**Messages**

**from the  
Universal House of Justice**

**1986–2001**



**The fourth epoch  
of the  
Formative Age**

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Foreword

The early years of the history of the Bahá’í Faith are defined by Shoghi  
Effendi as the Heroic Age, an age that began with the Báb’s declaration of  
His divine mission in 1844 and continued through the ministries of both  
Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. It was an age characterized by vicious persecu-  
tion of the Faith’s twin Prophet-Founders and Their followers. It was a time  
of hardship but also of glory, for the brightness of dawn dispelled the dark  
of night, and Bahá’u’lláh’s voluminous writings set forth the pathway to a  
divine civilization that would ensure peace and prosperity for all by offering  
the means for individual spiritual transformation and the final unification  
of human society. Bahá’u’lláh urged the kings and rulers of His time to  
recognize and partake of this gift. None heeded His call, assuring that He  
would not see His own promises realized in His lifetime. After Bahá’u’lláh’s  
passing, the small community of believers was entrusted with bringing His  
world order into reality.

To build a new world order would be a hopeless task indeed had Bahá’u’-  
lláh not given His followers a means to ensure its realization. In His will and  
testament He established a Covenant, unprecedented in religious history,  
that would protect and shelter the Bahá’ís by preserving the continuity of  
divine authority through a never-ending link to God’s will for humanity.  
Through this Covenant Bahá’u’lláh passed leadership of the Bahá’í commu-  
nity to His eldest son and appointed successor, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá  
in turn perpetuated this Covenant by designating, in his will and testament,  
the twin institutions of the Guardianship and the Universal House of Jus-  
tice as his successors.

With ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s passing in 1921, the sun set on the Heroic Age of the  
Faith, and a new age began: the Formative Age, an age destined to precede  
and prepare the way for the Golden Age of the Most Great Peace, the emer-  
gence of a global commonwealth, and the fulfillment of Bahá’u’lláh’s holy  
vision of the oneness of humankind.

During the Formative Age, the strength of the Covenant would not only  
protect the Faith from schism but also provide for its florescence. Upon  
Shoghi Effendi, his eldest grandson, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá laid the mantle of the  
Guardian of the Cause of God. Under his leadership during the First Epoch  
of the Formative Age, spanning the years 1921 to 1946, the seeds of the  
Bahá’í Administrative Order that Bahá’u’lláh had planted and that ‘Abdu’l-  
Bahá had carefully nurtured began to sprout. Guided by the Guardian, the  
Bahá’í community established the primary stages of its expansion—slowly  
building in all continents the local and national institutions that would  
facilitate the spread of the Faith to the entire world through the execution  
of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Divine Plan. That Plan was the blueprint carried forward  
by Shoghi Effendi as he initiated the first of many systematic teaching plans  
implemented and carried out during his stewardship of the worldwide  
Bahá’í community. These successive plans, beginning with the first Seven  
Year Plan in 1937, were directed at establishing Bahá’í communities in every  
country in the Western Hemisphere and deepening the roots of already  
existing communities.

These teaching plans continued throughout the Second Epoch of the  
Formative Age (1946–63), culminating in the Ten Year World Crusade  
from 1953 to 1963, which summoned the twelve existing National Spiritual  
Assemblies to unite in a focused effort to spread the Faith to all corners of  
the globe. The Crusade opened 131 new countries to the Faith, achieving  
a complementary increase in the diversity of the Bahá’í community and  
expanding the number of National Assemblies to fifty-six. These successes  
were matched by the evolution of the Administrative Order and the simul-  
taneous development of the Faith’s World Center in Haifa. Auxiliary Boards  
were introduced and the International Bahá’í Council was established. The  
Hands of the Cause of God, an institution created by Bahá’u’lláh, came  
into its own through the appointment to its ranks of souls of remarkable  
character and capacity, to carry out its purpose of propagating the Faith of  
God and protecting its unity.

Shoghi Effendi’s unexpected death midway through the Crusade in 1957,  
however, deprived the Bahá’ís of their source of divine guidance and their  
beloved Guardian. At this moment of despair, the Hands of the Cause of  
God, whom Shoghi Effendi called the “Chief Stewards of Bahá’u’lláh’s em-  
bryonic World Commonwealth,” heroically arose to lead the community to  
complete the plan laid out by Shoghi Effendi and to establish the Universal

House of Justice, the second of the “Twin Successors” of Bahá’u’lláh and  
‘Abdu’l-Bahá. The House of Justice, whose members Bahá’u’lláh described  
as the “Trustees of the All-Merciful” and the “Deputies of God,” was now  
entrusted with the fulfillment of Bahá’u’lláh’s Covenant with humanity  
that His guidance would never cease. The Second Epoch closed with an  
International Bahá’í Convention that summoned the members of the Na-  
tional Spiritual Assemblies from around the globe to elect the first Universal  
House of Justice.

The international Bahá’í community, with the Universal House of Justice  
now at its helm, entered the Third Epoch of the Formative Age (1963–86),  
a span that would take it through the next twenty-three years. Those years  
witnessed a growing maturation of Bahá’í administration and of the abilities  
of Bahá’í communities, the creation of the Continental Boards of Counsel-  
ors and the International Teaching Center, and the continuing development  
of the Auxiliary Boards. The Third Epoch called the Bahá’ís of the world  
to a higher level of functioning that would be consistent with expected vast  
increases in the community’s size and diversity, its emergence as a model to  
humankind, and the extension of its influence. Indeed, the Third Epoch  
witnessed an unprecedented expansion in the number of adherents to the  
Faith. It also introduced the community to pursuing projects of social and  
economic development, thereby signaling readiness for a profound advance  
in both its scope of activity and the concomitant sense of its own identity.  
The injunction of the Universal House of Justice at the opening of the  
Epoch—that the Bahá’ís, through study of the Word of God and dedicated  
service, “show to the world a mature, responsible, fundamentally assured  
and happy way of life, far removed from the passions, prejudices and dis-  
tractions of present day society”—was bearing precious fruit.

The Fourth Epoch of the Formative Age was proclaimed by the Universal  
House of Justice in a letter to the Bahá’ís of the World dated 2 January 1986,  
its inception marked by a “new development in the maturation of Bahá’í  
institutions.” The overall aims and characteristics of the ensuing Plan were  
to be established by the Universal House of Justice, but for the first time it  
was stated that “national goals of the next Plan are to be largely formulated  
by National Spiritual Assemblies and Boards of Counselors.” The Six Year  
Plan that followed (1986–1992) included among its main objectives the vast  
expansion of the numerical and financial resources of the Cause, increased  
availability and use of Bahá’í literature, a worldwide demonstration of the

Bahá’í way of life with a focus on education of children and youth, ex-  
tended involvement in the needs of the world, and the pursuit of social and  
economic development in well-established Bahá’í communities. This was  
followed by the Three Year Plan (1993–96); the momentous Four Year Plan  
(1996–2000); and the Twelve Month Plan (2000–2001), which propelled  
the Bahá’í community into the Fifth Epoch of the Formative Age.

*Messages of the Universal House of Justice, 1986–2001: The Fourth Epoch  
of the Formative Age* offers a collection of messages from this period that  
tells a compelling story of a religious community maturing internally while  
externally emerging further from obscurity and solidifying its reputation  
in the world as a community concerned with unity, peace, and justice for  
all humanity. The closing years of the twentieth century were a period of  
tremendous turbulence in the world, witnessing upheavals of nations and  
peoples worldwide. The Bahá’í Faith penetrated parts of the world long  
closed off to Bahá’u’lláh’s healing message, and the people of those countries  
joined in the dedicated application of Bahá’u’lláh’s teachings in society. The  
disorder and chaos in the world appeared in sharp relief to the hard-won  
victories and joyful triumphs of a community clearly in the ascendant.

This volume compiles letters, cables, telexes, and electronic messages  
sent to Bahá’í institutions and individuals. The patient and loving guidance  
of the Universal House of Justice is evident in all of the correspondence  
here as it advises and comments on matters of personal morality and social  
responsibility, tackling such subjects as nonviolence in families, sexual mo-  
rality, the nature of Bahá’í elections, and the Covenant. Readers will also  
find guidance on publishing, on Bahá’í scholarship, on presenting Bahá’í  
perspectives in public fora and on the Internet, and on cooperating with  
international organizations, as well as strong statements on issues such as  
apartheid, individual rights and freedoms, and the necessity of protect-  
ing the environment. Throughout the volume, one tragic thread passing  
through the narrative is the severe persecution of the Bahá’í community in  
Iran, whose members were oppressed, harassed, arrested, and even executed  
for their religious beliefs. The Fourth Epoch also saw the momentous occa-  
sion of the Holy Year commemorating the centenary of Bahá’u’lláh’s passing  
and the inauguration of His Covenant. This anniversary was marked not  
only with two historic international gatherings but also with the publication  
of the English translation of Bahá’u’lláh’s Most Holy Book, the Kitáb-i-  
Aqdas, whose laws will form the basis for the promised Golden Age. Other

notable results and achievements were the inauguration and steady progress,  
despite financial hardship, of the Mount Carmel Projects to erect edifices  
for the administration of the Faith at its World Center and to set off the  
Shrine of the Báb within a series of terraced gardens stretching from the  
foot of Mount Carmel to its summit. The outward signs of these physical  
structures were paralleled by the continued development of the functioning  
of the Auxiliary Boards, the Continental Boards of Counselors, and the In-  
ternational Teaching Center; by a steady increase in the number of National  
Spiritual Assemblies; and by the inauguration in 1997 of the institution of  
the Regional Bahá’í Council in many countries. Also chronicled here are  
evidences of increasingly effective engagement with the wider community,  
from the local through international levels, on critical matters of the day.

Beyond these stellar achievements, the Fourth Epoch will be remembered  
in Bahá’í history as the period in which the Universal House of Justice led the  
Bahá’í world to a new stage in its collective effort to achieve the long-sought  
goal of systematic, large-scale, and sustainable expansion and consolidation.  
In announcing the Four Year Plan (1996–2000), it wrote: “The next four  
years will represent an extraordinary period in the history of our Faith, a turn-  
ing point of epochal magnitude.” The rapid evolution of the Bahá’í com-  
munity in the ensuing years amply justifies this assertion. The new phase of  
evolution grew out of the experience of the preceding three decades, during  
which victories in the teaching work around the globe vastly expanded the  
Bahá’í community but also proved to be unsustainable and unable to bring  
into being capable local Bahá’í communities. Experience was demonstrating  
the need for systematic, widespread, and formal training for the purpose of  
raising up “large numbers of believers who are trained to foster and facili-  
tate the process of entry by troops with efficiency and love.” Expansion and  
consolidation could thereby become reciprocal parts of one self-sustaining  
process. In its Riḍván message to the Bahá’ís around the world, the Universal  
House of Justice called for the development of a “network of training insti-  
tutes on a scale never before attempted.” The single aim of the Four Year Plan  
was a significant advance in the process of entry by troops. The individual,  
the community, and the Bahá’í institutions were each called upon to play  
their unique part. The training institute for the systematic development of  
human resources was to become the engine for this process.

It would be almost ten years later, in December 2005, that the Uni-  
versal House of Justice would announce that the “elements required for a

concerted effort to infuse the diverse regions of the world with the spirit of  
Bahá’u’lláh’s Revelation have crystallized into a framework for action that  
now needs only to be exploited.” The messages in this volume presage the  
gradual emergence of each of those elements and document the founda-  
tional steps on which this framework rests.

—National Spiritual Assembly of the  
 Bahá’ís of the United States

List of abbreviations

ABC ‘Abdu’l*-Bahá in Canada*

ABL ‘Abdu’l*-Bahá in London*

ADJ *The Advent of Divine Justice*

ALNZ *Arohani: Letters to New Zealand*

BA *Bahá’í Administration*

BP *Bahá’í Prayers*, 2002 U.S. ed.

BWF *Bahá’í World Faith*

CC *Compilation of Compilations*, vol. 1

CC2 *Compilation of Compilations*, vol. 2

CC3 *Compilation of Compilations*, vol. 3

CF *Citadel of Faith*

CUHJ *Constitution of the Universal House of Justice*

DB *The Dawn-Breakers*

DG *Directives from the Guardian*

DND *Dawn of a New Day*

ESW *Epistle to Son of the Wolf*

GPB *God Passes By*

GWB *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh*

HE *High Endeavors: Messages to Alaska*

HW *The Hidden Words*

JTA *Japan Will Turn Ablaze*

KA *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*

KI *The Kitáb-i-Íqán*

LDG *The Light of Divine Guidance*

LG *Lights of Guidance*

LGANZ *Letters of the Guardian to Australia and New Zealand*

MA *Messages to America*

MBW *Messages to the Bahá’í World*

MC *Messages to Canada*

MIS *Messages of Shoghi Effendi to the Indian Subcontinent, 1923–1957*

MUHJ *Messages from the Universal House of Justice, 1963–1986*

PDC *The Promised Day is Come*

PEBT *Promoting Entry by Troops*

PM *Prayers and Meditations*

PUP *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*

SAQ *Some Answered Questions*

SDC *The Secret of Divine Civilization*

SH Súriy-i-Haykal, in *Summons of the Lord of Hosts*

SWAB *Selections from the Writings of* ‘Abdu’l*-Bahá*

SWB *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*

TB *Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh*

TDH *This Decisive Hour*

TDP *Tablets of the Divine Plan*

UD *Unfolding Destiny*

WOB *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*

WT *Will and Testament of* ‘Abdu’l*-Bahá*

Epochs of the Heroic Age

*1844–1853*

*The First Epoch*

The Bábí Dispensation

*1853–1892*

*The Second Epoch*

The Ministry of Bahá’u’lláh

*1892–1921*

*The Third Epoch*

The Ministry of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

Epochs of the Formative Age

*1921–1944/46*

*The First Epoch*

1921–1936 Period of Preparation

1937–1944 The first Seven Year Plan of the Bahá’ís of the United  
States and Canada

1944–1946 Consolidation of Victories

*1946–1963*

*The Second Epoch*

1946–1953 The second Seven Year Plan of the Bahá’ís of the United  
States and plans of varying duration pursued by nine  
other regional and national Bahá’í communities (Canada;  
Central America and South America; Australia and New  
Zealand; India, Pakistan, and Burma; the British Isles;  
Germany and Austria; Persia; Egypt; Iraq)

1953–1963 The Ten Year World Crusade

*1963–1986*

*The Third Epoch*

1963–1964 Year of Preparation

1964–1973 Nine Year Plan

1973–1974 Year of Preparation

1974–1979 Five Year Plan

1979–1986 Seven Year Plan

*1986–2001*

*The Fourth Epoch*

1986–1992 Six Year Plan

1992–1993 Holy Year Commemorating the Ascension of Bahá’u’lláh  
and the Inauguration of His Covenant

1993–1996 Three Year Plan

1996–2000 Four Year Plan

2000–2001 Twelve Month Plan

*2001–*

*The Fifth Epoch*

2001–2006 Five Year Plan

2006–2011 Five Year Plan

The Fourth Epoch  
significant milestones, anniversaries, and events

**Milestones**

Riḍván 1986 Beginning of the Six Year Plan

Riḍván 1992 End of the Six Year Plan

Beginning of the Holy Year Commemorating the  
Centenary of the Ascension of Bahá’u’lláh and the  
Inauguration of His Covenant

Riḍván 1993 Beginning of the Three Year Plan

Riḍván 1996 End of the Three Year Plan

Beginning of the Four Year Plan

Riḍván 2000 End of the Four Year Plan

Beginning of the Twelve Month Plan

Riḍván 2001 End of the Twelve Month Plan

Beginning of the Five Year Plan

**Significant anniversaries**

1987–1988 Seventy-fifth anniversary of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s visit to  
the West

April 1987 Fiftieth anniversary of the inauguration of the first  
Seven Year Plan

November 1992 Centenary of the Ascension of Bahá’u’lláh

April 1993 Fortieth anniversary of the opening of the Ten Year  
Crusade

**Significant events**

May 1986 Martyrdom of three Bahá’ís in Iran

Increase in number of Auxiliary Board members to 756

June 1986 Execution of a Bahá’í in Iran

August 1986 Visit of Prime Minister of the Cook Islands to  
the Bahá’í World Center, the first head of state to  
formally consult with the Universal House of Justice

October 1986 Murder of two Bahá’ís in Iran

Release of statement on apartheid

December 1986 Dedication of the House of Worship in New Delhi

January 1987 First International Conference on Ḥuqúqu’lláh in  
Haifa

Execution of a Bahá’í in Iran

Release of a compilation on trustworthiness

March 1987 Execution of two Bahá’ís in Iran

By-election to replace one member of the Universal  
House of Justice

The establishment of Africa’s first Bahá’í radio  
station, in Liberia

Release of a codification of the law of Ḥuqúqu’lláh

April 1987 Signing of status agreement between the Bahá’í  
World Center and the government of Israel

June 1987 Release of a statement on the Bahá’í education of  
children

August 1987 Announcement of inauguration of the Mount  
Carmel Projects overseeing the completion of  
three remaining Arc buildings and the terraces  
surrounding the Shrine of the Báb

October 1987 Two Bahá’ís executed in Iran, five others arrested,  
including two members of the former National  
Spiritual Assembly

October 1987 Release of a compilation on crisis and victory

November 1987 Bahá’í Faith joins the Network on Conservation and  
Religion of the World Wide Fund for Nature

December 1987 Release of compilation on the Covenant

Riḍván 1988 Convening the Sixth International Bahá’í

Convention and election of the Universal House of  
Justice

May 1988 Purchase of land adjacent to the Guardian’s resting  
place

Appointment of new members of International  
Teaching Center and increase of membership to nine

September 1988 Release of a compilation on a chaste and holy life

December 1988 Execution of two Bahá’ís in Iran

Letter of the Universal House of Justice outlining  
individual rights and freedoms in the World Order  
of Bahá’u’lláh

March 1989 Announcement of worldwide network of Deputies  
and Representatives of Ḥuqúqu’lláh

Riḍván 1989 Formation of new National Spiritual Assemblies in  
Macau and Guinea-Bissau

Re-establishment of Local Spiritual Assembly of  
‘Ishqábád

October 1989 Appointment of first European Bahá’í Youth Council

Release of a compilation on conservation of the  
earth’s resources

Creation of an Office of the Environment of the  
Bahá’í International Community

December 1989 Release of a compilation on Bahá’í elections

January 1990 Official approval of town planning scheme for  
Mount Carmel Projects

January 1990 Settlement of pioneers in Sakhalin Island, the final  
territorial goal of the Ten Year Crusade

February 1990 Establishment of the Bahá’í Chair for World Peace at  
the University of Maryland

Riḍván 1990 Launch of subsidiary Two Year Plan for former  
Eastern Bloc countries

Election of first Local Spiritual Assembly of Cluj,  
Romania, the first Assembly in a former Eastern Bloc  
country

May 1990 Commencement of Phase One of Mount Carmel  
Projects, beginning of extension of terraces  
surrounding the Shrine of the Báb

June 1990 Completion of restoration of the North Wing of the  
House of ‘Abdu’lláh Páshá

September 1990 Release of a compilation on teaching prominent people

November 1990 Formation of twenty-three new Local Spiritual  
Assemblies in former Eastern Bloc countries

Increase in number of Auxiliary Board members to 846

December 1990 Suspension of pilgrimage program due to war in the  
Middle East

1991 Establishment of an Office of Ḥuqúqu’lláh at the  
Bahá’í World Center

February 1991 Granting of registration and legal incorporation of  
Local Spiritual Assemblies by Federal Constitutional  
Court of Germany

April 1991 Publication of a statement on Bahá’u’lláh

Riḍván 1991 Formation of four new National Spiritual Assemblies  
(Czechoslovakia, Romania, the West Leeward  
Islands, and the USSR)

June 1991 Commencement of Phase Two of the Mount Carmel  
Projects

March 1992 Execution of a Bahá’í in Iran

Riḍván 1992 Close of the Six Year Plan

Formation of eight new National Spiritual  
Assemblies (Albania, Angola, Azerbaijan, the Baltic  
States, Bulgaria, Hungary, Greenland, and Poland)  
and two new Regional Spiritual Assemblies (Central  
Asia and Ukraine, Belarus, and Moldova)

Change of the National Spiritual Assembly of the  
USSR to the Regional Spiritual Assembly of Russia,  
Georgia, and Armenia

Reestablishment of the National Spiritual Assemblies  
of the Congo Republic and Niger

Announcement of the universal application of the  
law of Ḥuqúqu’lláh

May 1992 Inauguration of the Holy Year

Gathering at the Bahá’í World Center to  
commemorate the centenary of the Ascension of  
Bahá’u’lláh

June 1992 Release of a compilation on proclaiming the Faith  
through mass media

Desecration of a Bahá’í cemetery in Tehran  
Murder of a Bahá’í in Iran

September 1992 Two imprisoned Iranian Bahá’ís sentenced to death

Confiscation of Bahá’í homes and other properties  
in Iran

November 1992 Second Bahá’í World Congress in New York City

December 1992 Establishment of an Office for the Advancement of  
Women by the Bahá’í International Community

Initiation of Phase Three of the Mount Carmel  
Projects

March 1993 Publication of the annotated English translation of  
 the Kitáb-i-Aqdas

Riḍván 1993 Launch of the Three Year Plan

Convening of the Seventh International Bahá’í  
Convention and election of the Universal House of  
Justice

May 1993 Appointment of International Teaching Center  
members

June 1993 Visit to the Bahá’í World Center of Deputy Prime  
Minister of Papua New Guinea

October 1993 Reformat and relaunch of the annual Bahá’í World  
volumes

November 1993 Release of a compilation on entry by troops

December 1993 Commencement of construction of the Center for  
the Study of the Sacred Texts

March 1994 Murder of three Iranian pioneers in Ciskei

April 1994 Five continental conferences of National Bahá’í  
Youth Committees

Riḍván 1994 Formation of six new National Spiritual Assemblies  
(Cambodia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia,  
Tajikistan, Uzbekistan) and the Regional Spiritual  
Assembly of Slovenia and Croatia

Change of the Regional Spiritual Assembly of  
Central Asia to the National Spiritual Assembly of  
Turkmenistan

May 1994 Official version of Bahá’í Sacred Writings made  
available electronically

July 1994 Visit to the Bahá’í World Center of the President of  
the Seychelles

December 1994 Commencement of construction of International  
Teaching Center

January 1995 Release of the statement The Prosperity of  
Humankind at the World Summit for Social  
Development

February 1995 Release of a compilation on Bahá’í scholarship

March 1995 Tenth anniversary of Universidad Núr

April 1995 Preparation for completion of lower terraces on  
Mount Carmel

Riḍván 1995 Formation of five new National Spiritual Assemblies  
(Armenia, Belarus, Eritrea, Georgia, and Sicily)

Change of Regional Spiritual Assembly of Russia,  
Georgia, and Armenia to National Spiritual  
Assembly of the Russian Federation and the  
Regional Spiritual Assembly of Ukraine, Belarus,  
and Moldova to the Regional Spiritual Assembly of  
Ukraine and Moldova

Merging of Bophuthatswana, Ciskei, South Africa,  
and Transkei under one National Spiritual Assembly  
of South Africa

October 1995 Increase in number of Continental Counselors to 81

December 1995 Publication of Persian edition of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas

Announcement of changes in role and function of  
Continental Boards of Counselors leading up to  
Four Year Plan

Clarification of function of training institutes in  
developing human resources

Riḍván 1996 Conclusion of Three Year Plan and launch of the  
Four Year Plan

Formation of two new National Spiritual Assemblies  
(São Tomé and Príncipe and Moldova) and change  
of Regional Spiritual Assembly of Ukraine and  
Moldova to the National Spiritual Assembly of  
Ukraine

August 1996 Seventy-fifth anniversary of the Bahá’í Faith in Brazil

January 1997 Four Bahá’í Prisoners in Iran Sentenced to Death

March 1997 Acquisition of Property for Terraces on Mount  
Carmel

May 1997 Formation of Regional Bahá’í Councils

August 1997 Martyrdom of Two Bahá’ís in Iran

February 1998 Formation of three new National Spiritual  
Assemblies (Sabah, Sarawak, and Slovakia) and  
reformation of one National Spiritual Assembly  
(Liberia) and change of Regional Spiritual Assembly  
of the Czech and Slovak Republics to the National  
Spiritual Assembly of the Czech Republic

May 1998 Two Bahá’ís in Iran sentenced to prison

Riḍván 1998 Convening of the Eighth International Bahá’í  
Convention and the election of the Universal House  
of Justice

July 1998 Twenty-fifth anniversary of the establishment of the  
International Teaching Center

Execution of Bahá’í in Iran

Visit by representative of the Bahá’í International  
Community to the United Nations to the Pacific  
Islands

Imprisonment of four Bahá’ís in Iran

August 1998 Release of a compilation on the arts

Continued persecution by the Iranian government of  
Bahá’ís in Iran

September 1998 Arrests, imprisonment, and confiscation of property  
of Bahá’ís in Iran

Two Bahá’ís in Iran sentenced to death

February 1999 Release of a document to commemorate the end of  
the twentieth century

October 1999 Martyrdom of Bahá’í in Tajikistan

December 1999 Interfaith gathering in India in the presence of Pope  
John Paul II

January 2000 Passing of Amatu’l-Bahá Rúḥíyyih Khánum

February 2000 Three Bahá’ís in Iran sentenced to death

Registration of Bahá’í marriages in Iran

March 2000 By-election to replace one member of the Universal  
House of Justice

Riḍván 2000 Twenty-fifth anniversary of the Associations of  
Bahá’í Studies

Restoration of the National Spiritual Assembly of  
the Bahá’ís of Indonesia

May 2000 Release of Bahá’í prisoners in Iran

Release of publication on obligatory prayer and  
fasting

November 2000 Revision of codification of the law of Ḥuqúqu’lláh

January 2001 Inauguration of the International Teaching Center  
Building on Mount Carmel

Publication by the Universal House of Justice of the  
document entitled The Institution of the Counsellors

April 2001 Publication of *Century of Light*

1986–1992

The Six Year Plan

1  
Martyrdom of three Bahá’ís in Iran

12 MAY 1986

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

1.1 WITH HEAVY HEARTS ANNOUNCE MARTYRDOM THREE VALIANT SOULS IRANIAN  
BAHÁ’Í COMMUNITY. MR. SIRRU’LLÁH VAḤDAT-NIḤÁMÍ WAS EXECUTED BY HANG-  
ING 4 MAY 1986 IN TEHRAN. HE HAD BEEN IMPRISONED SINCE 13 FEBRUARY 1984.  
MR. FIDRUS SHABRUKH, 38, WAS EXECUTED BY HANGING 9 MAY 1986 IN ZÁHIDÁN.  
HE HAD BEEN IMPRISONED FOR A SECOND TIME SINCE 26 SEPTEMBER 1983. BOTH  
THESE FRIENDS HAD BEEN SEVERELY TORTURED MUCH OF THEIR TIME IN PRISON.

1.2 THE THIRD VICTIM, FIFTEEN YEAR OLD PAYMÁN SUBHÁNÍ WAS TAKEN TOGETH-  
ER WITH HIS FATHER RÚḤU’L-AMÍN SUBHÁNÍ BY A GROUP OF FANATICS ENCOUR-  
AGED BY OFFICIAL RELIGIOUS ELEMENTS, TO THE MOUNTAINS, WHERE THEY WERE  
BEATEN AND STONED. BOTH WERE PRESUMED DEAD AND THROWN OVER A CLIFF.  
ACCIDENTALLY A VEHICLE STRAYED INTO THE AREA AND FOUND THEM. THE FA-  
THER, BARELY ALIVE, WAS TAKEN TO A HOSPITAL IN TEHRAN WHERE HE IS STILL IN  
SERIOUS CONDITION. THE SON, PAYMÁN WAS DEAD.

1.3 THESE CRIMES AFTER RELATIVE QUIET PERIOD IN IRAN HAVE CAUSED CONCERN  
SAFETY, WELL-BEING IRANIAN BAHÁ’Í COMMUNITY ….

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

2  
Assignments of the Continental Boards of Counselors

25 MAY 1986

To the Bahá’ís of the World

Beloved Friends,

2.1 The Six Year Plan has been launched and national Bahá’í communities  
throughout the world are engaged in formulating their national goals. On  
the Day of the Covenant, 26 November 1986, a new term of five years will  
begin for those appointed to the Auxiliary Boards. In preparation for that  
event, we find it propitious to announce the following decisions.

2.2 As from last Riḍván, Turkey has been transferred from the area of re-  
sponsibility of the Continental Board of Counselors in Asia to that of the  
Continental Board of Counselors in Europe. Counselor Ilhan Sezgin is,

therefore, a member of the European Board of Counselors. It has also been  
decided to increase the size of the European Auxiliary Board for the Protec-  
tion of the Faith to 36 members, which is the same as the number currently  
authorized for the Propagation Board in that continent.

2.3 In view of the growth of the Bahá’í community and its emergence from  
obscurity, we have decided to make the following further changes in the  
number of members of the Auxiliary Boards, to be effective from 26 No-  
vember 1986:

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | **Present Number** | **Number Added** | **New Number** |
| **Africa** | Protection | 81 | 9 | 90 |
|  | Propagation | 99 | 9 | 108 |
| **Americas** | Protection | 54 | 9 | 63 |
|  | Propagation | 117 | 0 | 117 |
| **Asia** | Protection | 99 | 0 | 99 |
|  | Propagation | 117 | 9 | 126 |
| **Australasia** | Protection | 27 | 9 | 36 |
|  | Propagation | 36 | 9 | 45 |
| **Europe** | Protection | 36 | 0 | 36 |
|  | Propagation | 36 | 0 | 36 |
| **Total** |  | 702 | 54 | 756 |
|  | **Total Protection** | 297 | 27 | 324 |
|  | **Total Propagation** | 405 | 27 | 432 |

2.4 This further expansion of the institution of the Auxiliary Boards reflects  
the recent increase of the number of Continental Counselors from sixty  
three to seventy two and is required by the marked growth in the size of  
Bahá’í communities, a growth which it is confidently expected will acceler-  
ate during the Six Year Plan as the impact of the Faith’s emergence from  
obscurity begins to make itself evident in a growing interest in its teachings  
by people in all walks of life.

2.5 It will also assist the vital development in maturity and experience of the  
National and Local Spiritual Assemblies, a process which must synchronize  
with the further development of the World Center of the Faith and the  
advance of mankind towards the attainment of the lesser peace. Who can

tell what challenges these burgeoning divine institutions will have to face in  
the years immediately ahead years which may well see the realization of  
mankind’s gravest fears and the appearance of the fulfillment of its highest  
hopes.

2.6 Our prayers at the Sacred Threshold are offered on behalf of every faith-  
ful follower of the Blessed Beauty who is laboring for the promotion of His  
Cause.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

3  
Execution of a Bahá’í in Iran

25 JUNE 1986

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

3.1 WITH HEAVY HEARTS WE ANNOUNCE EXECUTION BY HANGING OF FARÍD BIHMARDÍ  
ON 10 JUNE 1986 IN TEHRAN. HIS FAMILY WERE UNAWARE OF HIS EXECUTION AND  
FOUND OUT ABOUT THIS SAD EVENT A FEW DAYS AFTER HE WAS BURIED BY THE  
AUTHORITIES. MR. BIHMARDÍ, AGE 46, WAS ONE OF THE OUTSTANDING BAHÁ’ÍS IN  
THE CRADLE OF THE FAITH. HE WAS UNDER TORTURE FOR A VERY PROLONGED  
PERIOD OF TIME, BUT HIS ENDURANCE WAS A SOURCE OF ENCOURAGEMENT TO  
OTHER BAHÁ’Í PRISONERS WHO WERE WITNESSES TO HIS SUFFERING. FIVE OTHER  
PRISONERS HAVE INDICATED TO THEIR VISITING RELATIVES THAT IT MAY BE THE  
LAST VISIT THEY WILL HAVE, WHICH IMPLIES THEIR IMMINENT EXECUTION ….

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

4  
Visit to the World Center by  
Prime Minister of the Cook Islands

8 AUGUST 1986

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

4.1 IN HUMBLE ACKNOWLEDGMENT BAHÁ’U’LLÁH’S UNABATING CONFIRMATIONS,  
WE INFORM FRIENDS EVERYWHERE PRIVATE VISIT TO BAHÁ’Í WORLD CENTER  
PRIME MINISTER COOK ISLANDS SIR THOMAS DAVIS AND LADY DAVIS 3 AND 4 AU-

GUST. OCCASION MADE HISTORIC BY PRIME MINISTER’S INITIATIVE IN REQUESTING  
CONSULTATION WITH UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE REGARDING WORLD PEACE.  
VISIT ALSO MARKED MOST CONCRETE RESPONSE TO DATE BY POLITICAL LEADER  
TO PEACE STATEMENT RELEASED TO PEOPLES WORLD LAST OCTOBER. DURING  
CONSULTATIONS WHICH TOOK PLACE ON FIRST DAY IN COUNCIL CHAMBER FOL-  
LOWING PRIME MINISTER’S VISIT TO SHRINE BÁB AND ON SECOND DAY AT MANSION  
BAHJÍ FOLLOWING HIS VISIT SHRINE BAHÁ’U’LLÁH, SIR THOMAS DISCUSSED HIS  
THOUGHTS ABOUT WORLD PEACE AND HIS DESIRE FOR PRACTICAL ACTION CON-  
SONANT WITH CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FACING VAST PACIFIC AREA.

4.2 OCCASION ALSO ENABLED LADY DAVIS, LEADING MEMBER COOK ISLANDS NOBIL-  
ITY AND ONE OF THE FIRST BAHÁ’ÍS THAT COUNTRY, TO UNDERTAKE BRIEF PILGRIMAGE  
THUS SPIRITUALLY ENHANCING TOTAL UNPRECEDENTED EXPERIENCE ASSOCIATED  
WITH VISIT TO WORLD CENTER THESE TWO DISTINGUISHED PERSONS. WHILE SIR  
THOMAS MET WITH US IN COUNCIL CHAMBER, LADY DAVIS WAS RECEIVED AT SEAT  
INTERNATIONAL TEACHING CENTER. PUNCTUATED BY BANQUET AT SEAT UNI-  
VERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE, THEIR ACTIVITIES AT WORLD CENTER ENDED WITH  
LUNCH AT MAZRA‘IH. SUBSEQUENTLY SIR THOMAS AND LADY DAVIS TRAVELED TO  
JERUSALEM WHERE THEY WERE ENTERTAINED BY OFFICIALS GOVERNMENT ISRAEL.  
THEY DEPARTED HOLY LAND ON MORNING 5 AUGUST.

4.3 ONCE AGAIN ACTION BY LEADER FROM PACIFIC OCEAN CALLS TO OUR MINDS  
ONE OF BAHÁ’U’LLÁH’S MOST TRENCHANT ASSERTIONS CONCERNING POWER HIS  
CAUSE: “SHOULD THEY ATTEMPT TO CONCEAL ITS LIGHT ON THE CONTINENT,”  
HE WROTE, “IT WILL ASSUREDLY REAR ITS HEAD IN THE MIDMOST HEART OF  
THE OCEAN, AND, RAISING ITS VOICE, PROCLAIM: ‘I AM THE LIFEGIVER OF THE  
WORLD!’”[[1]](#footnote-1)4-1

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

5  
Bahá’í youth killed in Iran

8 OCTOBER 1986

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

5.1 IN VARDÁVARD, A VILLAGE IN OUTSKIRTS KARAJ, NEAR TEHRAN, SIXTEEN YEAR  
OLD BOY, MEMBER DEVOTED BAHÁ’Í FAMILY, BÍZHAN ṬÁLIBÍ, WAS KILLED A FEW  
DAYS AGO. FANATICAL ELEMENTS IN VILLAGE HAD REPEATEDLY ABUSED THIS FAM-  
ILY AND OTHER LOCAL FRIENDS. BODY FOUND IN GARDEN WITH EVIDENCE SE-  
VERE INJURIES THROUGH BRUTAL BEATING. MURDERERS HAD THE BODY HANGED  
TO SUGGEST SUICIDE. HOWEVER LOCAL GENDARMES WHO ARRIVED ON SCENE  
AVERRED DEATH WAS DUE TO INJURIES. MEMBERS FAMILY COMPLAINED TO LOCAL  
AUTHORITIES, BUT THIS RESULTED IN HIS MOTHER, BROTHER AND COUSIN BEING  
HELD IN SOLITARY CONFINEMENT IN TEHRAN ….

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

6  
Apartheid

12 OCTOBER 1986

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

6.1 The above statement which was sent to you with our covering letter of  
21 February 1986 has been revised by the Office of Public Information and  
approved by the Universal House of Justice. At the direction of the House  
of Justice, we enclose a copy of the revised statement, which supersedes the  
previous one.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

Apartheid: A Bahá’í View

6.2 A little more than a hundred years ago, Bahá’u’lláh, Founder of the Bahá’í  
Faith, declared that mankind was entering upon a new era in its history  
when accelerating processes of unification would soon compel universal rec-  
ognition that humanity is one single race, one distinct species. He appealed

to the peoples of the world to accept this central truth and to set aside the  
barriers of race, nationality, and culture which have been principal causes  
of war throughout history. There is, He said, no possibility of achievement  
of world peace until the fundamental principle of unity has been accepted  
and given practical effect in the organization of society.

6.3 Consequently, from the time of its inception more than a century ago,  
the Bahá’í world community has been characterized by the integration of  
the many religious, racial, ethnic, cultural, linguistic and national elements  
which it comprises. Marriage between persons of different ethnic, and  
cultural backgrounds, and particularly between black and white Bahá’ís,  
is warmly encouraged in the Bahá’í scriptures. In order to make certain  
that those members who suffer discrimination in society as a whole are not  
prevented from full participation in the life of the community, the Bahá’í  
teachings contain certain administrative principles which are designed to  
overcome the handicaps created by social inequalities. For example, where a  
tie vote has been cast in a Bahá’í community election or where two or more  
believers are equally qualified for a particular office, priority is given as a  
matter of principle to the one representing the disadvantaged or oppressed  
sector of society.

6.4 It is these principles which have guided the Bahá’ís in South Africa since  
the opening years of this century. When the apartheid laws made it illegal  
for certain local groups, including elected Bahá’í Spiritual Assemblies, to  
contain members from different racial backgrounds, it was the white Bahá’ís  
who surrendered the privilege of elected membership so that the principle  
of giving priority to disadvantaged segments of society could continue to  
prevail. Except for these local decision-making bodies whose membership  
was explicitly limited by civil law, Bahá’í meetings in South Africa have been  
racially integrated, a fact well known to the civil authorities.

6.5 Beyond attempting to provide an encouraging example of racial integra-  
tion, the Bahá’í community in South Africa has devoted much of its energy  
to the inculcation of Bahá’í principles related to the oneness of mankind  
and on the development of a sense of self-worth and of social responsibility  
in the individual. Parallel with these activities has been a program aimed  
at training Spiritual Assemblies in principles of consultation and problem-  
solving. Bahá’ís are particularly proud of the results of this effort because  
through it black believers have assumed the highest elective and appointive  
offices in the community.

6.6 This historical background points up the Bahá’í conviction that solutions  
to situations such as that which prevails in South Africa must draw on the  
force of example. Fundamental changes in social attitude will be most read-  
ily achieved if the relevant spiritual and moral principles are courageously  
set forth and if men and women of good will can see others attempting  
successfully to give these ideals practical expression in individual and com-  
munity life.

6.7 Violating as it does the very honor of humanity, the system of apartheid  
arouses in peoples of all nations and cultures deep feelings of abhorrence.  
Bahá’ís share these feelings particularly keenly. The moral challenge which  
the situation represents, however, has now become intertwined with parti-  
san political concerns. So complete is this interrelationship that the issues in  
the conflict are inextricable from one another: social protest originating in  
moral outrage has assumed the character of political action.

6.8 It is natural that it should do so, given the adversary principle that char-  
acterizes our political traditions throughout the world. But political action,  
in the absence of conditions for genuine consultation, in which partisan  
interests are subordinated to the interests of the whole, will not itself bring  
an enduring resolution of problems as serious as those convulsing South  
Africa. However difficult the task and however disheartening the present  
situation may seem, segments of South African society who believe full  
integration to be the fundamental issue face the challenge of focusing their  
efforts on creating such conditions. This is a moral imperative as urgent as  
any other motivating peoples of good will who seek to free South Africa  
from its terrible burden.

6.9 Bahá’ís are required by the teachings of their Faith to refrain from in-  
volvement in partisan political activity and civil disorder. This is true  
whether such activity is a response to racial oppression, as is generally the  
case in South Africa, or to more widespread attempts to keep people divided  
and vulnerable such as the persecution of religious belief, the suppression  
of women, or the denial of political freedom. The hard-won experience of  
Bahá’ís under all these conditions convinces them beyond any doubt that  
humanity can learn to live as one family and that all the forces of contempo-  
rary history are rapidly impelling the race in this direction. The pressure of  
these forces is inescapable; eventually even South Africa will respond. The  
quality of that response, and its speed, will depend as much on spiritual and  
moral conditions as it will on economic and political ones.

7  
Equality of women and men

27 OCTOBER 1986

To an individual Bahá’í

Dear Bahá’í Friend,

7.1 Your very thought-provoking letter of 24 June 1986 has been the subject  
of considerable research, and the Universal House of Justice has instructed  
us to send you the following reply.

7.2 The crucial task before you in relation to your two little daughters would  
seem to be to foster their confidence in and love for God, their acceptance  
of His Will and their assurance of the validity of the Bahá’í principle of the  
equality of men and women. In working towards this there are certain facts  
of history and principle in the Faith that you need to accept and reconcile.

7.3 You raise two basic issues, that all the Manifestations of God known to  
us have been men, and that they have appeared in the East.

7.4 ‘Abdu’l-Bahá Himself in a talk given in Malden, Massachusetts, confirms  
that “The East has ever been the dawning point of the Sun of Reality. All  
the Prophets of God have appeared there. The religions of God have been  
promulgated, the teachings of God have been spread, and the law of God  
founded in the East. The Orient has always been the center of lights.” (*The  
Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 289) Indeed, one can see that the Proph-  
ets of God named in the Scriptures have appeared, not just in the East, but  
in a very limited area of the East, stretching from the Levant and Egypt  
across Iran as far as India. We have no authenticated records of Chinese or  
Japanese Prophets. However, to complement this we must remember that  
the Founders of the Great Religions are but one of the kinds of prophet,  
and we should study the following Qur’anic statements:

7.4a And every nation had an apostle; so when their apostle came, the  
matter was decided between them with justice and they shall not be  
dealt with unjustly.

(Surah 10, verse 47)

7.4b And certainly We raised in every nation an apostle saying: Serve God  
and shun the devil ….

(Surah 16, verse 36)

7.4c And on the day when We will raise up a witness out of every nation,

then shall no permission be given to those who disbelieve, nor shall

they be made to solicit favor.

(Surah 16, verse 84)

7.4d … And there is not a people but a warner has gone among them.

(Surah 35, verse 24)

7.5 There are Prophets mentioned in the Qur’án, such as Húd and Ṣáliḥ,  
about whom the Bible is silent. Idrís, whom the Qur’án states was a Proph-  
et, is identified with Hermes by Bahá’u’lláh, Who states “In every tongue  
he hath a special name.”[[2]](#footnote-2)7-1 It is clear that He must have lived in very ancient  
times. Bahá’u’lláh made no mention of Buddha, and if it had not been for  
‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s statement we would not have been in a position to state defi-  
nitely that Buddha had been a Manifestation of God. There are a myriad  
traditions in the legends of peoples that point back to some sort of divine  
revelation but, as the beloved Guardian’s secretary pointed out on his behalf  
in a letter written to an individual believer on 13 March 1950, “… We can-  
not possibly add names of people we (or anyone else) think might be Lesser  
Prophets to those found in the Qur’án, the Bible and our own Scriptures.  
For only these can we consider authentic Books.” We must just accept that  
there are undoubtedly many prophetic figures of whom all authentic record  
has been lost. As to the future, the Research Department knows of no Text  
which states explicitly in which country Manifestations of God will appear.

7.6 The reason for the appearance of a Manifestation of God in a given place  
is not to honor a particular people or nation. Shoghi Effendi indicates a  
quite different reason in *The Advent of Divine Justice* and, more concisely, in  
a letter to an individual written on his behalf on 23 January 1944:

7.6a The ever-recurring miracle in the establishment of every religion is  
that such poor instruments accomplish the work of God. It is to dem-  
onstrate the fact that God is the power that overcomes every obstacle,  
and that Revelations are divine in origin, that leads Him to always

choose the worst people among whom to manifest His Messenger and  
the most obscure and helpless of the population—relatively speak-  
ing—to establish the foundations of His Faith. The Bahá’í Dispensa-  
tion is no exception to this rule, as you yourself have observed.

7.7 Beyond these points is the fact that God, the Almighty Creator, does not  
have to justify His choice of a race or nationality from which to raise up a  
Manifestation. As all sacred scriptures tell us, He does as He wills and shall  
not be asked of His doing, and we bow in humility before Him. Besides,  
as you must know, conceptions of race, nation, oriental, occidental, and  
the like reflect earthly limitations and are not qualifications attached to the  
reality of the soul in the limitless realms of God.

7.8 Regarding your desire to assist your daughters to overcome their percep-  
tions of the unequal status of women, you are perhaps not aware of the  
compilation on women recently released to National Spiritual Assemblies.[[3]](#footnote-3)7-2  
Through the divine insights and instructions provided in this compilation,  
you can inspire your daughters with knowledge of the glorious station to  
which women are called in the Age of Bahá’u’lláh, and imbue them with  
assurance in the promises of the Blessed Beauty, so that through constant  
endeavor they may become as brilliant stars radiating a spirit of freedom  
from the stultifying notions of the past. On the particular question of the  
relationship between womanhood and prophethood, it is hoped that the  
following comments will be of help.

7.9 Even though there have been outstanding women such as Sarah, Ásíyih,  
the Virgin Mary, Fáṭimih, Ṭáhirih and the Greatest Holy Leaf in every  
Dispensation, it is an incontrovertible fact that all Manifestations of God  
known to us have been men. Moreover, it is a clear provision in Bahá’í  
administration that the Guardians were to be men and that membership  
on the Universal House of Justice is confined to men. Whether these facts  
point to a differentiation in function that is unalterable, or whether it was  
merely a characteristic of a period which will change when mankind attains  
its maturity is a matter that will, no doubt, become clear in the future. The  
important point for Bahá’ís to remember is that, in face of the categorical

pronouncements in Bahá’í Scripture establishing the equality of men and  
women, even these facts are no evidence at all of the superiority of the male  
over the female sex. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has explained that equality does not mean  
identity of function. He has also stated that the few areas in which men and  
women are not equal are “negligible.”[[4]](#footnote-4)7-3

7.10 We must also remember that sex is a characteristic of this world, not of  
the spiritual world. When the Guardian was asked about “soul mates” and  
the problem that could arise in the next world if one were to remarry in this  
life, his secretary replied on his behalf, on 4 December 1954:

7.10a There is no teaching in the Bahá’í Faith that “soul mates” exist.  
What is meant is that marriage should lead to a profound friendship  
of spirit, which will endure in the next world, where there is no sex,  
and no giving and taking in marriage; just the way we should establish  
with our parents, our children, our brothers and sisters and friends a  
deep spiritual bond which will be everlasting, and not merely physical  
bonds of human relationship.

7.11 The House of Justice hopes that these remarks will help to ease some of  
your perplexity and will assist you and your dear wife to raise your daughters  
as devoted and knowledgeable Bahá’ís, confident of the validity of the prin-  
ciples promulgated by Bahá’u’lláh. Surely as they meet problems and ques-  
tions and face them fearlessly, their understanding of the Cause of God will  
deepen and this will increase their ability to deal with the difficulties of life.

7.12 We are asked to assure you of the prayers of the House of Justice in  
the Holy Shrines that … and … may be the recipients of God’s constant  
benediction and that their parents may be divinely assisted to protect and  
train them.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

8  
New Stage in external affairs of the Faith

29 OCTOBER 1986

To the meeting of the Senior Officers of the United Nations Office and the  
Office of Public Information

8.1 THE GATHERING IN NEW YORK ON 31 OCTOBER OF THE SENIOR STAFF OF THE  
OVERSEAS OFFICES OF THE BAHÁ’Í INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY MARKS A NEW,  
POTENT STAGE IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE EXTERNAL AFFAIRS OF THE WORLD-  
WIDE BAHÁ’Í COMMUNITY. THIS STAGE BETOKENS THE PROMINENCE ATTAINED BY  
THE CAUSE OF GOD IN ITS EMERGENCE FROM OBSCURITY AND IS CHARACTERIZED  
BY THE NEW, INESCAPABLE CHALLENGES IMMEDIATELY TO BE MET AS A DIRECT RE-  
SULT OF THE OPERATION OF THE ONRUSHING PROCESSES THROUGH WHICH ARE  
EVOLVING THE RECONSTRUCTIVE INFLUENCES OF BAHÁ’U’LLÁH’S WORLD ORDER  
A STRIKING MANIFESTATION OF THE NEW SITUATION CAN BE SEEN IN THE AC-  
CUMULATING EVIDENCE OF THE SALUTARY RELATIONSHIP DEVELOPING BETWEEN  
THE BAHÁ’Í COMMUNITY AND THE WORLD AT LARGE. THIS RELATIONSHIP MUST  
BE EXPANDED. AS WINDOWS OF THE BAHÁ’Í COMMUNITY TO THE WORLD, THESE  
OFFICES MUST DISPLAY EVER MORE CLEARLY THE UNIFYING PRINCIPLES, THE HOPE,  
THE PROMISE, THE MAJESTY OF THIS EMERGING ORDER.

8.2 A GLANCE BACKWARD TO THE EMBRYONIC EFFORTS 39 YEARS AGO TO ASSOCI-  
ATE THE INTERESTS OF THE FAITH WITH THE WORK OF THE UNITED NATIONS  
CANNOT BUT AROUSE IN EVERY OBSERVANT BAHÁ’Í A DEEP SENSE OF PRIDE AND  
WONDERMENT AT THE MOMENTOUS PROGRESS ACHIEVED. THE FOUNDATION  
OF EIGHT NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLIES ON WHICH THOSE EFFORTS WERE  
LAUNCHED HAS, BY THE ESTABLISHMENT OF 148 NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLIES,  
BROADENED NEARLY NINETEENFOLD. FROM THAT SMALL BEGINNING TO THE  
HISTORIC MOMENT IN 1970 WHEN THE BAHÁ’Í INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY WAS  
ACCORDED CONSULTATIVE STATUS WITH THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL,  
FOLLOWED BY A SIMILAR ACCREDITATION WITH THE UNITED NATIONS CHILDREN’S  
FUND IN 1976, TO THE REMARKABLE OCCASION IN DECEMBER 1985 WHEN THE  
NAME OF THE FAITH WAS RECORDED IN A RESOLUTION PASSED BY THE GENERAL  
ASSEMBLY ITSELF, THE WORLD ORDER OF BAHÁ’U’LLÁH HAS SURELY JUSTIFIED ITS  
PROMISE TO COME FORTH AS A FORCE TO BE RECKONED WITH IN THE CLOSING  
YEARS OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY.

8.3 YOU HAVE WITNESSED IN THE LAST THREE YEARS THE ESTABLISHMENT OF  
THE OFFICE OF PUBLIC INFORMATION, THE CONSOLIDATION OF THE EXECUTIVE

COMMITTEE AND THE CREATION OF THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT  
UNIT IN THE UNITED NATIONS OFFICE, AND THE ENLARGEMENT OF THE GENEVA  
BRANCH OF THAT OFFICE WITH THE TRANSFER FROM NEW YORK OF THE HUMAN  
RIGHTS UNIT …. THESE ORGANIZATIONAL INITIATIVES AND REFINEMENTS BESPEAK  
AN ADMINISTRATIVE RESPONSE TO THE CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES POSED  
BY THE FAR-REACHING DIPLOMATIC AND PUBLIC RELATIONS PROSPECTS OPENING  
BEFORE THE BAHÁ’Í WORLD COMMUNITY.

8.4 CLARITY AND UNITY OF VISION BETWEEN THE OFFICES OF THE BAHÁ’Í INTER-  
NATIONAL COMMUNITY MUST BE ACHIEVED. A HIGHER LEVEL OF COOPERATION  
WITHIN AND BETWEEN THESE OFFICES IS IMPERATIVE. EQUALLY ESSENTIAL IS A  
GREATER PARTICIPATION IN THE BAHÁ’Í INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY’S PROGRAMS  
AND OBJECTIVES BY PERTINENT INSTRUMENTS OF THE BAHÁ’Í ADMINISTRATION  
THROUGHOUT THE WORLD, PARTICULARLY NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLIES,  
WHOSE GROWING GOOD RELATIONS WITH GOVERNMENTS AND INCREASING  
CONTACTS WITH PROMINENT ELEMENTS IN THEIR RESPECTIVE COUNTRIES OFFER  
A WIDE FIELD OF ACTIVITY TO BE CHERISHED AND ENCOURAGED ON THE ONE  
HAND, AND EXPLORED AND EXPLOITED ON THE OTHER, BY THE UNITED NATIONS  
OFFICE AND THE OFFICE OF PUBLIC INFORMATION. FOSTERING A HARMONIOUSLY  
FUNCTIONING NETWORK COMPRISING THE VARIOUS ENTITIES OF A MATURING,  
FAR-FLUNG BAHÁ’Í SYSTEM—INDEED, THE WISE, SKILLFUL, STRATEGIC COLLABORA-  
TION OF THESE ENTITIES IN PROGRAMS BEING PURSUED BY THESE OFFICES CAN  
CONDUCE TO A DEPLOYMENT OF BAHÁ’Í INFLUENCE NOT YET EXPERIENCED.

8.5 YOUR AIM NOW IS TO VALIDATE SUCH PROSPECTS THROUGH LOVING, UNITED,  
EFFICIENT, SELFLESS, AND CEASELESS ENDEAVOR. DIFFICULTIES OF THE PAST MUST  
YIELD TO THE URGENT DEMANDS OF THE PRESENT; INCONGRUITIES OF PERSONAL-  
ITY MUST DISSOLVE IN A WIDENING RANGE OF EFFECTIVE ACTIONS; ALL PARTICU-  
LARISMS MUST BE SUBORDINATED TO THE COMMON GOOD OF THE CAUSE. ONLY  
THUS CAN SUCCESS BE ASSURED.

8.6 IT IS WITH A COMMITMENT TO SUCH RESOLVES THAT YOU WILL NOT ONLY  
MEET AMONG YOURSELVES AS CO-WORKERS IN THE OFFICES OF THE BAHÁ’Í IN-  
TERNATIONAL COMMUNITY, BUT ALSO INVITE THE PARTICIPATION OF REPRESEN-  
TATIVES OF THE NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLIES OF THE UNITED STATES AND  
CANADA, WHICH WERE AMONG THE EIGHT NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLIES  
WHICH CONFIGURED THE BAHÁ’Í INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY AS AN ENTITY IN  
THE EYES OF THE UNITED NATIONS, WITH THE UNITED STATES NATIONAL ASSEM-  
BLY THE SPEARHEAD. THESE REPRESENTATIVES WILL COME FROM COMMUNITIES  
WHICH CONSTITUTE A BULWARK OF HARD-WON BAHÁ’Í EXPERIENCE, RESOURCES  
AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR INTERNATIONAL ACTION, AND WHICH, AS IS WIDELY

RECOGNIZED, SHOULDER EXTRAORDINARY RESPONSIBILITIES BY VIRTUE OF THE  
UNIQUE BLESSINGS BESTOWED ON NORTH AMERICA THROUGH ‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ’S DI-  
VINE PLAN. SUCH BLESSINGS WILL IN GOD’S APPOINTED TIME MAKE EVIDENT THE  
PREPONDERATING INFLUENCE WHICH THAT CONTINENT MUST AND WILL EXERT  
ON THE REALIZATION OF PEACE ON EARTH. AS THE RISE IN THE STATUS OF THE  
AMERICAN AND CANADIAN COMMUNITIES ALSO SIGNIFIES TO A GREAT EXTENT  
A RISE IN THE STATUS OF THE BAHÁ’Í WORLD COMMUNITY, IT IS ONLY FITTING  
THAT THE COLLABORATION OF THEIR NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLIES WITH THE  
UNITED NATIONS OFFICE AND THE OFFICE OF PUBLIC INFORMATION SHOULD BE  
WELCOMED, REAPPRAISED AND REINFORCED. THEY WILL IN TURN, NO DOUBT, EX-  
TEND TO THOSE OFFICES EAGER HANDS OF SUPPORT AND THE WHOLEHEARTED  
WILL TO COOPERATE, AS MUCH WITH THE OFFICES AS BETWEEN THEMSELVES.

8.7 WE LOOK TO THE FUTURE, CONFIDENT THAT BY WORKING UNITEDLY TO-  
GETHER, AND WITH DUE APPRECIATION OF THE IMPORTANCE OF THE ROLE AS-  
SIGNED TO THE ADMINISTRATOR-GENERAL, YOU WILL MAKE A NOTABLE CONTRI-  
BUTION TO A PERIOD OF UNPRECEDENTED ADVANCEMENT FOR THE FAITH OF  
BAHÁ’U’LLÁH. WITH THIS ASSURANCE WE OFFER OUR SUPPLICATIONS AT THE HOLY  
SHRINES THAT HE WHO WATCHES OVER THE DESTINY OF HIS WONDROUS CAUSE  
AND CONFIRMS THE HUMBLE EFFORTS OF HIS DEVOTED SERVANTS MAY GRANT  
YOU A FRESH MEASURE OF HIS GRACE AND BOUNTY.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

9  
Murder of two Bahá’ís in Iran

31 OCTOBER 1986

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

9.1 We are saddened to receive the following information from Iran ….

9.2 Mr. Íraj Mihdí-Nizhád, 59 years old, a prominent Bahá’í in Bandar-  
‘Abbás, was stabbed to death by a group of people. Sixteen knife wounds  
were observed on his body. Mr. Mihdí-Nizhád had been a civil servant and  
was dismissed from his job because of his faith, like thousands of other  
Bahá’ís. Out of necessity, he became a peddler, selling various articles in the  
streets in order to earn an income. Following the murder, his son-in-law and  
his son were detained for 48 hours by the police for questioning. However,

later on, the murderers were apprehended. They belonged to a family, one  
of whose members had studied the Bahá’í Faith and expressed acceptance  
of it. It was some of the fanatical members of that family who attacked Mr.  
Mihdí-Nizhád, a prominent and active Bahá’í.

9.3 The police assembled a file of evidence related to the crime and sent  
it to the Attorney-General. However, the Attorney-General was apparently  
notified in advance by the members of the murderers’ family, who may  
even have threatened him. As a result, before the file reached his desk he  
left his office, instructing his subordinate to refuse to accept the file on the  
pretext that the Attorney-General had gone on leave. In the meantime, the  
police, who had correctly carried out their duty in preparing the file, must  
have subsequently received instructions. As a consequence, when the file  
was returned to them, they indicated that no action would be taken, and  
even advised Mr. Mihdí-Nizhád’s family to let the matter drop.

9.4 The members of the family, however, have not given up their efforts to  
pursue their complaint, although it is fraught with danger and there is very  
little prospect of bringing the murderers to justice.

9.5 Mr. Ḥabíbu’lláh Muhtadí, 70 years of age, a retired army officer and a  
graduate of law school, who had been out of the country during the Revolu-  
tion, returned to Iran after the Revolution to take possession of his proper-  
ties and prevent them from being confiscated. However, after he had sold  
one of his properties in Iran, he was immediately arrested, and the proceeds  
of the sale were taken from him. He was put in prison for five years, and all  
of his other properties were later confiscated. After his release, he was pursu-  
ing his case with the authorities to try and regain the properties which had  
been unjustly taken from him. On 27 August he was killed instantly by a  
blow to his head. Apparently, similar acts are being perpetrated by fanatical  
elements, emboldened by the lack of action on the part of the Government.  
They are sure that even if the crime is discovered, a Muslim will not be  
punished by law if he has committed a crime against a Bahá’í.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

10  
Celebrating Christmas

6 NOVEMBER 1986

To an individual Bahá’í

Dear Bahá’í Friend,

10.1 Your letter of 28 September to the Universal House of Justice has been  
received, and we are asked to convey its answer to your questions concern-  
ing Bahá’ís celebrating Christmas.

10.2 Questions concerning the observance of Christmas by Bahá’ís were asked  
of the beloved Guardian, and two extracts from letters written on his behalf  
will be of assistance to your understanding of the Bahá’í position.

10.2a The Bahá’ís should give up the celebrating of Christian Holy Days  
such as Christmas. The same applies to Bahá’ís of Jewish and Moslem  
extraction etc. However, this is not a thing for the Spiritual Assem-  
blies to enforce now; but each one should conscientiously begin to do  
this otherwise, people will never know we are members of a new  
religion, but will think we are just people believing two or three things  
at the same time.

(15 August 1957)

10.2b As regards the celebration of the Christian Holidays by the believ-  
ers; it is surely preferable and even highly advisable that the friends  
should in their relation to each other discontinue observing such holi-  
days as Christmas and New Year, and to have their festal gatherings of  
this nature instead during the Intercalary Days and Naw-Rúz.

(19 March 1938)

10.3 It is important to note, in the second extract, the phrase “in their rela-  
tion to each other”; it is clear, therefore, that among the members of the  
Bahá’í community the celebrations of former religious dispensations should  
be abandoned. However, Bahá’ís are encouraged to “consort with the fol-  
lowers of all religions in a spirit of friendliness and fellowship,” and there is  
no harm in Bahá’ís sharing Christmas with Christian relatives or friends.[[5]](#footnote-5)10-1

Indeed, families may contain both Bahá’ís and non-Bahá’ís, and the par-  
ticipation by Bahá’ís at celebrations of Christmas or of other religious ob-  
servances, should not be made into a source of conflict but rather be used  
as an opportunity for demonstrating the honor due to other religions and  
also as an incentive for developing the celebration of Bahá’í Holy Days and  
anniversaries.

10.4 The House of Justice understands the problems of individuals and fami-  
lies who have come into the community and who require loving support  
through their transition to a new way of life, new Holy Days, and ways of  
celebrating the events of the new Dispensation. Prayers will be offered for  
your own guidance in this situation, which must not become a source of  
difficulty in the community.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

11  
Passing of the Hand of the Cause of God  
Zikrullah Khadem

14, 15 AND 16 NOVEMBER 1986

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

11.1 WITH SORROWFUL HEARTS ANNOUNCE PASSING INDEFATIGABLE FEARLESS DE-  
FENDER FAITH DEEPLY LOVED HAND CAUSE ZIKRULLAH KHADEM. HIS STERLING  
SERVICES TO THE CAUSE, HIS TOTAL CONSECRATION TO TASKS ASSIGNED TO HIM  
BY BELOVED GUARDIAN, HIS OUTSTANDING EFFORTS AS MEMBER NATIONAL SPIRI-  
TUAL ASSEMBLY CRADLE FAITH, HIS VALUABLE SOUL-UPLIFTING STIMULATION IM-  
PARTED BODY BELIEVERS NORTH AMERICA, PARTICULARLY UNITED STATES BAHÁ’Í  
COMMUNITY, HIS UNTIRING ENDEAVORS THROUGH HIS TALKS AND WRITINGS IN  
SAFEGUARDING COVENANT AND IN INSTILLING APPRECIATION LOVE FOR SHOGHI  
EFFENDI SHED UNDYING LUSTER OVER PERIOD HIS ADMIRABLE STEWARDSHIP  
CAUSE GOD. OFFERING PRAYERS HOLY SHRINES PROGRESS HIS RADIANT SOUL ABHÁ  
KINGDOM. URGE HOLD BEFITTING MEMORIAL GATHERINGS HIS NAME AT ALL  
HOUSES OF WORSHIP AS WELL AS IN ALL LOCAL BAHÁ’Í COMMUNITIES.

UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

12  
Infallibility of the Manifestations of God

26 NOVEMBER 1986

To a National Spiritual Assembly

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

12.1 The International Teaching Center has referred to the Universal House  
of Justice your letter of 29 September 1986 in which you seek comment on  
the draft of the letter you plan to send to the Local Spiritual Assembly of  
… for the guidance of …, a believer who has written an article entitled,  
“The Infallibility of the Prophets.”

12.2 The House of Justice has studied your draft response and …’s paper  
in which he concludes, by means of logical analysis, based in part on his  
understanding of an article by Mr. Juan Ricardo Cole on the Tablet of Wis-  
dom, that Bahá’u’lláh, and indeed all the Prophets of God, are not infallible  
… expresses the opinion that attempts to resolve apparent contradictions  
in the Writings by seeking a broader context only serve to create insoluble  
logical difficulties, and he indicates that he is aware that the Institutions of  
the Faith may not agree with his views causing his status as a Bahá’í to be  
called into question. We are instructed by the Universal House of Justice to  
make the following reply.

12.3 …’s article raises fundamental issues about the station of the Mani-  
festations and Their authority, as well as about the nature of individual  
interpretation.

12.4 It is clear from a study of the Text that infallibility is an essential attribute  
of the Manifestation of God. Bahá’u’lláh wrote:

12.4a … the Most Great Infallibility is confined to the One Whose sta-  
tion is immeasurably exalted beyond ordinances or prohibitions and is  
sanctified from errors and omissions….

12.4b … Were He to pronounce right to be wrong or denial to be belief,  
He speaketh the truth as bidden by God. This is a station wherein sins  
or trespasses neither exist nor are mentioned.

(*Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, pp. 108, 109)

12.5 ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in *Some Answered Questions*, stresses the inseparability of

“essential infallibility” from the Manifestation of God, and states:

12.5a … as the supreme Manifestations certainly possess essential infal-  
libility, therefore whatever emanates from Them is identical with the  
truth, and conformable to reality. They are not under the shadow of  
the former laws. Whatever They say is the word of God, and whatever  
They perform is an upright action.[[6]](#footnote-6)12-1

12.6 The following extract from a letter dated 11 January 1942 written on  
behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer underlines the vital link  
between Revelation and the infallibility of the Manifestation:

12.6a Regarding your Bahá’í friend who does not fully understand the infal-  
libility of the Manifestation of God: You should influence that person  
to study the matter more deeply, and to realize that the whole theory  
of Divine Revelation rests on the infallibility of the Prophet, be He  
Christ, Muḥammad, Bahá’u’lláh, or one of the others. If They are not  
infallible, then They are not divine, and thus lose that essential link  
with God which, we believe, is the bond that educates men and causes  
all human progress.

12.7 As to the infallibility of the content of Bahá’u’lláh’s revelation, … cites  
issues concerning the chronology of philosophical figures mentioned in Mr.  
Cole’s article in the *World Order* magazine in 1979, as a basis for questioning  
the infallibility of Bahá’u’lláh … appears to have misconstrued the tenor  
of Mr. Cole’s article. Mr. Cole’s article does not challenge the infallibility  
of Bahá’u’lláh, on the contrary, he shows that Bahá’u’lláh, Himself, states  
in the Tablet of Wisdom that He is quoting the writings of past sages.  
Bahá’u’lláh wrote:

12.7a Thou knowest full well that We perused not the books which men  
possess and We acquired not the learning current amongst them, and  
yet whenever We desire to quote the sayings of the learned and of the

wise, presently there will appear before the face of thy Lord in the form  
of a tablet all that which hath appeared in the world and is revealed  
in the Holy Books and Scriptures. Thus do We set down in writing  
that which the eye perceiveth. Verily His knowledge encompasseth the  
earth and the heavens.

(*Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, p. 149)

12.8 Mr. Cole confirms this statement by comparison of the texts concerned.  
There is nothing in the text of this Tablet to show conclusively whether,  
by quoting these passages, Bahá’u’lláh was intending to confirm their as-  
sertions, or whether He was merely referring to historical authorities that  
were accepted by the audience He was addressing. It must be borne in mind  
that accounts of past events as recorded by historians of the East do not  
always agree with the accounts set down by chroniclers in other parts of the  
world. Perhaps in the future studies will be undertaken to ascertain the facts  
scientifically, if this is at all possible.

12.9 In reference to His Revelation, Bahá’u’lláh provides the following assur-  
ance that when viewed from the perspective of the Manifestation, the divine  
purpose of the verses will become apparent and questions will be resolved:

12.9a The verses are sent down at one time in a form that is untroubled  
by the rules of grammarians, transcending what the minds of men  
have yet conceived; and at another time they are sent down in a style  
that conformeth to the standards of men. Thy Lord, verily, is potent  
over whatsoever He willeth by virtue of His words “Be, and it is.” Wert  
thou to view them with Mine eyes thou wouldst see that they are in  
conformity with the most consummate rules, and wouldst give thanks  
to the Lord, the Almighty, the Best-Beloved.

(Newly translated)

12.10 As to the question of individual interpretation, while individual inter-  
pretation is the fruit of man’s rational power and conducive to a better un-  
derstanding of the teachings, the application of logical analysis has inherent  
limitations. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá stated:

12.10a Therefore, if the criterion of reason or intellect constituted a correct  
and infallible standard of judgment, those who tested and applied it  
should have arrived at the same conclusions. As they differ and are

contradictory in conclusions, it is an evidence that the method and  
standard of test must have been faulty and insufficient.

(*The Promulgation of Universal Peace: Talks Delivered by* ‘Abdu’l*-Bahá during  
His Visit to the United States and Canada in 1912*, p. 254)

12.11 Understanding of the Writings requires belief in the Manifestation of  
God, for, as the Master states:

12.11a … the knowledge of God is the cause of spiritual progress and at-  
traction, and through it the perception of truth, the exaltation of  
humanity, divine civilization, rightness of morals and illumination  
are obtained.

(*Some Answered Questions*, p. 300)

12.12 Other important components in this process include an attitude of  
prayerful humility, acceptance of the statements of the Manifestation, con-  
fidence in the knowledge that understanding of their meaning will emerge  
with meditation, study of the texts and the passage of time, willingness to  
acknowledge that one’s views may be erroneous, and, courage to follow in  
the direction defined by the authentic sacred texts.

12.13 The House of Justice urges your National Spiritual Assembly to use the  
guidance contained in this letter as a basis for guiding and educating the  
believer in question about some of the fundamental verities of Bahá’í belief  
as a means of assisting him to determine his relationship to the Faith ….

12.14 We are asked to assure you of the prayers of the House of Justice for the  
implementation of this weighty responsibility.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

13  
Conference on Ḥuqúqu’lláh

7 JANUARY 1987

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

13.1 CONVEY ALL BELIEVERS JOYOUS NEWS CONVOCATION HOLY LAND DURING  
FIRST THREE DAYS JANUARY CONFERENCE ON ḤUQÚQU’LLÁH AS FIRST MAJOR STEP

IN SIX YEAR PLAN TOWARDS FULFILLMENT GOAL EDUCATION ENTIRE COMMUNITY  
THIS GREAT LAW OF GOD.

13.2 TRUSTEE ḤUQÚQU’LLÁH HAND CAUSE GOD DR. ‘ALÍ MUḤAMMAD VARQÁ AND  
FIVE HIS DEPUTIES WITH REPRESENTATIVES INTERNATIONAL TEACHING CENTER  
AND WORLD CENTER FINANCE DEPARTMENT MET IN CONSULTATION WITH UNI-  
VERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE EXAMINE ALL ASPECTS APPLICATION THIS LAW WORLD-  
WIDE. ACTION TAKEN DEVELOP MIGHTY INSTITUTION THROUGH APPOINTMENT  
BY TRUSTEE ḤUQÚQU’LLÁH THREE ADDITIONAL DEPUTIES, TWO IN AFRICA ONE  
IN ASIA, AND ADOPTION MEASURES LEADING ULTIMATE ESTABLISHMENT CENTRAL  
OFFICE ḤUQÚQU’LLÁH HOLY LAND AT HEART ADMINISTRATIVE CENTER FAITH.

13.3 DECISIONS TAKEN PREPARE CODIFICATION FOR DISTRIBUTION ALL COMMUNI-  
TIES TOGETHER WITH OTHER MATERIALS FACILITATE STUDY FRIENDS THIS LAW  
OBEDIENCE TO WHICH CHARACTERIZED BY BAHÁ’U’LLÁH AS “A BOUNTY WHICH  
SHALL REMAIN WITH EVERY SOUL IN EVERY WORLD OF THE WORLDS OF GOD.”

13.4 DELIGHTED ACTIONS TAKEN BY NATIONAL ASSEMBLIES DISSEMINATION TEXTS  
ISSUED 4TH JULY 1985.[[7]](#footnote-7)13-1 CONFERENCE STIRRED BY REPORTS WESTERN BELIEVERS  
ALREADY SPONTANEOUSLY OFFERING ḤUQÚQU’LLÁH ON READING COMPILATION,  
SWELLING RANKS THOSE WHO HAVE LONG CHERISHED PRIVILEGE OBSERVE THIS  
LAW. URGE NATIONAL ASSEMBLIES WHO HAVE NOT YET PUBLISHED COMPILATION  
TO EXPEDITE TRANSLATION PUBLICATION. CONDENSED COMPILATION NOW IN  
COURSE PREPARATION EASE TASK THOSE NATIONAL COMMUNITIES WHICH HAVE  
LIMITED FACILITIES TRANSLATION.

13.5 IT IS OUR ARDENT PRAYER SACRED THRESHOLD THAT BAHÁ’U’LLÁH WILL ABUN-  
DANTLY BLESS PROCESSES NOW SET IN MOTION.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

14  
Release of a compilation on trustworthiness

18 JANUARY 1987

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

14.1 The Universal House of Justice felt that a compilation on trustworthi-  
ness, a cardinal Bahá’í virtue, would be useful to the friends everywhere, as

they are endeavoring in their personal lives to mirror forth the eternal moral  
precepts inculcated in the teachings. The House of Justice has instructed  
the Research Department to prepare a compilation of extracts from the  
Bahá’í Writings on this subject.

14.2 A copy of this compilation is attached.[[8]](#footnote-8)14-1 The Universal House of Justice  
leaves it to your discretion to determine how the friends under your jurisdic-  
tion can best be informed of its contents and encouraged to study them  
carefully.

14.3 It is of vital importance that the Bahá’í standard of trustworthiness be  
upheld at this time when the House of Justice has offered the Bahá’í experi-  
ence to the world as a model for study in its search for peace. Furthermore,  
the central theme which the compilation helps to stress is a vital element  
which will contribute to the success of the rapidly increasing number of  
social and economic development projects undertaken by Bahá’í communi-  
ties throughout the world.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

15  
Passing of Charles Wolcott,  
member of the Universal House of Justice

27 AND 28 JANUARY 1987

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

15.1 DEEPLY GRIEVED PASSING DISTINGUISHED SERVANT CAUSE GOD, DEDICATED  
WORKER HIS VINEYARD CHARLES WOLCOTT. SELFLESSNESS, HUMILITY, COURAGE,  
NOBILITY, FAIR-MINDEDNESS, PERSEVERANCE CHARACTERIZED HIS UNINTER-  
RUPTED SERVICES COURSE HALF A CENTURY, IN HIS CAPACITY AS MEMBER AND  
LATER SECRETARY NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY CRADLE ADMINISTRATIVE OR-  
DER, AS SECRETARY-GENERAL INTERNATIONAL BAHÁ’Í COUNCIL FOLLOWED BY  
HIS OUTSTANDING LABORS AS MEMBER UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE SINCE ITS  
INCEPTION. PRAYING SHRINES PROGRESS HIS RADIANT SOUL, CONFIDENT RICH

WELL-DESERVED REWARD ABHÁ KINGDOM HIS UNIQUE CONTRIBUTION PROG-  
RESS CONSOLIDATION FAITH NORTH AMERICA AND AT WORLD CENTER. EXTEND  
LOVING SYMPATHY HIS BELOVED WIDOW WHO SHARED SUPPORTED HIS SERVICES  
THROUGHOUT PERIOD HIS DISTINGUISHED PROFESSIONAL CAREER, HIS BRILLIANT  
LABORS CAUSE GOD AND TO HIS BEREAVED DAUGHTERS AND FAMILY. ADVISE  
FRIENDS EVERYWHERE HOLD BEFITTING MEMORIAL GATHERINGS, INCLUDING  
COMMEMORATIVE SERVICES IN HIS HONOR ALL MASHRIQU’L-ADHKÁRS.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

16  
Execution of a Bahá’í in Iran

29 JANUARY 1987

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

16.1 WITH HEAVY HEARTS ANNOUNCE ANOTHER EXECUTION IN IRAN. AFTER TWO  
YEARS’ IMPRISONMENT, MOSTLY IN SOLITARY CONFINEMENT, AND HAVING BEEN  
SUBJECTED TO MUCH TORTURE, AIMED AT HIS RECANTATION FAITH, MR. AḤMAD  
KÁVIH WAS EXECUTED ON 26 JANUARY IN ISFAHAN BY FIRING SQUAD. HE WAS IN  
HIS MID FIFTIES AND A MERCHANT. NO INFORMATION RECEIVED AS TO ANY TRIAL  
PRIOR HIS EXECUTION ….

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

17  
Interpretations of sacred Writings

9 MARCH 1987

To an individual Bahá’í

Dear Bahá’í Friend,

17.1 The Universal House of Justice has received your letter of 8 February  
1987 in which you inquire about the role of the individual in interpretation  
of the Writings: specifically whether given the existence of interpretations by  
the Master and the Guardian of passages from the Writings, there remains  
room for personal interpretations of these same texts. We are instructed to  
convey the following points in reply.

17.2 The interpretations of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and the Guardian are divinely guided  
statements of what the Word of God means and as such these interpreta-  
tions are binding on the friends. However, the existence of authoritative  
interpretations in no way precludes the individual from engaging in his own  
study of the teachings and thereby arriving at his own interpretation or  
understanding. Indeed, Bahá’u’lláh invites the believers to “immerse” them-  
selves in the “ocean” of His “words,” that they “may unravel its secrets, and  
discover all the pearls of wisdom that lie hid in its depths.”[[9]](#footnote-9)17-1

17.3 Far from knowledge being limited, Bahá’u’lláh quotes the Muslim tradi-  
tion that “every knowledge hath seventy meanings,” and asserts that the  
“meaning” of the Word of God “can never be exhausted.”[[10]](#footnote-10)17-2 This potential  
richness of meaning is underlined by the provision whereby future Guard-  
ians, while not abrogating the “interpretations of former Guardians,” may  
“elaborate and elucidate former interpretations,” as set out in the extract  
from a letter dated 19 February 1947 which was written on behalf of Shoghi  
Effendi to an individual believer:

17.3a … regarding future Guardians: they cannot “abrogate” the interpreta-  
tions of former Guardians, as this would imply not only lack of guidance  
but mistakes in making them; however they can elaborate and elucidate  
former interpretations, and can certainly abrogate some former ruling  
laid down as a temporary necessity by a former Guardian.

17.4 Individual interpretations based on a person’s understanding of the  
teachings constitute the fruit of man’s rational power and may well contrib-  
ute to a more complete understanding of the Faith. Such views, however,  
lack authority. The believers are, therefore, free to accept or disregard them.  
Further, the manner in which an individual presents his interpretation  
is important. For example, he must at no time deny or contend with the  
authoritative interpretation, but rather offer his idea as a contribution to  
knowledge, making it clear that his views are merely his own.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

18  
Avoiding partisan politics  
and promoting the Lesser Peace

10 MARCH 1987

To an individual Bahá’í

Dear Bahá’í Friend,

18.1 The Universal House of Justice has received your letter of 27 January  
1987 and has asked us to convey on its behalf the following in response to  
the points you have raised.

18.2 It is not advisable for Bahá’í institutions or individuals to initiate actions  
designed to prod government leaders to urge their government or the lead-  
ers of other governments to convene the world conference called for by  
Bahá’u’lláh and echoed in *The Promise of World Peace*. Two points should  
be borne in mind in this regard: (1) Because of the political gravity of the  
decisions implied by this call and the differing political attitudes which it  
evokes, such actions on the part of the Bahá’í community would embroil  
the friends in partisan politics. There is quite a difference between identi-  
fying, as does the Peace Statement, the need for a convocation of world  
leaders and initiating the political processes towards its realization. (2) In  
the writings of the Faith (e.g., the closing passages of *The Promised Day is  
Come*), it is clear that the establishment of the Lesser Peace, of which the  
conference of leaders will be a related event, will come about independently  
of any Bahá’í plan or action. This is not to say that Bahá’ís should be inert.  
Indeed, Bahá’ís may promote the concept of the Lesser Peace with all that  
it implies without engaging in the political processes which its realization  
will require.

18.3 The House of Justice feels that the task before the Bahá’ís is to prepare  
the ground for the transition from the present system of national sover-  
eignty to a system of world government. This requires a number of related  
activities which have been indicated in the goals of previous and present  
Plans of the community based on ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Tablets of the Divine Plan.  
The activities which will indirectly prepare the world to make the final stride  
include the following.

18.4 The establishment as rapidly as possible of firmly grounded, efficiently  
functioning Local Spiritual Assemblies in every part of the world, so that  
seekers everywhere will have a point of reference to which they can turn for

guidance and for the Teachings of the Faith. This implies a vast increase in  
Bahá’í membership. Although the Canadian and many other Bahá’í Com-  
munities have achieved remarkable progress, much work is required to bring  
the Bahá’í institutions all over the world to the degree of maturation that is  
needed.

18.5 A second important activity is the deepening of the believers, of all ages,  
in their understanding of and obedience to the Teachings of the Faith. A  
third is the proclamation of the Faith to all strata of society, and in par-  
ticular to those in authority and to leaders of thought so that those who  
hold the direction of peoples in their hands will learn accurately about the  
nature and tenets of the Faith and will grow to respect it and implement  
its principles. A fourth is the promotion of Bahá’í scholarship, so that an  
increasing number of believers will be able to analyze the problems of man-  
kind in every field and to show how the Teachings solve them. A fifth is the  
development of relations between the Bahá’í International Community and  
the United Nations, both directly with the highest United Nations institu-  
tions and at a grass-roots level in areas of rural development, education, etc.

18.6 These different activities, which began a long time ago and are still go-  
ing on, coupled with the presentation of *The Promise of World Peace* to the  
leaders of the world, will gradually bring about circumstances which will  
indicate the direction of subsequent actions. The House of Justice will ad-  
vise the Bahá’í world when the time is ripe for such actions. The unpredict-  
ability of certain events in the world, which are likely to change the current  
course of certain processes, makes it impracticable for the House of Justice  
to respond with precision to some of your questions.

18.7 The House of Justice in its message to the Bahá’ís of the World dated 2  
January 1986 referred to Shoghi Effendi’s perception of a dialectic of victory  
and crisis in the organic life of the Cause. This indicates the instrumentality  
of the forces of opposition which will help to bring about, over a period of  
time, conditions necessary for the Local and National Spiritual Assemblies  
to act effectively as Local and National Houses of Justice.

18.8 The stages of the evolution of these institutions, which will synchronize  
with the establishment of the Lesser Peace, are indicated in the writings of  
the beloved Guardian, such as in the following extract:

18.8a Not only will the present-day Spiritual Assemblies be styled differ-  
ently in future, but they will be enabled also to add to their present  
functions those powers, duties, and prerogatives necessitated by the

recognition of the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh, not merely as one of the rec-  
ognized religious systems of the world, but as the State Religion of an  
independent and Sovereign Power.

(*The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, pp. 6–7)

18.9 Your specific question about whether or not Bahá’ís in North America  
“are permitted to run for election to school boards, town or municipal coun-  
cils, hospital boards and for local enforcement officer positions” should be  
answered by the National Assemblies concerned.

18.10 The completion of the buildings on the Arc “which will synchronize  
with two no less significant developments—the establishment of the Lesser  
Peace and the evolution of Bahá’í national and local institutions—the one  
outside and the other within the Bahá’í world”[[11]](#footnote-11)18-1 speaks, as you have rightly  
perceived, “to the readiness of the Bahá’í Administrative Order to manage  
the ever-growing and complex affairs of the Cause as well as an increased  
capacity to interface with the non-Bahá’í world and its institutions.”

18.11 Regarding the question in the final paragraph of your letter, the follow-  
ing reply was written on behalf of the beloved Guardian in a letter dated 14  
March 1939 to an individual believer.

18.11a Your view that the Lesser Peace will come about through the political  
efforts of the states and nations of the world, and independently of  
any direct Bahá’í plan or effort, and the Most Great Peace established  
through the instrumentality of the believers, and by the direct opera-  
tion of the laws and principles revealed by Bahá’u’lláh and the func-  
tioning of the Universal House of Justice as the supreme organ of the  
Bahá’í Super State—your view on this subject is quite correct and in  
full accord with the pronouncements of the Guardian as embodied in  
the “Unfoldment of World Civilization.”[[12]](#footnote-12)18-2

18.12 The fact that the Bahá’í institutions will not be directly involved in the  
eventual convocation of world leaders and in effecting the political unity  
of nations does not mean that the Bahá’ís are standing aside and waiting

for the Lesser Peace to come before they do something about the peace of  
mankind. Indeed, by promoting the principles of the Faith, which are indis-  
pensable to the maintenance of peace, and by fashioning the instruments of  
the Bahá’í Administrative Order, which we are told by the beloved Guardian  
is the pattern for future society, the Bahá’ís are constantly engaged in laying  
the groundwork for a permanent peace, the Most Great Peace being their  
ultimate goal.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

19  
Execution of two Bahá’ís in Iran

13 MARCH 1987

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

19.1 CONVEY SAD NEWS PAST FEW DAYS MR. SURÚSH JABBÁRÍ AND MR. ABU’L-QÁSIM  
SHÁYIQ WERE EXECUTED IN TEHRAN. EXACT DATE AND MANNER OF THEIR EXECU-  
TION ARE NOT KNOWN AS NO ANNOUNCEMENT WAS MADE, AND THERE IS NO  
INDICATION WHETHER OR NOT TRIALS WERE HELD. THEIR BODIES WERE BURIED  
WITHOUT KNOWLEDGE THEIR RELATIVES AND FRIENDS.

19.2 MR. JABBÁRÍ WAS 42 YEARS OLD AND HAD BEEN IN PRISON SINCE 15 SEPTEMBER  
1984. HE WAS AN ENGINEER. MR. SHÁYIQ WAS 47 YEARS OF AGE AND HAD BEEN IN  
PRISON SINCE 13 FEBRUARY 1984. HE WAS A GRADUATE IN HISTORY AND WORKED  
FOR THE GOVERNMENT BEFORE HIS DISMISSAL AS A BAHÁ’Í.

19.3 NO OTHER DETAILS ARE AVAILABLE.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

20  
Election of new member of  
Universal House of justice

20 MARCH 1987

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

20.1 WARMLY WELCOME NEWLY ELECTED MEMBER HOUSE JUSTICE PETER KHAN.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

21  
Codification of the Law of Ḥuqúqu’lláh

25 MARCH 1987

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

21.1 In furtherance of the goal of the Six Year Plan to educate the friends  
throughout the world in the Law of Ḥuqúqu’lláh, the Research Department  
has prepared a simple codification of the law. A copy of this codification is  
enclosed for you to share, as you judge appropriate, with the friends under  
your jurisdiction. It is based largely on a codification produced spontane-  
ously by some friends in Austria and on another written under the auspices  
of the United States National Spiritual Assembly. References throughout  
the document are to the sections of the compilation on Ḥuqúqu’lláh which  
has already been sent to you.[[13]](#footnote-13)21-1

21.2 To help the friends increase their understanding of the significance of  
this Law of God, the Research Department was also requested by the Uni-  
versal House of Justice to prepare a brief history of the development of the  
Institution which has been associated with the Law since the early years  
of its operation. This is also enclosed and is based on an article in Persian  
written by the Hand of the Cause of God Dr. ‘Alí Muḥammad Varqá, apart  
from the final section about Dr. Varqá himself, which has been added by the  
Research Department.

21.3 It is hoped that National Spiritual Assemblies will use this material as  
extensively as possible to educate the friends and deepen their understand-  
ing of this vital law of the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

A Codification of the Law of Ḥuqúqu’lláh

March 1987

Prepared by the Research Department  
at the request of the Universal House of Justice

I. Preamble

21.4 Ḥuqúqu’lláh (The Right of God) is a great law (7)[[14]](#footnote-14)21-2 and a sacred institution  
(72). Laid down in the Most Holy Book (Kitáb-i-Aqdas), it is one of the key  
instruments for constructing the foundation and supporting the structure  
of the World Order of Bahá’u’lláh. It has far-reaching ramifications that  
extend from promoting the welfare of the individual, to buttressing the  
authority and extending the activity of the Head of the Faith. In providing  
a regular and systematic source of revenue for the Central Institution of the  
Cause, Bahá’u’lláh has assured the means for the independence and decisive  
functioning of the World Center of His Faith.

21.5 By identifying this law as “The Right of God” Bahá’u’lláh has reem-  
phasized the nature of the relationship between human beings and their  
Creator as a Covenant based on mutual assurances and obligations; and, by  
designating the Central Authority in the Cause, to which all must turn, as  
the recipient of this Right, He has created a direct and vital link between  
every individual believer and the Head of his Faith that is unique in the  
structure of His World Order. This law enables the friends to recognize the  
elevation of their economic activity to the level of divine acceptability, it is  
a means for the purification of their wealth and a magnet attracting divine  
blessings. The computation and the payment of Ḥuqúqu’lláh, within the  
general guidelines set forth, are exclusively a matter of conscience between  
the individual and God (8, 104); demanding or soliciting the Ḥuqúqu’lláh  
is prohibited (8, 9, 38, 71, 96, 104), only appeals, reminders and exhor-  
tations of a general nature, under the auspices of the institutions of the  
Faith, are permissible (38, 70, 99, 104, 107). That the observance and en-  
forcement of this law, so crucial to the material well-being of the emerging  
Bahá’í commonwealth, should thus have been left entirely to the faith and  
conscience of the individual, gives substance to and sheds light on what the

beloved Master calls the spiritual solution to economic problems. Indeed,  
the implications of the law of Ḥuqúqu’lláh for the realization of a number  
of the principles of the Faith, such as the elimination of extremes of wealth  
and poverty, and a more equitable distribution of resources, will increas-  
ingly become manifest as the friends assume in ever greater measure the  
responsibility for observing it.

21.6 The fundamentals of the law of Ḥuqúqu’lláh are promulgated in the  
Kitáb-i-Aqdas. Further elaborations of its features are to be found in other  
Writings of Bahá’u’lláh, in Tablets from ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and in letters from  
Shoghi Effendi and the Universal House of Justice, mostly in response to  
questions raised by the friends. All these major references have been com-  
piled by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice and  
separately published. A study of that compilation makes it clear that the  
application of the law has been progressive, and will continue to be so, as its  
ramifications and subsidiary rulings are elucidated.

21.7 The following is a preliminary attempt at codifying the information  
in the Writings on the subject of Ḥuqúqu’lláh. It should be emphasized,  
however, that the friends should not attempt to read into it an element  
of rigidity or total comprehensiveness. The questions put to Bahá’u’lláh,  
the Master and Shoghi Effendi were from friends residing in places and  
times with infinitely simpler economic systems and relationships than those  
which obtain today. What can be learned from them are clear guiding prin-  
ciples whose application to changing and more complex conditions must  
be considered. The subject will undoubtedly occupy the Universal House  
of Justice in evolving legislation, as necessary, for a long time to come. As  
the Fourth Epoch of the Formative Age of our Faith unfolds before the  
eyes of an increasingly watchful humanity, the universal assumption of the  
obligation of Ḥuqúqu’lláh by the friends will be a clear sign of attaining to  
a new level of spiritual maturity by the community of the Greatest Name  
throughout the world.

II. A Bounty Granted by God

21.8 God, while being wholly independent of all created things, has in His  
bounty given us this law (7, 10, 63), for the progress and promotion of the  
Cause depend on material means (1). Obedience to this law enables the  
believer to be firm and steadfast in the Covenant (63), provides a reward in  
every world of the worlds of God (7), and is a unique test of true faith (62).

21.9 The Ḥuqúqu’lláh is to be offered joyfully and without hesitation (2, 9,  
32). When the Ḥuqúqu’lláh is offered in this spirit it will impart prosperity  
and protection to the friends, purify their worldly possessions (20, 31, 42,  
46, 48, 100), and enable them and their offspring to benefit from the fruits  
of their endeavors (48).

III. Determining the Ḥuqúqu’lláh

21.10 Everything that a believer possesses, with the exception of certain specific  
items, is subject once and only once to the payment of Ḥuqúqu’lláh.

A. Exempt from assessment to Ḥuqúqu’lláh are:

1. The residence and its needful[[15]](#footnote-15)21-3 furnishings (11).

2. The needful business and agricultural equipment which produce  
income for one’s subsistence (12, 67, 68).

B. Payment falls due:

1. Ḥuqúqu’lláh is payable as soon as a person’s assessable possessions  
reach or exceed the value of 19 mithqáls of gold (18, 19, 30). [19  
mithqáls equals approximately 2.2 troy ounces, or approximately  
69.2 grams (87, 105, 110). At the present time—March 1987—  
this is equivalent to some US$914.]

a. The amount to be paid is 19% of the value of the as-  
sessable property (10, 14).

b. The payment is due on whole units of 19 mithqáls of  
gold (15).

2. Ḥuqúqu’lláh is payable on further units of 19 mithqáls of gold  
when subsequently acquired possessions, after the deduction of  
the annual expenses, raise the value of the assessable property  
sufficiently. Among the expenses to be deducted are:

a. The general expenses of living (65, 66, 69, 78).

b. Losses and expenses incurred on the sale of possessions  
(103).

c. Sums which are paid to the State, such as taxes and  
duties (78).

3. When a person receives a gift or bequest it is to be added to his  
possessions and augments the total value in the same way as does  
an excess of annual income over expenditure (111).

4. If a property increases in value, Ḥuqúqu’lláh is not payable on  
that increase until it is realized, e.g. on the sale of the property.

5. If possessions decrease, such as through the expenses of a year  
exceeding the income received, Ḥuqúqu’lláh falls due again only  
after the loss has been made good and the total value of one’s  
assessable possessions is augmented (15–19, 30, 65–68, 78, 108,  
111).

6. The payment of debts takes precedence over the payment of  
Ḥuqúqu’lláh (22).

7. The payment of Ḥuqúqu’lláh is dependent on the person’s finan-  
cial ability to meet his obligations (24).

8. On the death of a believer, the completion of his payment of  
Ḥuqúqu’lláh is accomplished in the following manner:

a. The first charge on the estate is the expense of burial  
(22).

b. Secondly, the debts of the deceased must be paid (13).

c. The Ḥuqúqu’lláh still due on the property should then  
be paid. In establishing the value of the property on  
which Ḥuqúq has not already been paid, the following  
are among the deductions to be made:

– expenses of burial (22),

– debts of the deceased (13),

– loss of value of the assets when realized (103)  
and

– expenses incurred in realizing the assets  
(103).

C. Further notes on determining Ḥuqúqu’lláh:

1. It is left to the discretion of the individual believer to decide what  
is “needful” for himself and his family (104–6, 112).

2. Although references are made to annual payments of Ḥuqúqu’lláh,  
the time and method of payment are left to the discretion of the  
individual believer. There is, therefore, no obligation to liquidate  
one’s assets in haste in order to fulfill one’s current obligations to  
Ḥuqúqu’lláh (103).

3. Husband and wife are free to decide whether they want to honor  
their Ḥuqúqu’lláh obligations jointly or individually (109, 110).

4. The account of Ḥuqúqu’lláh should be kept separate from other  
contributions, inasmuch as the disposition of the funds of the  
Ḥuqúqu’lláh is subject to decision by the Central Authority in  
the Cause to which all must turn, whereas the purposes of the  
contributions to other Funds may be determined by the donors  
themselves.

5. Payment of the Ḥuqúqu’lláh has priority over making contribu-  
tions to other Funds of the Faith (78, 79, 97, 100), as well as over  
the cost of pilgrimage (31). It is, however, left to the discretion of  
the believer whether or not he treats his contributions to the Fund  
as an expense when arriving at the value of the annual accretion  
to his property for the purpose of calculating the Ḥuqúqu’lláh  
that he is due to pay (105).

IV. Applicability of the Law of Ḥuqúqu’lláh

21.11 The teachings of Bahá’u’lláh can be enforced only gradually because the  
time must be ripe if the desired results are to be attained (84–86). Thus  
hitherto the Law of Ḥuqúqu’lláh has been applied only to the believers  
from Iran and other countries of the Middle East. The other believers  
have been encouraged to support their local and national funds in its place  
but, although the law is not yet binding on them, they are and have been  
free to offer the Ḥuqúqu’lláh if they wish to do so (82, 93, 102, 103, 109,  
110).

V. Payment of Ḥuqúqu’lláh

21.12 The Ḥuqúqu’lláh is normally paid to the Trustee of Ḥuqúqu’lláh, his Depu-  
ties, or their appointed Representatives (35, 58). These persons issue re-  
ceipts and forward the funds to the World Center (56).

VI. Management of the Ḥuqúqu’lláh

21.13 Decisions on the necessary ordinances concerning Ḥuqúqu’lláh (81, 100),  
as well as on its disposition, lie within the sole jurisdiction of the Central  
Authority in the Cause. The Ḥuqúqu’lláh can be employed for charitable  
purposes (62, 65, 75), or for other purposes useful to the Cause of God  
(77, 78).

The Development of the Institution of Ḥuqúqu’lláh

March 1987

Prepared by the Research Department  
at the request of the Universal House of Justice

21.14 In one of His Tablets Bahá’u’lláh refers to this Law as ranking in impor-  
tance immediately after the two great obligations of recognition of God and  
steadfastness in His Cause, and yet the introduction and implementation of  
this Law are characterized by kindness, forgiveness, tolerance and magna-  
nimity. Although it deals with the material things of this world, it is placed  
among those spiritual obligations resting on the individual soul, such as  
prayer and fasting, the fulfillment of which is a direct responsibility of each  
believer towards God, not subject to the sanctions or impositions of His in-  
stitutions in this world. It is, indeed, a clear expression of the priorities with  
which Bahá’u’lláh views the duties of mankind. First comes the spiritual,  
and then the material—however important in practice the latter may be.

21.15 After the Kitáb-i-Aqdas had been revealed in response to the pleas of the  
friends, Bahá’u’lláh withheld it from publication for some time and even  
then, when a number of devoted Bahá’ís, having learned of the law, endeav-  
ored to offer the Ḥuqúqu’lláh, the payment was not accepted. The Tablets  
of Bahá’u’lláh show His acute consciousness of the way in which material  
wealth has been permitted to degrade religion in the past, and He preferred  
the Faith to sacrifice all material benefits rather than to soil to the slightest  
degree its dignity and purity. Herein is a lesson for all Bahá’í institutions for  
all time.

21.16 However, as the beloved Guardian explained, funds are the life-blood  
of the Cause. God Himself, as Bahá’u’lláh stated, has made achievement  
dependent on material means. Therefore, as the awareness of the friends  
grew, He permitted the Ḥuqúqu’lláh to be accepted, provided the donor  
made the offering willingly with joy and awareness.

21.17 To receive the Ḥuqúqu’lláh, Bahá’u’lláh brought into being one of the  
great Institutions of the Faith, the Trusteeship of Ḥuqúqu’lláh.

21.18 The first to be honored with appointment as Trustee of Ḥuqúqu’lláh was  
Jináb-i-Sháh Muḥammad from Manshád, Yazd, who eventually received  
from the Blessed Beauty the title of Amínu’l-Bayán (Trustee of the Bayán).  
Ḥájí Sháh Muḥammad had embraced the Faith in its early years and had  
the bounty of entering the presence of Bahá’u’lláh in Baghdad. The fire  
of love kindled in his heart made him impatient to offer his services to

the Threshold of his Beloved, and this undertaking he followed until the  
last moment of his life, surrendering all material belongings in the path of  
service. Encompassed by hardship, danger and lack of means, this trusted  
servant of Bahá’u’lláh, in journey after journey, would carry the friends’  
donations of Ḥuqúqu’lláh and their petitions to the Sacred Threshold and,  
in return, bring them news and Tablets from the Blessed Perfection.

21.19 One of the most sacred tasks entrusted to Amínu’l-Bayán was to go to  
Iran to receive the Remains of the Báb from their custodian, the devoted  
and valiant Hand of the Cause of God Jináb-i-Ḥájí Ákhúnd, and to transfer  
them through innumerable dangers to a safe hiding place in the Mosque of  
the Imámzádih Zayd in Tehran, where they lay concealed until the time  
when, at the behest of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, they were transferred to the Holy Land  
to be laid in their permanent resting place on the slopes of Mount Carmel.

21.20 The attention of Jináb-i-Sháh Muḥammad was drawn to the rare quali-  
ties of nobility and detachment of one of the believers, Ḥájí Abu’l-Ḥasan  
Ardakání, who was also from Yazd. The bond of fellowship between them  
became so strong that they became the closest of companions. Jináb-i-Sháh  
Muḥammad chose Ḥájí Abu’l-Ḥasan to be his assistant and confidant in  
his services as the Trustee of Ḥuqúqu’lláh. They were among the first group  
of pilgrims who, after encountering grave hardships and difficulties, were  
able to visit Bahá’u’lláh in ‘Akká. On their return to Iran they decided to  
make numerous journeys together, and on one of these journeys, in 1881,  
they were attacked and caught during a Kurdish revolt, and Jináb-i-Ḥájí  
Sháh Muḥammad was seriously wounded. Bahá’u’lláh instructed that, fol-  
lowing the passing of Jináb-i-Sháh Muḥammad, the office of Trustee of  
Ḥuqúqu’lláh should be conferred upon his loyal assistant and companion,  
Jináb-i-Ḥájí Abu’l-Ḥasan, who was subsequently entitled Amín (the Trusted  
One) or Jináb-i-Ḥájí Amín.

21.21 Jináb-i-Ḥájí Amín was a shining star who served the Cause for forty-  
seven years with eagerness and zeal, showing magnanimity, courage and  
incredible steadfastness. During the Ministry of Bahá’u’lláh he was impris-  
oned twice, by order of Náṣiri’d-Dín Sháh and his son, Kámrán Mírzá. In  
the course of his second imprisonment, in the prison of Qazvín, referred to  
as Sijn-i-Matín (the Mighty Prison) by Bahá’u’lláh in the opening verses of  
the Tablet of the World, he was together with the Hand of the Cause Ḥájí  
Ákhúnd. Here, Jináb-i-Amín suffered gravely, his legs in fetters and a chain  
around his neck. His jailers, in order to torment him, would add castor oil  
to his food. With manifest resignation and submission, he would neither

complain nor refuse the food, eating as though nothing were amiss. He was  
a symbol of magnanimity and detachment. He had no worldly possessions,  
no home or shelter of his own. His habitation was in the hearts and souls  
of the Bahá’í friends who would receive and entertain him with warmth  
and love. Each one would impatiently await his arrival, to enjoy the sweet  
melody of his prayers and chanting of the Tablets, the glad-tidings and  
encouragement he would bring. Every day he would bid good-bye to one  
family to spend the night in another household, illumining another gather-  
ing with his presence. He was continually on the move, traveling to most  
Iranian cities and being the trusted adviser of many Bahá’í friends in their  
personal affairs.

21.22 Among the countless journeys that Ḥájí Amín made was one to Paris  
where he attained the presence of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. During his long life he wit-  
nessed the last eleven years of the Ministry of Bahá’u’lláh, the twenty-nine  
years of the Ministry of the Center of the Covenant, and seven years of the  
Guardianship of Shoghi Effendi. Towards the end of his life he became ill  
and frail and was confined to bed, living in the home of his friend and as-  
sistant, Ḥájí Ghulám Riḍá, who, at the express desire of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, had  
been appointed his successor as Trustee of Ḥuqúqu’lláh. Upon his passing  
in 1928, Ḥájí Amín was named by the beloved Guardian a Hand of the  
Cause of God.

21.23 The third Trustee of Ḥuqúqu’lláh, Jináb-i-Ghulám Riḍá, was entitled  
Amín-i-Amín (Trustee of the Trustee). This distinguished soul was born  
into the wealthy merchant class of Tehran and was brought up to enjoy the  
comfortable life associated with it. During his youth, the urge to discover  
spiritual realities led him to the study of comparative religion and, while  
engaged in his business, he ventured to search out and associate with fol-  
lowers and leaders of religion. Disappointed in what he found, he sought  
more information about the Bahá’í Faith, which had been introduced to  
him by his secretary. This enquiry soon developed into a serious study of  
the sacred Tablets and Writings and his heart was illumined with the light  
of faith. After embracing the Cause, Jináb-i-Ḥájí Ghulám Riḍá engaged in  
Bahá’í activities and, at the age of 32, he gave up trade to devote himself  
fully and freely to the service of the Faith. He developed a special attach-  
ment to Jináb-i-Amín and became his constant assistant. In due course he  
received a Tablet from ‘Abdu’l-Bahá urging him to emulate Jináb-i-Amín  
and appointing him as Trustee of Ḥuqúqu’lláh. While ever mindful of the

responsibilities of his new position, he took the utmost care of Jináb-i-  
Amín for the remainder of his life.

21.24 Jináb-i-Ghulám Riḍá held the rank of Trustee of Ḥuqúqu’lláh for eleven  
years. His home became a center for the gatherings of the friends and for the  
administration of the affairs of the Faith. It was during his Trusteeship that  
initial steps were taken for the registration of Bahá’í properties and endow-  
ments in Iran, and he was assiduous in doing his utmost for their protection  
and preservation. In 1938 he fell ill and passed away.

21.25 The fourth Trustee of Ḥuqúqu’lláh, appointed to this position by the  
beloved Guardian, was Jináb-i-Valíyu’lláh Varqá, the third son of Varqá the  
martyr. He was born in Tabríz and, after the martyrdom of his father and  
brother, he was brought up from early childhood by his grandmother, a  
staunch, powerful and fanatical Muslim. She did her utmost, until his early  
youth, to sow the seeds of enmity to the Faith in his heart. When he was  
sixteen, his uncle, surnamed Akhu’sh-Shahíd (the Brother of the Martyr),  
managed to remove him from this agonizing atmosphere of prejudice and  
took him to his home in Míyándu’áb. There he introduced him to the Bahá’í  
Faith and its teachings, opening a new world to Jináb-i-Varqá. So afire did he  
become with love for the Faith that, without any preparations, he decided  
to go on pilgrimage in the company of a close friend. However, his Local  
Spiritual Assembly did not approve of this, and guided him, instead, to go  
to Tehran to join his elder brother Jináb-i-‘Azízu’lláh Varqá.

21.26 After his schooling in Tehran, Jináb-i-Varqá’s longing to make his pil-  
grimage was fulfilled, and he then attended the American University in  
Beirut, deepening his knowledge of the Bahá’í teachings under the guidance  
of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá during his summer vacations. During this time he made a  
journey to Iran at the behest of the Master, and later accompanied Him on  
His historic journey to Europe and America, as an interpreter. Upon the  
completion of this journey, he returned to Iran and rendered invaluable ser-  
vices on the Local Spiritual Assembly of Tehran, in many Bahá’í administra-  
tive agencies, and ultimately on the National Spiritual Assembly. His loyal  
and dedicated service as Trustee of Ḥuqúqu’lláh was to follow, occupying  
him for seventeen years, during which time the observance of the Law of  
Ḥuqúqu’lláh was spread throughout Iran, so that ever more of the friends  
fulfilled their obligations, offering large sums and many properties. In order  
to devote his full time to this sacred enterprise, Jináb-i-Varqá resigned from  
the work in which he was employed.

21.27 In 1951 Jináb-i-Valíyu’lláh Varqá was among the first contingent of emi-  
nent believers elevated by Shoghi Effendi to the rank of Hand of the Cause  
of God. This opened new opportunities for him to meet with the friends  
and cheer their hearts with news of the victories being achieved in the teach-  
ing work, especially during the Ten Year Crusade, which opened at Riḍván  
1953. These memorable services culminated in the fulfillment of his long-  
cherished desire to visit the beloved Guardian.

21.28 On his return to Iran from pilgrimage, a previous ailment grew worse,  
and Jináb-i-Varqá was forced to go to Tübingen in Germany for hospital  
treatment and an operation. The treatment, alas, was unsuccessful, and in  
November 1955 his noble life drew to a close.

21.29 In the cable announcing the passing of Valíyu’lláh Varqá, Shoghi  
Effendi included the words: “His mantle as Trustee Ḥuqúq now falls on ‘Alí-  
Muḥammad, his son …. Newly appointed Trustee Ḥuqúq now elevated  
rank Hand Cause.”

21.30 Just two years following the appointment of Jináb-i-‘Alí-Muḥammad  
Varqá to this onerous task, he and his fellow Hands of the Cause of God  
were confronted with the heart-breaking and soul-stirring events associated  
with the passing of the beloved Guardian, and carried the entire Bahá’í  
world to the victorious conclusion of the Ten Year Crusade, bringing into  
being, at Riḍván 1963, the Universal House of Justice.

21.31 The following twenty-three years have seen storms of tribulation and  
persecution afflicting the Bahá’í community in Iran, causing immense prob-  
lems to be wrestled with in relation to the safeguarding and sale of proper-  
ties donated for the Ḥuqúqu’lláh as well as a multitude of other historic  
tasks that have fallen to the lot of Jináb-i-Varqá in his capacity as a Hand of  
the Cause of God.

21.32 The successive teaching plans caused an outflow of pioneers from Iran  
to all corners of the world, requiring the Trustee of Ḥuqúqu’lláh to appoint  
Deputies and Representatives in many countries beyond the borders of Iran  
until, at this time, the Institution is represented in every continent of the  
earth. Not only do the friends from Middle Eastern countries continue to  
obey the law of Ḥuqúqu’lláh in their adopted countries, but, increasingly,  
other friends have been moved to offer the Ḥuqúq.

21.33 A new stage, therefore, has now been opened in the development of this  
Institution, a stage that will for ever be associated with the opening of the  
Fourth Epoch of the Formative Age of the Faith and the emergence of the  
Bahá’í community from obscurity into the arena of world affairs.

22  
Riḍván message 1987

RIḌVÁN 1987

Dearly loved Friends,

22.1 The launching of the Six Year Plan at Riḍván 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 signal-  
ized by a development of far-reaching consequence to the internal life of  
the Bahá’í community and by an outward activity of a magnitude unprec-  
edented in its entire history.

22.2 The former was a devolution of responsibility whereby all national com-  
munities, 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.

22.3 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 esti-  
mated 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.

22.4 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.

22.5 The steadfastness of the sorely tried Persian believers continues to be the  
mainspring of this worldwide 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—giv-  
ing 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 Com-  
mission on Human Rights, and by many powerful nations including the  
various governments constituting the European Community.

22.6 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 sta-  
tions—of which there are seven now broadcasting—to schools, literacy  
programs, agricultural assistance and a host of small but valuable undertak-  
ings at village level in many parts of the world.

22.7 National Bahá’í communities have organized and successfully conducted  
interreligious 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”[[16]](#footnote-16)22-1 have, through their many gatherings, attracted large num-  
bers 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.

22.8 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.

22.9 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 sacrifi-  
cially 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 interassembly assistance projects,  
the reformation of the National Spiritual Assembly of Zaire at Riḍván 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 pio-  
neers, 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 Boards of Counselors, the  
best means of ensuring the effective service of those who respond.

22.10 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 Cov-  
enant of Bahá’u’lláh, which links the past and the future with the progres-  
sive 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 consumma-  
tion 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, signalizing 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  
….”[[17]](#footnote-17)22-2 The questions that such concentrated study should answer will un-

doubtedly include the meaning of the Bahá’í Covenant, its origin and what  
should be our attitude towards it.

22.11 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. Simultane-  
ously, 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.

22.12 Great and wonderful tasks challenge us as never before. They demand  
equally great and wonderful sacrifice, dedication and single-minded devo-  
tion from every one of us. At present, the Bahá’í International Fund is ut-  
terly 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,

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

23  
Negotiations with the government of Israel for  
development of the Bahá’í World Center

30 APRIL 1987

To the Bahá’ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

23.1 This Riḍván, after decades of unabated effort involving prolonged,  
delicate negotiations, the Government of the State of Israel and the Bahá’í  
World Center signed an international agreement whose implications—  
spiritual, historical, and practical—are inestimable for the rapidly evolving  
World Order of Bahá’u’lláh.

23.2 Approved by unanimous vote of the Cabinet of the National Unity  
Government, the Agreement states as reasons for the Government’s con-  
currence in it the “friendly relations between the Bahá’í world community  
and the State of Israel” and the “desire of the Government of Israel to give  
effect to this relationship, and to its recognition of the special status of  
the Bahá’í World Center.” These friendly relations trace their foundation  
to the inspired initiatives of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá Himself, particularly during the  
period following the Revolution of the Young Turks in 1908 when a general  
amnesty was effected for religious and political prisoners held under the old  
regime. The prestige acquired by the Faith through the dynamic force of the  
Master’s unique spirit was demonstrated after His release from imprison-  
ment in the actions He took to establish His residence in Haifa at the foot  
of Mount Carmel, to inter the sacred remains of the Báb in the mausoleum  
which had been erected by Him on the spot designated by Bahá’u’lláh Him-  
self, and to travel extensively in the West. Subsequent to these travels, it  
was more conspicuously illustrated through the excellent relations He forged  
with high and low alike, the social impact of His liberal ministrations to the  
needs of the people in the Holy Land, and the conferring of a knighthood  
upon Him by the British Crown.

23.3 This legacy of prestige was evident in the recognition accorded Shoghi  
Effendi as Head of the Faith by the authorities of the British Mandate.  
The extent of the Guardian’s energetic exertions to achieve recognition  
of the independent status of the Faith, whose permanent spiritual and  
administrative centers are in the Holy Land, is beyond the scope of this

letter and must, in due time, be afforded full treatment in the work of  
future historians. Let it suffice to reaffirm here that what he was able  
to accomplish during the years of the Mandate, in securing custody of  
Bahá’í properties and in obtaining official protection of the Holy Places,  
recognition of the Bahá’í marriage certificate and of Bahá’í Holy Days,  
and relief from certain taxes, combined to reflect a status for the Faith  
which was accepted by the new Government when the State of Israel was  
established in 1948. Writing on Shoghi Effendi’s behalf to a National  
Spiritual Assembly on 30 May 1952, his secretary stated that “All the  
Bahá’í properties and imports are exempt from taxation and customs,  
and the status of the Faith as a religion, recognized.” However, the letter  
pointed out that “At present, we are planning to clarify our legal posi-  
tion with the Government, and get it on a more concrete footing.” It is  
precisely in fulfilling the need for such clarification and more concrete  
footing that the instrument recently signed in Jerusalem represents a dis-  
tinctive stage in the relations of the Bahá’í World Center with the Gov-  
ernment of this country.

23.4 In a ceremony at the Foreign Ministry on 22 April 1987, the second day  
of Riḍván, the Agreement, comprising an exchange of letters, was signed  
by Mr. Shimon Peres, Vice-Premier and Foreign Minister, on behalf of the  
Government of Israel, and Mr. Donald Barrett, Secretary-General of the  
Bahá’í International Community, on behalf of the Bahá’í World Center,  
in the presence of other high-ranking government officials and Mr. Ronald  
Bates, Deputy Secretary-General of the Bahá’í International Community.  
Among its contents are the following statements of recognition:

23.4a The Government of Israel recognizes the members of the Bahá’í  
Faith as a recognized religious community in Israel in accordance with  
Article 2 of the Palestine Order in Council, 1922–1947, and confirms  
that the Bahá’í World Center is the world spiritual and administrative  
center of the Bahá’í world community and that the Universal House  
of Justice in Haifa is the Head of the Bahá’í Faith and its Supreme  
Institution in accordance with its Constitution.

23.4b The Government of Israel recognizes that the holiest places of the  
Bahá’í Faith, in accordance with the Bahá’í Sacred Scriptures, are lo-  
cated in Israel, and confirms that the Universal House of Justice is the  
Trustee of the Bahá’í International Community over the Holy Places  
of the Bahá’í Faith in Israel and over the Bahá’í endowments in Israel.

23.5 From such clearly stated recognition flow privileges and benefits befitting  
the spiritual and administrative center of a world Faith. These provisions  
of the Agreement are defined in terms that are renewable or renegotiable at  
certain intervals, lending a flexibility and extension to the Agreement that  
are among its salient features. The Agreement can thus be regarded as the  
culmination of a series of preliminary measures of official recognition vari-  
ously granted by sundry governmental authorities over a span of decades,  
now confirmed, amplified, extended, and defined in an instrument which  
places the operation of the Bahá’í World Center on a solid basis in its rela-  
tions with the Government of Israel and in its other external relations. It  
thus launches a new phase in the development of the administration of the  
Faith at its World Center.

23.6 Of unusual importance—and fraught with implications for the future  
dealings of the Bahá’í community everywhere as the Faith passes through the  
stages of its evolution until its stature is fully acclaimed by the nations—is  
the nature of the final negotiations, which engaged our representatives in  
extensive consultations with highly placed officials, and from which emerged  
the procedure for sealing the Agreement. For it is a singular fact that the  
representative of a sovereign government, in the person of its Vice-Premier  
and Foreign Minister, and the representative of what was justifiably acknowl-  
edged as the “world center of a recognized international non-governmental  
organization” sat down together to sign an “International Agreement,” the  
first such occurrence in the history of the Cause of Bahá’u’lláh.

23.7 That this should have taken place in the Holy Land, to which only some  
120 years ago the Founder of that Cause was banished as a prisoner, evokes  
in us feelings of wonderment and astonished joy. That the Government  
which was party to so unprecedented an act happens to be that of a people  
who have only recently returned, after many centuries of exile, to their  
homeland bespeaks a token of divine favor of incalculable spiritual and  
historical importance for the Jewish people.

23.8 Dear Friends, the Status Agreement now achieved makes an indelible  
mark on the Formative Age of our Faith, assuming a special place among the  
swiftly accumulating evidences of the divine confirmations which have thus  
far distinguished the opening period of the fourth epoch of that Age. These  
accompanying signs of God’s abounding grace clearly include:

23.8a – The Conference of Continental Counselors at the World Center at  
 the close of which on 2 January 1986 was announced the opening  
 of the fourth epoch.

23.8b – The establishment in Jerusalem of an Office of Representation for  
 the Bahá’í International Community to facilitate the relations of  
 the World Center with the Government of Israel.

23.8c – The successful conclusion of the Seven Year Plan, unforgettable  
 for the stature the Cause of Bahá’u’lláh attained betokening its  
 emergence from obscurity—an emergence resulting largely from  
 the indescribable sacrifices of the beloved friends in Iran.

23.8d – The completion of the distribution of *The Promise of World Peace*  
 to heads of state and the outstanding events associated with the  
 promulgation of its contents.

23.8e – The launching of the Six Year Plan which incorporated the feature  
 of planning involving the consultation of Continental Counselors  
 with National Spiritual Assemblies, and to a large extent, consulta-  
 tion at the grass roots of the national Bahá’í communities, leading  
 to the choice of goals for their countries by these National Spiritual  
 Assemblies.

23.8f – The first visit of a head of government to the World Center to  
 consult with the Universal House of Justice on issues raised in its  
 Peace Statement.

23.8g – The participation of Bahá’í publishers in an International Book  
 Fair in the capital of the People’s Republic of China.

23.8h – The dedication of the Mother Temple of the Indian sub-continent,  
 an event which opened new opportunities for the Faith to be pro-  
 claimed in the Soviet Union, Eastern bloc countries, and China,  
 and which has induced the visits of high-ranking officials from  
 these and other countries to the Temple.

23.8i – The establishment in Liberia of the first Bahá’í radio station on the  
 continent of Africa.

23.8j – The adoption of the design created by Mr. Ḥusayn Amánat for  
 the complex of edifices remaining to be constructed on the Arc on  
 Mount Carmel.

23.9 One practical and spiritually confirming effect of the signing of the Sta-  
tus Agreement is that it brings us within reach of the realization of the  
beloved Guardian’s vision for the Arc on God’s Holy Mountain. For with the  
Agreement in hand formidable obstacles to the execution of the Arc Project  
have been removed. The conjunction of the completion of the architect’s  
design and the favorable action of the Government thus signals the ripe-  
ness of the time to pursue the obligation acutely felt by the entire Bahá’í

world to bring to fruition, as soon as possible, the work begun by Shoghi  
Effendi in the erection of the Archives Building and carried forward in the  
completion four years ago of the Seat of the Universal House of Justice.  
The plans to be made and the material requirements for so extraordinary an  
undertaking will, of course, be communicated to the friends in due course.  
In the meantime, we are happy to announce that the architect of the Indian  
Temple, Mr. Fariborz Sahba has been assigned the task of designing the  
Terraces to be situated below and above the Shrine of the Báb; he has also  
been appointed Project Manager to execute the design already adopted for  
the three remaining buildings on the Arc.

23.10 We rejoice to know that the entire company of Bahá’u’lláh’s loved ones  
joins us in prayers of thanksgiving for the manifold blessings He is shower-  
ing in such profusion on the humble efforts being made in His glorious  
Name.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

24  
Pioneer goals for remainder of Six Year Plan

14 MAY 1987

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

24.1 We have been asked by the Universal House of Justice to send this list  
of pioneer goals, which represents the minimum need for pioneers to settle  
within the next two years of the Six Year Plan. The goals for the Eastern  
European countries and the USSR are envisioned to cover the entire period  
of the Plan.

24.2 Formulated in consultation with the International Teaching Center, this  
first pioneer call has taken into consideration the requests for pioneers set  
forth by National Spiritual Assemblies. As the Bahá’í community grows and  
matures, its needs become more specialized and this call reflects the degree  
to which pioneers are needed for specific regions and to perform specific  
functions once they arrive at their posts.

24.3 While the settling of international pioneers is imperative, the House of  
Justice also wishes to emphasize the importance of homefront pioneering,  
which, in the majority of countries, is one of the most effective means of  
promoting and consolidating the Cause. You should feel free to seek assis-

tance from the Continental Boards of Counselors, other National Spiritual  
Assemblies, and the Continental Pioneer Committees towards the realiza-  
tion of your pioneer goals.

24.4 The Universal House of Justice wishes to express its appreciation of the  
sacrificial services rendered by both international and homefront pioneers  
throughout the world. It looks forward to seeing the results of further  
achievements in the pioneering field and will offer prayers in the Holy  
Shrines for the successful fulfillment of these sacred responsibilities.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

25  
Authority of Local Spiritual Assemblies

14 MAY 1987

To an individual Bahá’í

Dear Bahá’í Friend,

25.1 The Universal House of Justice has received your letter of 9 April 1987  
and has asked us to convey the following on its behalf.

25.2 You are assured of the prayers of the House of Justice in the Holy Shrines  
on behalf of the Native American Indian Bahá’í Institute at Burnt Water  
for the success of its efforts in raising the number of Navajo Indian believers  
who are well deepened in the Faith.

25.3 With regard to the two quotations you have cited about the authority of  
the Local Spiritual Assembly, and your question about what you consider to  
be contradictory, the two self-explanatory extracts are indeed complemen-  
tary. In both extracts individual believers and communities are required to  
uphold the authority of the Local Assembly and obey its decisions. The pre-  
rogative of the believer to offer at the Nineteen Day Feast “any suggestion,  
recommendation or criticism he conscientiously feels he should in order to  
improve and remedy certain existing conditions or trends in his local com-  
munity”[[18]](#footnote-18)25-1 does not give him or the community the right to disobey a deci-  
sion of the Assembly or to act in such a way as to undermine its authority.  
The point to bear in mind is also included in the first extract from Shoghi

Effendi’s writings quoted in your letter: “But again it should be stressed  
that all criticisms and discussions of a negative character which may result  
in undermining the authority of the Assembly as a body should be strictly  
avoided. For otherwise the order of the Cause itself will be endangered, and  
confusion and discord will reign in the Community.”[[19]](#footnote-19)25-2

25.4 A careful study of the principles of Bahá’í Administration and proce-  
dures which confirm the authority of the Assembly and, at the same time,  
guarantee the individual’s right to freedom of expression and provide him  
with the right of appeal, will clarify the questions you have in this regard.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

26  
Recitation of the prayer for the dead

22 MAY 1987

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of Australia

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

26.1 In response to your letter of 15 April 1987 enclosing a letter from Miss  
… concerning the Prayer for the Dead, the Universal House of Justice  
instructs us to reply as follows.

26.2 The Prayer for the Dead should be read in its entirety by one person,  
while all others stand in silence. It is not the practice for those present to  
repeat any part of the prayer in unison.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

27  
International collaboration goals

5 JUNE 1987

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

27.1 On behalf of the Universal House of Justice, we send herewith the inter-  
national collaboration goals for the Six Year Plan, based on your own con-  
siderations and on consultations with the International Teaching Center.

27.2 The goals are devised not only to achieve objectives, but to encourage  
mutual cooperation and sharing of ideas between National Spiritual Assem-  
blies, processes which will strengthen the unity of the Bahá’í world com-  
munity and enable it to present to mankind the pattern of a truly organic,  
universal, diversified but united society.

27.3 The House of Justice will offer its fervent prayers at the Holy Shrines that  
God may guide you in your devoted labors and enable you to carry out the  
tasks at hand with steadfastness and perseverance to achieve ultimate victory.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

28  
Bahá’í education of children

6 JUNE 1987

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

28.1 Among the Six Year Plan goals for collaboration between national com-  
munities, are those concerned with the Bahá’í education of our children.  
The goals set out in the attached statement are of three kinds: goals for  
systematic teacher training, for the preparation of lesson plans for all age  
groups, and for the creation of teaching materials to support the educa-  
tional process.

28.2 The group of national communities summoned to this vital and long  
overdue program of collaboration are those who are already known to be  
advanced in providing systematic child education, but also include some  
few now asked to make a positive contribution to this cooperative venture.

28.3 The Universal House of Justice will offer fervent prayers for the success of  
your labors in carrying out this collaborative project of utmost importance.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

29  
Plight of the indigenous and aboriginal peoples

15 JUNE 1987

To two individual Bahá’ís

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

29.1 Your letter of 11 April 1987, signed by yourselves, …, and …, has been  
received by the Universal House of Justice, and we have been instructed to  
convey the following response to you.

20.2 The House of Justice is deeply concerned at the plight of so many of the  
indigenous and aboriginal peoples in various parts of the world who have  
been denied their rights as a consequence of actions by oppressive majori-  
ties. Such inequities and injustices are to be found in many countries. The  
purpose of the coming of Bahá’u’lláh is to lift the yoke of oppression from  
His loved ones, to liberate all the people of the world, and to provide the  
means for their abiding happiness.

29.3 The Bahá’í approach to resolution of the manifold problems affecting  
human society rests upon the assertion by Bahá’u’lláh that these ills are  
but various symptoms and side effects of the basic disease, which the  
Divine Physician has diagnosed to be disunity. Bahá’u’lláh has made it  
abundantly clear that the first step essential for the health and harmony  
of the whole of mankind is its unification. He says, “The well-being  
of mankind, its peace and security are unattainable unless and until its  
unity is firmly established” (*The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 203). By  
contrast, the approach of most people is the exact opposite: their con-  
centration is on attempts to remedy the multitude of ills besetting man-  
kind, with the expectation that the resolution of these problems will lead  
ultimately to unity.

29.4 This unity can only be achieved through the spreading of the Faith and  
the building up of the World Order of Bahá’u’lláh. Bahá’u’lláh states in  
*Gleanings*, Section 120:

29.4a That which the Lord hath ordained as the sovereign remedy and  
mightiest instrument for the healing of all the world is the union of  
all its peoples in one universal Cause, one common Faith. This can  
in no wise be achieved except through the power of a skilled, an all-  
powerful and inspired Physician. This, verily, is the truth, and all else  
naught but error.

As Shoghi Effendi states in *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 34:

29.4b What else, might we not confidently affirm, but the unreserved ac-  
ceptance of the Divine Program enunciated, with such simplicity  
and force as far back as sixty years ago, by Bahá’u’lláh, embodying  
in its essentials God’s divinely appointed scheme for the unification  
of mankind in this age, coupled with an indomitable conviction in  
the unfailing efficacy of each and all of its provisions, is eventually  
capable of withstanding the forces of internal disintegration which, if  
unchecked, must needs continue to eat into the vitals of a despairing  
society ….

29.5 Such an effort is frequently misunderstood by others who feel that the  
Bahá’ís are not concentrating on solving the immediate and pressing prob-  
lems. This concern was addressed by the House of Justice in a letter written  
on 19 November 1974 to a National Spiritual Assembly:

29.5a … Bahá’ís are often accused of holding aloof from the “real prob-  
lems” of their fellow-men. But when we hear this accusation let us  
not forget that those who make it are usually idealistic materialists to  
whom material good is the only “real” good, whereas we know that  
the working of the material world is merely a reflection of spiritual  
conditions and until the spiritual conditions can be changed there can  
be no lasting change for the better in material affairs.

29.5b We should also remember that most people have no clear concept  
of the sort of world they wish to build, nor how to go about building  
it. Even those who are concerned to improve conditions are therefore  
reduced to combating every apparent evil that takes their attention.  
Willingness to fight against evils, whether in the form of conditions  
or embodied in evil men, has thus become for most people the touch-  
stone by which they judge a person’s moral worth. Bahá’ís, on the

other hand, know the goal they are working towards and know what  
they must do, step by step, to attain it. Their whole energy is directed  
towards the building of the good, a good which has such a positive  
strength that in the face of it the multitude of evils—which are in  
essence negative—will fade away and be no more. To enter into the  
quixotic tournament of demolishing one by one the evils in the world  
is, to a Bahá’í, a vain waste of time and effort. His whole life is directed  
towards proclaiming the Message of Bahá’u’lláh, reviving the spiritual  
life of his fellow-men, uniting them in a divinely created World Order,  
and then, as that Order grows in strength and influence, he will see  
the power of that Message transforming the whole human society and  
progressively solving the problems and removing the injustices which  
have so long bedeviled the world.[[20]](#footnote-20)29-1

29.6 It is contrary to Bahá’í principles for a believer to resort to partisan politi-  
cal action in asserting his rights or in seeking to obtain justice. It would be  
quite wrong for a Bahá’í to take up arms for a cause he or she believes to be  
just; such an action would be a direct contradiction of the aims of the Faith  
and of its laws. Believers are enjoined to deepen themselves more fully in the  
principles of world order expounded by Shoghi Effendi in his writings, so  
that they will gradually come to understand the underlying cause of the op-  
pression of minorities, as well as the spiritual forces released by Bahá’u’lláh  
and animating the work of the Bahá’í community in laboriously erecting  
and perfecting the administrative institutions which are the means by which  
justice is being established in the world.

29.7 Bahá’ís are free to work within the existing political and legal system.  
There is no objection to any Bahá’ís making a legal claim to property or  
rights through the courts or administrative agencies to which he has access.

29.8 With the emergence of the Faith from obscurity, there are increasing  
opportunities to bring Bahá’í principles to the attention of governments and  
to offer advice in the promotion of human rights. It is essential that such  
endeavors be carried out under the aegis of the National Spiritual Assembly.  
The believers are free to make suggestions to their National Assemblies or  
to recommend a course of action, but they must trust in the wisdom of  
their National Spiritual Assemblies to decide whether or not such action is  
appropriate.

29.9 The House of Justice hopes the above makes clear the Bahá’í position  
on the important issue raised in your letter. We are asked to assure you that  
prayers will be offered at the Sacred Threshold for all those concerned with  
this distressing problem.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

30  
Conduct of a National Convention

19 JUNE 1987

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of Germany

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

30.1 The Universal House of Justice has considered your letter of 10 June  
1987 and has instructed us to send you the following reply.

30.2 The House of Justice was very pleased to know how fruitful you have  
found the consultation at your recent National Conventions to have been.

30.3 The Convention is, of course, free to decide that every suggestion made  
by a delegate be recorded and conveyed to the National Spiritual Assembly.  
Beyond this, the National Assembly members who are present are always  
free to note down for their own interest and further discussion any points  
that are made. It is by no means necessary to have a formal consultation and  
vote on every recommendation. It is important to remember, however, that  
the National Convention is not a conference, it is a consultative institution  
of the Faith; therefore, consultation and formal voting on recommendations  
should not be ruled out altogether. There may, for example, be disagree-  
ment among the delegates on certain proposals put forward, and it would be  
fruitful for the matter to be discussed and voted upon so that the National  
Spiritual Assembly will know the recommendation of the Convention as a  
whole on those issues.

30.4 Detailed aspects of Convention procedure which are not defined in the  
National Bahá’í Constitution, being secondary in nature, are within the  
discretion of each National Spiritual Assembly to decide. The House of  
Justice feels that it is generally advisable not to be rigid and to leave it to the  
discretion of the Convention officers, or the Convention itself, to decide  
which recommendations need to be discussed and voted upon and which  
may be recorded without more ado. A distinction should be made in the

record between recommendations of the entire Convention and those which

are merely the proposals of individual delegates.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

31  
The Bahá’í role in promoting world peace

21 JUNE 1987

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of Finland

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

31.1 … The outstanding success of the peace conference in Finlandia Hall  
which your community sponsored last autumn remains one of the high-  
lights among the various Bahá’í peace events held throughout the world  
since the issuance of *The Promise of World Peace*. The House of Justice is  
happy to know of your continuing effort to keep the subject of world peace  
before the Finnish people; however, it advises you to be careful in choosing  
what such follow-up efforts should be and offers the following comments  
on your specific question about promoting the idea of a world conference  
of government leaders.

31.2 It is not advisable for Bahá’í institutions or individuals to initiate ac-  
tions designed to prod government leaders to urge their governments or  
the leaders of other governments to convene the world conference called  
for by Bahá’u’lláh and echoed in *The Promise of World Peace*. Two points  
should be borne in mind in this regard: (1) Because of the political gravity  
of the decisions implied by this call and the differing political attitudes  
which it evokes, such actions on the part of the Bahá’í community would  
embroil the friends in partisan politics. There is quite a difference between  
identifying, as does the Peace Statement, the need for a convocation of  
world leaders and initiating the political processes towards its realization. (2)  
In the writings of the Faith (e.g., the closing passages of *The Promised Day  
is Come*), it is clear that the establishment of the Lesser Peace, of which the  
conference of leaders will be a related event, will come about independently  
of any direct Bahá’í plan or action.

31.3 The following reply was written on behalf of the beloved Guardian in a  
letter dated 14 March 1939 to an individual believer:

31.3a Your view that the Lesser Peace will come about through the political  
efforts of the states and nations of the world, and independently of  
any direct Bahá’í plan or effort, and the Most Great Peace established  
through the instrumentality of the believers, and by the direct opera-  
tion of the laws and principles revealed by Bahá’u’lláh and the func-  
tioning of the Universal House of Justice as the supreme organ of the  
Bahá’í Super State—your view on this subject is quite correct and in  
full accord with the pronouncements of the Guardian as embodied in  
the “Unfoldment of World Civilization.”[[21]](#footnote-21)

31.4 It is clear, then, that the friends must respect the prerogatives of political  
leaders in this matter and allow them the latitude to exercise the initiative  
that only they can effectively take towards the establishment of the Lesser  
Peace. The fact that Bahá’í institutions will not be directly involved in the  
eventual convocation of the world leaders and in effecting the political  
unity of nations does not mean that the Bahá’ís are standing aside and wait-  
ing for the Lesser Peace to come before they do something about the peace  
of humanity. Indeed, by promoting the principles of the Faith, which are  
indispensable to the maintenance of peace, by living the Teachings, and by  
fashioning the instruments of the Bahá’í Administrative Order, which we  
are told by the beloved Guardian is the pattern for future society, the Bahá’ís  
are constantly engaged in laying the foundation for world peace, the Most  
Great Peace being their ultimate goal. The Bahá’ís should do whatever they  
can within the context of their Bahá’í teaching and consolidation plans and  
also through their professional and other regular activities to promulgate  
universal peace.

31.5 It is a source of great satisfaction to the House of Justice to see with  
what intensity the peace initiative of the Bahá’í community is being pursued  
by the friends, who must now accelerate their activities at the grassroots  
level. The grassroots effort of the Bahá’ís should prepare the ground for the  
transition from the present system of national sovereignty to a system of  
world government. This it can do by concentrating on wide and continual  
dissemination of the Peace Statement whose contents should be known by

the generality of humanity, on engaging people from all walks of life in  
discussions on peace, and on instilling and encouraging a sense of personal  
commitment to the prerequisites of peace. In a word, what is needed now is  
a worldwide consciousness of not only the requirements but also the possi-  
bility and inevitability of peace. Therefore, our immediate and inescapable  
task as Bahá’ís is to imbue the populations with such hope.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

32  
Requirements for membership  
in the Bahá’í community

28 JUNE 1987

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of New Zealand

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

32.1 Your letter of 25 May 1987 concerning Mr. … has been received by the  
Universal House of Justice, which has directed us to reply as follows.

32.2 In considering the status of believers such as Mr. …, it is necessary  
to review the requirements for membership in the Bahá’í community. The  
basic considerations are set out by the Guardian in his statement:

32.2a … I would only venture to state very briefly and as adequately as  
present circumstances permit the principal factors that must be taken  
into consideration before deciding whether a person may be regarded a  
true believer or not. Full recognition of the station of the Forerunner,  
the Author, and the True Exemplar of the Bahá’í Cause, as set forth  
in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Testament; unreserved acceptance of, and submis-  
sion to, whatsoever has been revealed by their Pen; loyal and steadfast  
adherence to every clause of our Beloved’s sacred Will; and close as-  
sociation with the spirit as well as the form of the present day Bahá’í  
administration throughout the world—these I conceive to be the fun-  
damental and primary considerations that must be fairly, discreetly  
and thoughtfully ascertained before reaching such a vital decision ….

(*Bahá’í Administration*, p. 90, October 24, 1925)

This specification was restated by the Universal House of Justice in address-  
ing the issue of acceptance of new believers, when it wrote:

32.2b Those who declare themselves as Bahá’ís should become en-  
chanted with the beauty of the teachings, and touched by the love  
of Bahá’u’lláh. The declarants need not know all the proofs, history,  
laws, and principles of the Faith, but in the process of declaring them-  
selves they must, in addition to catching the spark of faith, become  
basically informed about the Central Figures of the Faith, as well as  
the existence of laws they must follow and an administration they  
must obey.

(From a letter to all National Spiritual Assemblies, 13 July 1964)[[22]](#footnote-22)32-1

32.3 It follows that individuals who do not satisfy these requirements cannot  
be regarded as members of the Bahá’í community, irrespective of what-  
ever statements they might make concerning the nature of their belief in  
Bahá’u’lláh. Such a situation arises, in some instances, when a person claims  
to accept the station of Bahá’u’lláh but does not accept the authority of the  
Administrative Institutions. The Guardian clarified this matter in a letter  
written on his behalf, stating:

32.3a … To accept the Cause without the administration is like to accept  
the teachings without acknowledging the divine station of Bahá’u’lláh.  
To be a Bahá’í is to accept the Cause in its entirety. To take excep-  
tion to one basic principle is to deny the authority and sovereignty of  
Bahá’u’lláh, and therefore is to deny the Cause ….

(Letter to a National Spiritual Assembly, 30 May 1930)

32.4 If you feel that Mr. … does not accept “the authority and sovereignty  
of Bahá’u’lláh” as explained above, despite the statements he might make  
asserting his acceptance of the Bahá’í Faith, you should remove his name  
from the list of members and regard him as being a non-Bahá’í.

32.5 If you feel that the continued association of the Bahá’ís with Mr. … is  
potentially damaging to their belief or is detrimental to the unity of the  
community, you could well consider advising the believers to avoid associa-  
tion with him.

32.6 The House of Justice advises you to deal with this matter in a straightfor-  
ward way, avoiding any actions which might serve to increase Mr. …’s sense  
of his own importance or which might needlessly antagonize him and hence  
provoke him into active opposition of the Institutions.

32.7 The House of Justice will offer its prayers at the Sacred Threshold for  
your guidance in resolving this matter.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

33  
Functioning of an Executive Committee  
of a National Spiritual Assembly

15 JULY 1987

To a National Spiritual Assembly

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

33.1 The Universal House of Justice has studied carefully the information  
conveyed in your minutes about the functioning of your Executive Com-  
mittee. It has asked us to convey the following on its behalf.

33.2 It is entirely appropriate for your Assembly to appoint an Executive  
Committee and to authorize it to take action between National Spiritual  
Assembly meetings. While a committee of this type can be of considerable  
value to your Assembly, great care and close monitoring is required to guard  
against its becoming a source of difficulties which could ultimately weaken  
the authority of the Assembly.

33.3 Such a committee may be authorized to handle emergency matters which  
legitimately cannot await consultation by the full membership of the Na-  
tional Assembly, or matters which are of a routine nature and which can be  
dealt with through straightforward application of existing policy. Care is  
needed to ensure that the Executive Committee does not stray inadvertently  
beyond these bounds, and the functioning of the Committee should be a  
matter of careful review by the Assembly periodically.

33.4 The National Assembly has the responsibility to select the Assembly  
members who are to comprise the Committee. Valid meetings of the Ex-  
ecutive Committee can take place only when all of its appointed mem-

bers are duly notified. All members of the Assembly who have taken no  
part in the Executive Committee meeting should be informed of the de-  
cisions and actions taken, as soon after the meeting as practicable. This  
will afford them the opportunity to express the view as to whether the  
matter considered by the Committee should properly await a full meet-  
ing of the National Assembly. There may, of course, be instances when  
the urgency of a matter is such that a Committee decision has to be  
implemented before the other Assembly members can be informed; such  
instances are likely to be rare, and the Committee should be prepared to  
explain to the next meeting of the Assembly why it felt it necessary to  
proceed with such speed.

33.5 Furthermore, the matters considered by the Executive Committee should  
be placed on the agenda for the next full meeting of the National Assembly  
for ratification or otherwise. The House of Justice does not feel that it is  
sufficient to regard Executive Committee minutes as being “approved in  
principle” in the course of subsequent National Assembly consultation, nor  
does it feel that it is correct to delay submission of a full report of Executive  
Committee decisions to other than the next Assembly meeting.

33.6 As stated above, the House of Justice recognizes the value of your having  
an Executive Committee to avoid taking up the limited Assembly consul-  
tation time with routine matters, and to provide a mechanism by which  
urgent matters can be dealt with. However, it cautions you to be aware that  
there are dangers that such a committee could create a caucus within the  
Assembly membership which comes to the meetings with matters already  
discussed and minds made up. The Assembly must be vigilant to ensure  
that such an unfortunate condition does not occur, and that the Execu-  
tive Committee does not unintentionally take over and handle the work of  
the National Assembly itself. Limits on the functioning of the Committee  
should be set and observed, and the definition of what constitutes an urgent  
matter constantly monitored.

33.7 With the progressive development of efficient means of communication,  
it should be possible to involve a greater number of the Assembly members,  
if not all, in consultation on emergency issues without the necessity for all  
members to be physically present in the same location. While such facilities  
may not exist at the present time in …, their future development will  
doubtless remove some of the difficulties associated with decisions being  
made on urgent matters by a committee rather than by the full Assembly.

33.8 The House of Justice commends to your careful attention the points  
made in this letter, and assures you of its prayers for the confirmation of  
your devoted efforts to serve the Cause of Bahá’u’lláh in ….

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

34  
Passing of Knight of Bahá’u’lláh ‘Azíz Navídí

6 AUGUST 1987

To all National Spiritual Assemblies in Africa

34.1 GRIEVED PASSING DEVOTED DEDICATED SERVANT CAUSE KNIGHT BAHÁ’U’LLÁH  
‘AZÍZ NAVÍDÍ. HIS FEARLESS DEFENSE OPPRESSED BAHÁ’ÍS CRADLE FAITH HIGHLY  
PRAISED BY BELOVED GUARDIAN. HIS CONTINUOUS SERVICES PIONEERING FIELD  
CROWNED BY OUTSTANDING SUCCESSES GAIN RECOGNITION FAITH BY MANY AFRI-  
CAN COUNTRIES OBTAINED THROUGH HIS UTTER RELIANCE BAHÁ’U’LLÁH AND HIS  
INDEFATIGABLE RESOURCEFULNESS SACRIFICIAL EFFORTS, ALL SHED LUSTER UPON  
HIS LOVING MEMORY. REQUESTING NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY UGANDA HOLD  
MEMORIAL SERVICE MOTHER TEMPLE AFRICA RECOGNITION UNIQUE SERVICES  
THAT CONTINENT. ASSURE ARDENT PRAYERS PROGRESS SOUL ABHÁ KINGDOM. AD-  
VISE HOLD MEMORIAL GATHERING LONDON.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

35  
Support of Bahá’í funds exclusively by believers

20 AUGUST 1987

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of Canada

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

35.1 Your letter of 22 July 1987 has been received by the Universal House of  
Justice, which has asked us to respond as follows.

35.2 The provisions set out in the letter of 17 July 1978 written to your Na-  
tional Spiritual Assembly on behalf of the House of Justice remain appli-  
cable, including the principle that it is improper for Bahá’ís to solicit funds  
from non-Bahá’ís in the name of the Faith for any purpose.

35.3 The following passage from the Pen of Bahá’u’lláh: “It would be impos-  
sible to conceive any act more contemptible than soliciting, in the name of  
the one true God, the riches which men possess”[[23]](#footnote-23)35-1 clearly indicates what  
the attitude of the Bahá’ís should be.

35.4 There is, however, a wide range of fund-raising activities in which  
Bahá’ís may engage. For example, Bahá’í institutions are free to approach  
governments or institutions which hold themselves out as wishing to fund  
charitable activities, to apply for grants to assist in specific humanitarian  
projects. A Bahá’í school which has both Bahá’í and non-Bahá’í pupils is  
free to raise funds for its own development by such activities as concerts,  
etc., or by appeals to parents; in this instance, a humanitarian institution is  
clearly identified, and the funds are being collected in its name rather than  
in the name of the Faith. Another example is that of a Bahá’í who wishes to  
sell an item he owns to the general public for a fair market price; he is free to  
use the proceeds for any purpose he wishes, including contributing them all,  
or in part, to the Bahá’í Fund, provided he does not represent to the public  
that the sale is being conducted for the benefit of the Faith.

35.5 There would be no objection to the Bahá’í community’s joining with  
others to give a concert or undertake some other similar activity to raise  
funds for a deserving charity. Such activities or even the making of dona-  
tions to humanitarian work should be, and should be seen to be, acts of sin-  
cere assistance and cooperation. In choosing to engage in such fund-raising,  
a Bahá’í community would need to ensure that assisting the charity would  
not have partisan political implications or support purposes contrary to the  
interests of the Faith. It would need to watch carefully that its involvement  
in such activities does not divert its energies from the vital work of teaching  
the Faith and consolidating its Institutions.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

36  
Plans for development of the buildings  
on the Arc and terraces

31 AUGUST 1987

To the Followers of Bahá’u’lláh throughout the world

Beloved Friends,

36.1 Nigh on one hundred years ago, Bahá’u’lláh walked on God’s Holy  
Mountain and revealed the Tablet of Carmel, the Charter of the World  
Center of His Faith, calling into being the metropolis of the Kingdom of  
God on Earth. Through decades of oppression and expansion, persecu-  
tion and emancipation, His followers have successfully labored to carry His  
message to the remotest regions of the earth, to erect the structure of His  
Administrative Order, and to proclaim to mankind the divinely prescribed  
cure for all its ills. In the past eight years the agonies suffered by His lovers  
in Iran have awakened the interest of a slumbering world and have brought  
His Faith to the center of human attention.

36.2 On this same Mount Carmel ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, with infinite pains, raised  
the Mausoleum of the Báb on the spot chosen by His Father, and laid to  
rest within its heart the sacred remains of the Prophet Herald of the Faith,  
establishing a Spiritual Center of immeasurable significance. In accordance  
with the same divine command, Shoghi Effendi embellished the Shrine with  
an exquisite shell and then, under its protecting wing, began the construc-  
tion of the Administrative Center of the Faith, to comprise five buildings  
in a harmonious style of architecture, standing on a far-flung Arc centering  
on the Monuments of the Greatest Holy Leaf, her Mother and Brother.  
The first of these five buildings, the International Archives, was completed  
in the beloved Guardian’s lifetime. The second, the Seat of the Universal  
House of Justice, now stands at the apex of the Arc. Plans for the remaining  
three were prepared in fulfillment of a goal of the Seven Year Plan, and are  
now being detailed.

36.3 As indicated in our letter of 30 April 1987, the way is now open for the  
Bahá’í world to erect the remaining buildings of its Administrative Center,  
and we must without delay stride forward resolutely on this path.

36.4 Five closely related projects demand our attention: the erection of the  
three remaining buildings on the Arc and, added now to these, the con-  
struction of the terraces of the Shrine of the Báb and the extension of the

International Archives Building. A brief description of each of these will  
convey an impression of their significance for the Faith.

36.4a – **The Terraces of the Shrine of the Báb**. In His plans for the de-  
velopment of Mount Carmel, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá envisaged nineteen  
monumental terraces from the foot of the mountain to its crest,  
nine leading to the terrace on which the Shrine of the Báb itself  
stands, and nine above it. These plans were often referred to by  
Shoghi Effendi, and he completed in preliminary form the nine  
terraces constituting the approach to the Shrine from the central  
avenue of the former German Templar Colony.

36.4b – **The International Teaching Center** will be the seat of that institu-  
tion which is specifically invested with the twin functions of the  
protection and propagation of the Cause of God. The institution  
itself, referred to by the beloved Guardian in his writings, was es-  
tablished in June 1973, bringing to fruition the work of the Hands  
of the Cause of God residing in the Holy Land and providing for  
the extension into the future of functions with which that body had  
been endowed.

36.4c – **The Center for the Study of the Texts**. This building will be the  
seat of an institution of Bahá’í scholars, the efflorescence of the  
present Research Department of the World Center, which will as-  
sist the Universal House of Justice in consulting the Sacred Writ-  
ings, and will prepare translations of and commentaries on the  
authoritative texts of the Faith.

36.4d – **The International Archives Building**. We have decided to con-  
struct, westwards, an extension to the basement of the present Ar-  
chives Building to provide accommodation for the central office of  
the ever-growing Archives at the World Center. This institution is  
charged with responsibility for the preservation of the Sacred Texts  
and Relics and the historic documents of the Cause of God.

36.4e – **The International Bahá’í Library**. This Library is the central de-  
pository of all literature published on the Faith, and is an essential  
source of information for the institutions of the World Center on  
all subjects relating to the Cause of God and the conditions of  
mankind. In future decades its functions must grow, it will serve as  
an active center for knowledge in all fields, and it will become the  
kernel of great institutions of scientific investigation and discovery.

36.5 It is impossible at this stage to give an accurate estimate of the cost of  
these projects. All that we can now say is that in the immediate future two  
objectives have to be met: to accumulate rapidly a reserve of fifty million  
dollars on which plans for the construction can realistically begin to be  
implemented, and to provide an income of between twenty and twenty-five  
million dollars for the Bahá’í International Fund for each of the next ten  
years. As the work proceeds, contracts are signed and costs can be accurately  
determined, further information will be announced.

36.6 The great work of constructing the terraces, landscaping their surround-  
ings, and erecting the remaining buildings of the Arc will bring into being  
a vastly augmented World Center structure which will be capable of meet-  
ing the challenges of coming centuries and of the tremendous growth of  
the Bahá’í community which the beloved Guardian has told us to expect.  
Already we see the effect of the spiritual energies which the completion of  
the Seat of the Universal House of Justice has released, and the new impulse  
this has given to the advancement of the Faith. Who can gauge what trans-  
formations will be effected as a result of the completion of each successive  
stage of this great enterprise? The Faith, advances, not at a uniform rate of  
growth, but in vast surges, precipitated by the alternation of crisis and vic-  
tory. In a passage written on 18 July 1953, in the early months of the Ten  
Year Crusade, Shoghi Effendi, referring to the vital need to ensure through  
the teaching work a “steady flow” of “fresh recruits to the slowly yet steadily  
advancing army of the Lord of Hosts,” stated that this flow would “presage  
and hasten the advent of the day which, as prophesied by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, will  
witness the entry by troops of peoples of divers nations and races into the  
Bahá’í world ….”[[24]](#footnote-24)36-1 This day the Bahá’í world has already seen in Africa, the  
Pacific, in Asia and in Latin America, and this process of entry by troops  
must, in the present plan, be augmented and spread to other countries for,  
as the Guardian stated in this same letter, it “will be the prelude to that long-  
awaited hour when a mass conversion on the part of these same nations and  
races, and as a direct result of a chain of events, momentous and possibly  
catastrophic in nature and which cannot as yet be even dimly visualized, will  
suddenly revolutionize the fortunes of the Faith, derange the equilibrium of  
the world, and reinforce a thousandfold the numerical strength as well as the

material power and the spiritual authority of the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh.”[[25]](#footnote-25)36-2  
This is the time for which we must now prepare ourselves; this is the hour  
whose coming it is our task to hasten.

36.7 At this climacteric of human history, we are called upon to rise up in sac-  
rificial endeavor, our eyes on the awe-inspiring responsibilities which such  
developments will place upon Bahá’í institutions and individual believers in  
every land, and our hearts filled with unshakeable confidence in the guiding  
Hand of the Founder of our Faith. That our Beloved Lord will arouse His  
followers in every land to a mighty united effort is our ardent prayer at the  
Sacred Threshold.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

37  
Execution of two Bahá’ís in Iran

1 OCTOBER 1987

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

37.1 WITH PROFOUND SORROW AND DEEP SENSE OUTRAGE WE CONVEY REPORT  
JUST RECEIVED AT WORLD CENTER THAT ON 28 SEPTEMBER TWO BAHÁ’ÍS WERE  
EXECUTED IN TEHRAN. MR. ARDISHÍR AKHTARÍ AND MR. AMÍR-ḤUSAYN NÁDIRÍ  
WERE FORMER MEMBERS OF NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY OF IRAN. BOTH HAD  
BEEN IN PRISON SINCE 12 SEPTEMBER 1984. DEATH SENTENCES WERE PASSED WHILE  
SECRETARY GENERAL OF UNITED NATIONS WAS VISITING IRAN.

37.2 MESSRS. AKHTARÍ AND NÁDIRÍ, AS WELL AS MR. SURÚSH JABBÁRÍ AND MR. ABU’L-  
QÁSIM SHÁYIQ WHO WERE EXECUTED ON 3 MARCH 1987, WERE AMONG GROUP OF  
14 BAHÁ’Í PRISONERS WHOSE FATE HAS BEEN SOURCE ACUTE CONCERN TO BAHÁ’ÍS  
IRAN SINCE BEGINNING THIS YEAR ….

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

38  
Release of a compilation on *Crisis and Victory*

11 OCTOBER 1987

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

38.1 We enclose a copy of a new compilation entitled *Crisis and Victory*, which  
was prepared by the Research Department at our instruction.[[26]](#footnote-26)38-1 The pur-  
pose of this compilation is to orient the believers to the processes, within  
and without the Faith, that will accompany its progressive emergence on  
the world stage.

38.2 Tribulations attend and fuel the unfoldment of the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh.  
In describing the sweep of Bahá’í history, the beloved Guardian identified a  
pattern of growth which is characterized by “a series of pulsations, of alter-  
nating crises and triumphs, leading it [the Faith] ever nearer to its divinely  
appointed destiny.”[[27]](#footnote-27)38-2

38.3 As the stature of the Cause of God increases in the eyes of the world, the  
process of its emergence into the limelight of public attention, resulting, in  
large part, from the indescribable sacrifices of the beloved friends in Iran,  
is accelerated, and the Faith, gradually and inevitably, is projected into the  
next stage of its divinely propelled development.

38.4 The shelter of its relatively imperceptible expansion enabled the founda-  
tions of the Faith to be established and consolidated, and the community to  
attain a level of stability. Now, with the entrance of the Faith on the world  
scene, we call upon the believers everywhere not to allow themselves, even  
for one moment, to be perturbed by any increase in opposition to the Cause.  
Rather let them deepen their understanding of the creative interaction be-  
tween crisis and victory in the evolution of the Faith, and increase their aware-  
ness of the power inherent in the Cause to surmount all obstacles that threaten  
its progress. Armed with this knowledge, let them seize the opportunities that  
arise and embrace the God-given challenges, confident in the invincibility of  
the Faith and the steady onward march of its Institutions.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

39  
Arrest of six Bahá’ís in Iran

22 OCTOBER 1987

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

39.1 WE CONVEY WITH PROFOUND SADNESS NEWS OF THE ARREST IN TEHRAN ON  
20 OCTOBER OF SIX BAHÁ’ÍS. OUR DISTRESS IS DEEPENED BY FACT THAT TWO OF  
THESE, MR. JAMÁLU’D-DÍN KHÁNJÁNÍ AND MR. ḤASAN MAḤBÚBÍ, WERE MEMBERS  
OF THE FORMER NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY, AND THAT THE ARRESTS OF SUCH  
PERSONS HAVE COME SO SOON AFTER THE EXECUTION ON 28 SEPTEMBER OF TWO  
OTHER FORMER NATIONAL ASSEMBLY MEMBERS.

39.2 THE OTHER FOUR INCLUDED IN THE ARRESTS ARE MR. CHANGÍZ FANÁ’ÍYÁN,  
MR. SUHRÁB ḤÁJÍYÁN, MR. BAHMAN SAMANDARÍ AND HIS WIFE, MRS. RUZÍTÁ SA-  
MANDARÍ. ALL SIX WERE TOGETHER IN A PRIVATE HOME WHEN THEY WERE AR-  
RESTED AND TAKEN TO AN UNKNOWN DESTINATION ….

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

40  
Message to the Bahá’í Publishers’ Conference, London

26 OCTOBER 1987

To Bahá’í Publishers’ Conference (London)

40.1 WE EXTEND A WARM WELCOME TO ALL PARTICIPANTS IN THIS TIMELY CONFER-  
ENCE ON ENGLISH-LANGUAGE BAHÁ’Í PUBLISHING, THE FIRST OF THIS NATURE  
SINCE THAT HELD IN MONTREAL FOLLOWING THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE  
OF SEPTEMBER 1982. WE COMMEND BOTH THE INITIATIVE TAKEN BY THE UNITED  
KINGDOM PUBLISHING TRUST IN INAUGURATING THE PRESENT HISTORIC GATHER-  
ING AND THE ENTHUSIASTIC RESPONSE IT GENERATED AMONG NATIONAL COM-  
MUNITIES EUROPE AND BEYOND WHO ARE CONCERNED WITH THE VITAL QUES-  
TIONS IT WILL CONSIDER. THIS DEGREE OF RESPONSE BETOKENS RECOGNITION  
ON PART OF PARTICIPANTS OF THE IMPORTANCE OF THE MAJOR OBJECTIVE OF  
THE SIX YEAR PLAN SET OUT IN OUR LETTER OF 25 FEBRUARY 1986 CALLING FOR A  
WORLDWIDE INCREASE IN THE TRANSLATION, PRODUCTION, DISTRIBUTION AND  
USE OF BAHÁ’Í LITERATURE. AS YOU BEGIN YOUR DELIBERATIONS WE HASTEN TO

ACKNOWLEDGE THE VALUE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE ROLE BAHÁ’Í PUBLISHING  
AGENCIES PLAY IN FULFILLING THIS GOAL AS WELL AS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF  
IMPROVEMENTS IN THE DISTRIBUTION AND THE INCREASED PRODUCTION OF LIT-  
ERATURE. WE LOOK FORWARD EAGERLY TO THE REPORT OF YOUR GATHERING AND  
PARTICULARLY YOUR RECOMMENDATIONS FOR AN UNPRECEDENTED INCREASE IN  
THE AVAILABILITY OF THE BAHÁ’Í WRITINGS WHOSE CAPACITY TO UPLIFT, HEAL,  
INSPIRE AND DIRECT IS THE VERY BEDROCK OF ALL OUR TEACHING EFFORTS.

UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

41  
Further information on Bahá’ís arrested in Iran

30 OCTOBER 1987

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

41.1 RE OUR MESSAGE OF 21 OCTOBER ANNOUNCING ARREST OF SIX BAHÁ’ÍS IRAN,  
WE NOW HAVE FOLLOWING INFORMATION.

41.2 FIVE OF THE SIX HAVE BEEN FOUND EVIN PRISON. THEY HAVE BEEN VISITED BY  
FRIENDS AND APPEAR TO BE WELL.

41.3 WE HAVE LEARNED THAT MRS. RUZÍTÁ SAMANDARÍ HAD NOT ACTUALLY BEEN  
ARRESTED. ANOTHER BAHÁ’Í WOMAN, A RELATIVE OF ONE PRISONER, WAS ARREST-  
ED SHORTLY AFTER ARREST FIVE MEN AND SUBSEQUENTLY RELEASED.

41.4 FATE FORMER MEMBERS NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY GREATLY FEARED AS  
INDICATED OUR PREVIOUS MESSAGE.

UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

42  
Joining the Network on Conservation and Religion

3 NOVEMBER 1987

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

42.1 JOYFULLY ANNOUNCE THAT DURING OCTOBER BAHÁ’Í FAITH BECAME SIXTH WORLD  
RELIGION TO JOIN THE NETWORK ON CONSERVATION AND RELIGION WHICH WAS  
FORMED SEPTEMBER 1986 AT EVENT IN ASSISI, ITALY, TO MARK 25TH ANNIVERSARY

FOUNDING WORLD WIDE FUND FOR NATURE (WWF) WHICH IS WORLD’S LARGEST  
PRIVATE NATURE CONSERVATION ORGANIZATION. BAHÁ’ÍS WERE INVOLVED IN SE-  
RIES OF RELATED EVENTS BETWEEN 3–5 OCTOBER 1987. AMONG THESE WAS CER-  
EMONY IN WINCHESTER, ENGLAND, IN WHICH BAHÁ’Í INTERNATIONAL COMMU-  
NITY ISSUED OFFICIAL BAHÁ’Í STATEMENT ON NATURE AND FORMALLY ENTERED  
NETWORK, SIGNALING NEW LEVEL COLLABORATION BETWEEN BAHÁ’Í COMMUNITY  
AND ENVIRONMENTAL INTEREST GROUPS. BBC WORLD SERVICE BROADCAST NEWS  
THIS DEVELOPMENT SEVERAL TIMES. HIGHLIGHT THESE EVENTS WAS SPECIAL  
MEETING 5 OCTOBER IN GLAND, SWITZERLAND, WORLD HEADQUARTERS WWF,  
WHEN HRH THE PRINCE PHILIP, DUKE OF EDINBURGH, PRESIDENT OF WWF, RE-  
CEIVED COPY BAHÁ’Í STATEMENT ON NATURE FROM AMATU’L-BAHÁ RÚḤÍYYIH KHÁ-  
NUM WHO HEADED BAHÁ’Í DELEGATION TO MEETING. PRINCE PHILIP RESPONDED  
WITH PARTICULAR INTEREST TO COMMENTS BY AMATU’L-BAHÁ RÚḤÍYYIH KHÁNUM  
ON IMPORTANCE OF INVOLVING INDIGENOUS PEOPLES IN CONSERVATION AT VIL-  
LAGE LEVEL.

UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

43  
Resignation of two members  
of the Universal House of Justice

17 NOVEMBER 1987

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Beloved Friends,

43.1 In view of the steadily increasing burden of work resting upon the  
members of the Universal House of Justice, which will undoubtedly  
grow still heavier during the years immediately ahead, Mr. David Hof-  
man and Mr. Borrah Kavelin, after prayerful consideration as to the best  
interests of the Cause of God, have, in light of their advanced ages,  
requested permission to relinquish their membership on this body in ac-  
cordance with Article V.2.(c) of the Constitution of the Universal House  
of Justice.

43.2 The House of Justice has regretfully accepted the resignation of these  
beloved members, who have rendered a quarter of a century of continuous  
and highly valued service in the Holy Land. They will thus be able to con-  
tinue their services to the Cause of God free from the inexorable pressure of  
work at the World Center. Since, however, the next international election is

so near, we have requested them to remain in office until that time, and this  
they have readily agreed to.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

44  
Activities of Bahá’ís in relation to governments

14 DECEMBER 1987

To selected National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

44.1 At the conference of representatives for external affairs held in Lan-  
genhain last month, a question was raised about Bahá’í relations towards  
governments and the principle of non-involvement in politics. The repre-  
sentative 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,

44.2 The Universal House of Justice received your letter … inquiring about  
permissible activities of the Bahá’ís in relation to governments …. We have  
been asked to convey the following.

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

44.3a According to the fundamental laws which We have formerly re-  
vealed in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas and other Tablets, all affairs are commit-

ted 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:

44.3b It is incumbent upon the ministers of the House of Justice to pro-  
mote 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:

44.3c 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:

44.3d 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)

44.4 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.

44.5 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 defi-  
nitely undergo the profound changes anticipated in the Bahá’í writings. As  
a consequence, what we understand now of the policy of non-involvement  
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.”

44.6 In view of the necessity of the Bahá’í community to relate to govern-  
ments, 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 non-interfer-  
ence with government affairs is bound to be difficult to achieve on the  
part of individual friends. The force of circumstances, operating inter-  
nally and externally, is pressing the Bahá’í community into certain rela-  
tionships 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 ut-  
ter complexity of human affairs with which the Bahá’í community must  
increasingly cope both spiritually and practically, individual judgment is  
not sufficient.

44.7 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 circum-  
stances 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 inti-  
mately 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 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 involv-

ing or affecting relations with their governments, and evince confidence in  
the incontrovertible promise of Bahá’u’lláh to protect His community.

44.8 Considering the unusual challenges facing National Spiritual Assem-  
blies, 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 non-involvement in politics.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

45  
Release of a compilation on the Covenant

25 DECEMBER 1987

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

45.1 We enclose a copy of a new compilation entitled *The Covenant*, which  
was prepared by the Research Department at our instruction.[[28]](#footnote-28)45-1

45.2 The Covenant of Bahá’u’lláh, the 100th anniversary of the inception of  
which will be commemorated in 1992, must be the subject of sustained and  
concentrated study. Instituted by the Revealer of God’s Word in this Day to  
direct and canalize the forces released by His Revelation, the Covenant in  
essence guarantees the continuation of divine guidance after the ascension  
of the Manifestation through the presence in the world of an institution to  
which all the friends must turn.

45.3 So important for the development of the Faith at this time is the un-  
derstanding of the Covenant in all its aspects that it has been designated  
as a major theme of the Six Year Plan. It is our earnest hope that the new  
compilation, consisting of extracts which convey essential elements of the  
Covenant, will serve not only to deepen the understanding and love of the  
believers for the Covenant, but also to increase their level of conviction, and  
their loyalty to the Cause and its Institutions. To this end you will undoubt-  
edly wish to arrange for the compilation to be made available to the friends

and, if translation is required, to have it translated in full into the main  
language or languages used in the areas under your jurisdiction. Should it  
be necessary to translate the text into vernacular languages of limited usage,  
you are free of course to prepare an abridged form by selecting extracts from  
the compilation.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

46  
Indigenous rights and self-determination

14 JANUARY 1988

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of the Mariana Islands

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

46.1 Your letter of 25 November 1987 to the United Nations Office of the  
Bahá’í International Community concerning the issues of “indigenous  
rights” and “self-determination” was passed to the Universal House of Jus-  
tice, which has instructed us to convey the following reply.

46.2 With the coming of Bahá’u’lláh and the emphasis that His Revelation  
gives to the oneness of mankind, it is inevitable that peoples in all parts of  
the world who once seemed dormant or who have suffered discrimination  
would rise to assert their place in society. As with so many fundamental  
social issues, those concerning “indigenous rights” and “self-determination”  
find, for Bahá’ís, their proper expression and resolution within the con-  
text of the principle of the oneness of mankind. However, as is often the  
case, such issues are expressed in political forms which are unacceptable to  
Bahá’ís, who conscientiously avoid partisanship, subversion, and the cor-  
rupt attitudes and involvements associated with politics. At the same time,  
it is recognized that important issues of society fall within the province of  
government and perforce engage political processes currently in practice.  
Increasingly, as the Faith emerges from obscurity the Bahá’í community  
will find itself compelled to assist in finding solutions to the social problems  
afflicting humanity; it will have to be wise in its actions to avoid the pitfalls  
of politics.

46.3 Generally, the wisest course for the Bahá’í community in controversial  
situations is to remain uninvolved; however, at times when primary Bahá’í  
principles are at the heart of an issue, the decision of the National Assembly

concerned should not necessarily be to observe silence but, rather, to take  
action which rises above the partisan political manifestations of the contro-  
versy. The Assembly may, for instance, present its own statement to the au-  
thorities, setting forth its views on essential issues on the basis of principle,  
letting the circumstances determine how the principle is best to be applied.  
If you feel that such action would be appropriate in the situation you face  
with respect to the issues raised in your letter, you may wish to draft such a  
statement, but before releasing it, kindly check with the World Center.

46.4 Concerning indigenous rights, it stands to reason that indigenous people  
are entitled to all the human rights accorded other peoples. For example,  
they should be guaranteed the full rights of citizenship, and all acts of dis-  
crimination against them, which may have developed over the years, should  
be eliminated. At the same time, it would be unseemly for the demands for  
their rights to make, on the basis of their indigenousness, a special claim to  
exclusive rights and privileges which exceed the necessity to redress injustic-  
es. The Bahá’í attitude on such questions should be guided by Bahá’u’lláh’s  
teaching that “The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens.”[[29]](#footnote-29)46-1  
Thus it should be borne in mind that while upholding indigenous rights  
may well deserve the support of the Bahá’ís, often the viewpoints of those  
claiming such rights are so circumscribed and narrow that Bahá’ís find it  
difficult to wholeheartedly subscribe to them.

46.5 The United Nations Office of the Bahá’í International Community will  
send you the statements requested in your letter.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

47  
Request special prayers for Bahá’ís in Iran

4 FEBRUARY 1988

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

47.1 We feel that the period of the Fast from 2 March to 21 March is an ap-  
propriate time for the Bahá’ís of the world to offer special prayers on behalf  
of the Bahá’ís of Iran. Not only has the heroic perseverance of those tried  
and persecuted friends in the Cradle of the Faith attracted great admiration  
from Bahá’ís and non-Bahá’ís alike, but also their courage and steadfast-  
ness have inspired other Bahá’í communities to increase their services to the  
Threshold of Bahá’u’lláh.

47.2 Bahá’u’lláh has stated: “Thou hast endowed every hour of these days with  
a special virtue, inscrutable to all except Thee, Whose knowledge embraceth  
all created things.”[[30]](#footnote-30)47-1 Your daily prayers on behalf of the dear friends in Iran  
will have great significance during the Fast. We will beseech Bahá’u’lláh to  
answer the prayers of His beloved followers from all over the world that the  
present suffering of the Iranian Bahá’ís will be alleviated.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

48  
Riḍván Message 1988

RIḌVÁN 1988

To the Bahá’ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

48.1 At this resplendent, festive season, we greet you all in a spirit of renewed  
hope.

48.2 A silver lining to the dark picture which has overshadowed most of this  
century now brightens the horizon. It is discernible in the new tendencies  
impelling the social processes at work throughout the world, in the evi-

dences of an accelerated trend towards peace. In the Faith of God, it is the  
growing strength of the Order of Bahá’u’lláh as its banner rises to more  
stately heights. It is a strength that attracts. The media are giving increasing  
attention to the Bahá’í world community; authors are acknowledging its  
existence in a growing number of articles, books and reference works, one  
of the most highly respected of which recently listed the Faith as the most  
widely spread religion after Christianity. A remarkable display of interest in  
this community by governments, civil authorities, prominent personalities  
and humanitarian organizations is increasingly apparent. Not only are the  
community’s laws and principles, organization and way of life being investi-  
gated, but its advice and active help are also being sought for the alleviation  
of social problems and the carrying out of humanitarian activities.

48.3 A thrilling consequence of these favorably conjoined developments is  
the emergence of a new paradigm of opportunity for further growth and  
consolidation of our worldwide community. New prospects for teaching the  
Cause at all levels of society have unfolded. These are confirmed in the early  
results flowing from the new teaching initiatives being fostered in a number  
of places as more and more national communities witness the beginnings  
of that entry by troops promised by the beloved Master and which Shoghi  
Effendi said would lead on to mass conversion. The immediate possibilities  
presented by this providential situation compel us to expect that an expan-  
sion of the Community of the Most Great Name, such as has not yet been  
experienced, is, indeed, at hand.

48.4 The spark which ignited the mounting interest in the Cause of  
Bahá’u’lláh was the heroic fortitude and patience of the beloved friends in  
Iran, which moved the Bahá’í world community to conduct a persistent,  
carefully orchestrated program of appeal to the conscience of the world.  
This vast undertaking, involving the entire community acting unitedly  
through its Administrative Order, was accompanied by equally vigorous  
and visible activities of that community in other spheres, which have been  
detailed separately. Nonetheless, we are impelled to mention that an impor-  
tant outcome of this extensive exertion is our recognition of a new stage in  
the external affairs of the Cause, characterized by a marked maturation of  
National Spiritual Assemblies in their growing relations with governmental  
and nongovernmental organizations and with the public in general.

48.5 This recognition prompted a meeting in Germany last November of na-  
tional Bahá’í external affairs representatives from Europe and North Amer-

ica, together with senior representatives of the Offices of the Bahá’í Inter-  
national Community, intent on effecting greater coordination of their work.  
This was a preliminary step towards the gathering of more and more Na-  
tional Spiritual Assemblies into a harmoniously functioning, international  
network capable of executing global undertakings in this rapidly expanding  
field. Related to these developments was the significant achievement of in-  
ternational recognition accorded the Faith through its formal acceptance last  
October into membership of the Network on Conservation and Religion of  
the renowned World Wide Fund for Nature.

48.6 At one of the darkest periods in the prolonged oppression of the dearly  
loved, resolutely steadfast friends in Iran, Shoghi Effendi was moved to  
comfort them in a letter of astounding insight. “It is the shedding of the  
sacred blood of the martyrs in Persia” he wrote, “which, in this shining era,  
this resplendent, this gem-studded Bahá’í age, shall change the face of the  
earth into high heaven and, as revealed in the Tablets, raise up the tabernacle  
of the oneness of mankind in the very heart of the world, reveal to men’s  
eyes the reality of the unity of the human race, establish the Most Great  
Peace, make of this lower realm a mirror for the Abhá Paradise, and establish  
beyond any doubt before all the peoples of the world the truth of the verse:  
‘… the day when the Earth shall be changed into another Earth.’” Reflec-  
tions like these, in adducing such wondrous future consequences from the  
horrific suffering to which our Iranian friends are subjected, illuminate the  
opportunity and the challenge facing us all at this crucial moment in the  
fortunes of the Cause.

48.7 The great projects already launched must be pursued to their completion.  
The Terraces below and above the Shrine of the Báb and the Arc on Mount  
Carmel must be completed, fulfilling the glorious vision of the efflorescence  
of God’s holy mountain; the second World Congress must be held in the  
City of the Covenant to celebrate the hundredth anniversary of the inaugu-  
ration of that Covenant; the steadily advancing work on the translation and  
annotation of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, the Most Holy Book, must be brought to  
publication; the interest shown by the friends in the Law of Ḥuqúqu’lláh  
must be cultivated; the pioneers and traveling teachers must go forth; the  
expenses of the Cause must be met; all objectives of the Six Year Plan must  
be achieved.

48.8 But the paramount purpose of all Bahá’í activity is teaching. All that has  
been done or will be done revolves around this central activity, the “head

corner-stone of the foundation itself,” to which all progress in the Cause is  
due.[[31]](#footnote-31)48-1 The present challenge calls for teaching on a scale and of a quality,  
a variety, and intensity outstripping all current efforts. The time is now, lest  
opportunity be lost in the swiftly changing moods of a frenetic world. Let it  
not be imagined that expedience is the essential motive arousing this sense  
of urgency. There is an overarching reason: it is the pitiful plight of masses  
of humanity, suffering and in turmoil, hungering after righteousness, but  
“bereft of discernment to see God with their own eyes, or hear His Melody  
with their own ears.”[[32]](#footnote-32)48-2 They must be fed. Vision must be restored where  
hope is lost, confidence built where doubt and confusion are rife. In these  
and other respects, *The Promise of World Peace* is designed to open the way.  
Its delivery to national governmental leaders having been virtually com-  
pleted, its contents must now be conveyed, by all possible means, to peoples  
everywhere from all walks of life. This is a necessary part of the teaching  
work in our time and must be pursued with unabated vigor.

48.9 Teaching is the food of the spirit; it brings life to unawakened souls and  
raises the new heaven and the new earth; it uplifts the banner of a unified  
world; it ensures the victory of the Covenant and brings those who give  
their lives to it the supernal happiness of attainment to the good pleasure  
of their Lord.

48.10 Every individual believer—man, woman, youth and child—is sum-  
moned to this field of action; for it is on the initiative, the resolute will  
of the individual to teach and to serve, that the success of the entire com-  
munity depends. Well-grounded in the mighty Covenant of Bahá’u’lláh,  
sustained by daily prayer and reading of the Holy Word, strengthened by a  
continual striving to obtain a deeper understanding of the divine Teachings,  
illumined by a constant endeavor to relate these Teachings to current issues,  
nourished by observance of the laws and principles of His wondrous World  
Order, every individual can attain increasing measures of success in teach-  
ing. In sum, the ultimate triumph of the Cause is assured by that “one thing  
and only one thing” so poignantly emphasized by Shoghi Effendi, namely,  
“the extent to which our own inner life and private character mirror forth in  
their manifold aspects the splendor of those eternal principles proclaimed  
by Bahá’u’lláh.”[[33]](#footnote-33)48-3

48.11 Beloved Friends you who are addressed by the Best Beloved, the Blessed  
Beauty, as “the solace of the eye of creation,” as “the soft-flowing waters  
upon which must depend the very life of all men”[[34]](#footnote-34)48-4—we urge you, with  
all earnestness from the utter depths of our conviction as to the ripeness  
of the time, to lay aside your every minor concern and direct your energies  
to teaching His Cause—to proclaiming, expanding and consolidating it.  
You can approach your task in full confidence that this clear field of prog-  
ress outstretched before you derives from the operation of that “God-born  
Force” which “vibrates within the innermost being of all created things” and  
which, “acting even as a two-edged sword, is, under our very eyes, sunder-  
ing, on the one hand, the age-old ties which for centuries have held together  
the fabric of civilized society, and is unloosing, on the other, the bonds that  
still fetter the infant and as yet unemancipated Faith of Bahá’u’lláh.”[[35]](#footnote-35)48-5

48.12 Have no fear or doubts. The power of the Covenant will assist you and  
invigorate you and remove every obstacle from your path. “He, verily, will  
aid everyone that aideth Him, and will remember everyone that remembe-  
reth Him.”[[36]](#footnote-36)48-6

48.13 You have our abiding assurance of ardent and constant prayers for you  
all.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

49  
Election of the Universal House of Justice—  
Riḍván 1988

1 MAY 1988

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

49.1 NEWLY ELECTED MEMBERS UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE ‘ALÍ NAKHJAVÁNÍ, GLEN-  
FORD MITCHELL, HUSHMAND FATHEAZAM, IAN SEMPLE, PETER KHAN, DAVID RUHE,  
HUGH CHANCE, HOOPER DUNBAR, ADIB TAHERZADEH.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

50  
Purchase of area near the grave of the Guardian

10 MAY 1988

To selected National Spiritual Assemblies

50.1 HIGHLY PLEASED ANNOUNCE COMPLETION AGREEMENT WITH OWNERS NEW  
SOUTHGATE CEMETERY PURCHASE LARGE AREA ADJACENT RESTING PLACE BE-  
LOVED GUARDIAN. OFFERING PRAYERS GRATITUDE SACRED THRESHOLD OPPORTU-  
NITY ENSURE PROTECTION PRECINCTS HALLOWED SPOT.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

51  
Appointment of International  
Teaching Center members

19 MAY 1988

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

51.1 REJOICE ANNOUNCE APPOINTMENT COUNSELOR MEMBERS INTERNATIONAL TEACH-  
ING CENTER FOR FIVE-YEAR TERM BEGINNING 23 MAY 1988: DR. FARZAM ARBAB,  
DR. MAGDALENE CARNEY, MR. HARTMUT GROSSMANN, MR. MAS‘ÚD KHAMSÍ, MRS.  
LAURETTA KING, MR. DONALD ROGERS, MRS. ISOBEL SABRI, MRS. JOY STEVENSON,  
MR. PETER VUYIYA. VIEW SUPREME IMPORTANCE ACCELERATION TEACHING WORK  
THIS STAGE FORMATIVE AGE, NUMBER COUNSELOR MEMBERS NOW RAISED TO NINE.  
EXPRESS PROFOUND GRATITUDE MR. ‘AZÍZ YAZDÍ AND MISS ANNELIESE BOPP FOR  
THEIR ASSIDUOUS DEVOTED SELF-SACRIFICING SERVICES TEACHING CENTER OVER  
SO MANY YEARS.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

52  
Membership on the Universal House of Justice

31 MAY 1988

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of New Zealand

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

52.1 We have been informed of a paper presented at a recent New Zealand  
Bahá’í Studies conference, which raises the possibility that the ineligibility  
of women for membership on the Universal House of Justice may be a  
temporary provision subject to change through a process of progressive un-  
foldment of the divine purpose. We present the following points as a means  
of increasing the friends’ understanding of this established provision of the  
Order of Bahá’u’lláh that membership of the Universal House of Justice is  
confined to men.

52.2 The system of Bahá’í Administration is “indissolubly bound with the  
essential verities of the Faith” as set forth in the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh  
and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. A unique feature of this system is the appointment of  
authorized interpreters, in the persons of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and the Guardian,  
to provide authoritative statements on the intent of Bahá’u’lláh’s Revelation.  
Writing in “The Dispensation of Bahá’u’lláh,” Shoghi Effendi stated that  
‘Abdu’l-Bahá and the Guardian “share … the right and obligation to inter-  
pret the Bahá’í teachings.” In relation to his own function as interpreter, he  
further stated that “the Guardian has been specifically endowed with such  
power as he may need to reveal the purport and disclose the implications  
of the utterances of Bahá’u’lláh and of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.”[[37]](#footnote-37)52-1 The significance  
of this important provision is that the religion of God is safeguarded and  
protected against schism and its essential unity is preserved.

52.3 The function of the divinely appointed interpreters is evident in the pro-  
gressive disclosure and clarification of the details of the Bahá’í teachings  
concerning the membership of the Universal House of Justice. Bahá’u’lláh  
in His Writings ordained both the Universal House of Justice and Local  
Houses of Justice. However, in many of His laws He refers simply to “the  
House of Justice” and its members as “Men of Justice,” leaving open for  
later clarification to which level or levels of the whole institution each law

would apply. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, the Center of Bahá’u’lláh’s Covenant and the  
unerring Interpreter of His Word, not only provided for the establishment  
of National Spiritual Assemblies, to be designated at some future time as  
Secondary Houses of Justice, but He also outlined the means by which the  
Universal House of Justice was to be elected. In His Will and Testament the  
Master wrote:

52.3a And now, concerning the House of Justice which God hath or-  
dained as the source of all good and freed from all error, it must be  
elected by universal suffrage, that is, by the believers …. By this  
House is meant the Universal House of Justice, that is, in all countries  
a secondary House of Justice must be instituted, and these secondary  
Houses of Justice must elect the members of the Universal one ….

(p. 14)

And in one of His Tablets He had already written:

52.3b At whatever time all the beloved of God in each country appoint  
their delegates, and these in turn elect their representatives, and these  
representatives elect a body, that body shall be regarded as the Su-  
preme House of Justice.[[38]](#footnote-38)52-2

In the following passage, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá referred, to membership of the  
“House of Justice” being restricted to men, without a specific designation  
of the level or levels of the institution to which this provision applied:

52.3c The House of Justice, however, according to the explicit text of the  
Law of God, is confined to men; this for a wisdom of the Lord God’s,  
which will erelong be made manifest as clearly as the sun at high noon.

(*Selections from the Writings of* ‘Abdu’l*-Bahá*, p. 80[[39]](#footnote-39)52-3)

Later the Master clarified that it was only the Universal House of Justice  
whose membership was confined to men. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá wrote:

52.3d According to the ordinances of the Faith of God, women are  
the equals of men in all rights save only that of membership on the  
Universal House of Justice, for as hath been stated in the text of the  
Book, both the head and the members of the House of Justice are  
men. However, in all other bodies, such as the Temple Construction  
Committee, the Teaching Committee, the Spiritual Assembly, and in  
charitable and scientific associations, women share equally in all rights  
with men.

(from a newly translated Tablet)

52.4 Shoghi Effendi, in a letter written on his behalf to an individual believer,  
provided the following authoritative elaboration of this theme:

52.4a As regards your question concerning the membership of the Uni-  
versal House of Justice: there is a Tablet from ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in which  
He definitely states that the membership of the Universal House is  
confined to men, and that the wisdom of it will be fully revealed and  
appreciated in the future. In the local as well as the National Houses  
of Justice, however, women have the full right of membership. It is,  
therefore, only to the International House that they cannot be elected.  
…

(28 July 1936)

52.5 ‘Abdu’l-Bahá Himself, it should also be noted, had, as attested by the  
above-cited extracts from His Tablets, affirmed that the ineligibility of  
women for election to the Universal House of Justice had been set out “in  
the text of the Book” and “in the explicit text of the Law of God.” In  
other words, this provision was established by none other than Bahá’u’lláh  
Himself.

52.6 Further, in response to a number of questions about eligibility for mem-  
bership and procedures for election of the Universal House of Justice, the  
Guardian’s secretary writing on his behalf distinguished between those  
questions which could be answered by reference to the “explicitly revealed”  
Text and those which could not. Membership of the Universal House of  
Justice fits into the former category. The letter stated:

52.6a The membership of the Universal House of Justice is confined to  
men. Fixing the number of the members, the procedures for election  
and the term of membership will be known later, as these are not  
explicitly revealed in the Holy Text.

(27 May 1940)

Hence, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and the Guardian progressively have revealed, in accor-  
dance with divine inspiration, the meaning and implications of Bahá’u’lláh’s  
seminal teachings. Their interpretations are fundamental statements of  
truth which cannot be varied through legislation by the Universal House  
of Justice.

52.7 The progressive clarification of the details of the laws concerning mem-  
bership of the Houses of Justice has been accompanied by a gradual imple-  
mentation of their provisions. For example, based on the Texts available  
to the believers at the time, membership of Local Houses of Justice was  
initially confined to men. When the Master began to elaborate on the differ-  
ences between the levels of this Institution He clarified that the exclusion of  
women applied only to the Universal House of Justice. Thereafter, women  
became eligible for service as members of Local and National Spiritual As-  
semblies. Women in the West, who already enjoyed the benefits of educa-  
tion and opportunities for social involvement, participated in this form of  
service much sooner than, for instance, their Bahá’í sisters in Iran, who were  
accorded this right only in 1954, “removing thereby the last remaining ob-  
stacle to the enjoyment of complete equality of rights in the conduct of the  
administrative affairs of the Persian Bahá’í Community.”[[40]](#footnote-40)52-4 It is important  
to note that the timing of the introduction of the provisions called for by  
the interpretations of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and the Guardian in relation to the Lo-  
cal and National Spiritual Assemblies, rather than constituting a response  
to some external condition or pressure, was dictated by the principle of  
progressive implementation of the laws, as enjoined by Bahá’u’lláh Himself.  
Concerning the implementation of the laws, Bahá’u’lláh wrote in one of  
His Tablets:

52.7a Indeed the laws of God are like unto the ocean and the children of  
men as fish, did they but know it. However, in observing them one  
must exercise tact and wisdom …. One must guide mankind to the  
ocean of true understanding in a spirit of love and tolerance.[[41]](#footnote-41)52-5

As mentioned earlier, the law regarding the membership of the Universal  
House of Justice is embedded in the Text and has been merely restated  
by the divinely appointed interpreters. It is therefore neither amenable to  
change nor subject to speculation about some possible future condition.

52.8 With regard to the status of women, the important point for Bahá’ís  
to remember is that in face of the categorical pronouncements in Bahá’í  
Scripture establishing the equality of men and women, the ineligibility of  
women for membership of the Universal House of Justice does not consti-  
tute evidence of the superiority of men over women. It must also be borne  
in mind that women are not excluded from any other international institu-  
tion of the Faith. They are found among the ranks of the Hands of the  
Cause. They serve as members of the International Teaching Center and as  
Continental Counselors. And, there is nothing in the Text to preclude the  
participation of women in such future international bodies as the Supreme  
Tribunal.

52.9 Though at the present time it may be difficult for the believers to ap-  
preciate the reason for the circumscription of membership on the Universal  
House of Justice to men, we call upon the friends to remain assured by  
the Master’s promise that clarity of understanding will be achieved in due  
course. The friends, both women and men, must accept this with faith that  
the Covenant of Bahá’u’lláh will aid them and the institutions of His World  
Order to see the realization of every principle ordained by His unerring Pen,  
including the equality of men and women, as expounded in the Writings  
of the Cause.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

53  
First meeting of new International Teaching Center

16 JUNE 1988

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

53.1 WITH GRATEFUL HEARTS CONVEY TO THE FOLLOWERS OF BAHÁ’U’LLÁH THROUGH-  
OUT WORLD JOYFUL NEWS FIRST MEETING NEWLY APPOINTED INTERNATIONAL  
TEACHING CENTER.

53.2 ON MORNING OF FRIDAY THIRD JUNE THE HANDS OF THE CAUSE AMATU’L-BAHÁ  
RÚḤÍYYIH KHÁNUM AND ‘ALÍ AKBAR FURÚTAN, THE MEMBERS OF THE UNIVERSAL  
HOUSE OF JUSTICE AND THE NINE COUNSELOR MEMBERS OF THE INTERNATIONAL  
TEACHING CENTER GATHERED IN BAHJÍ AND ENTERED THE MOST HOLY SHRINE  
FOR PRAYERS BEFORE PROCEEDING TO THE MANSION OF BAHÁ’U’LLÁH WHERE  
THEIR FIRST JOINT MEETING WAS HELD IN ROOM ASSOCIATED WITH SHOGHI  
EFFENDI. ALL WERE ACUTELY CONSCIOUS OF THE INESTIMABLE BLESSING OF INITI-  
ATING THEIR CONSULTATIONS IN THESE SACRED PRECINCTS.

53.3 IN THIS AND SUBSEQUENT CONSULTATIONS DURING THE DAYS WHICH FOL-  
LOWED, THE TASKS OF THE INTERNATIONAL TEACHING CENTER IN FACE OF THE  
TREMENDOUS OPPORTUNITIES FOR TEACHING NOW BEFORE THE BAHÁ’Í WORLD  
WERE REVIEWED, AND NEW PATTERNS OF OPERATION WERE FORMULATED.

53.4 REJOICE NEW VISTAS OPENING FOR VICTORIOUS PROMOTION CAUSE GOD.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

54  
New members of Universal House of Justice,  
International Teaching Center,  
and Continental Boards of Counselors

16 JUNE 1988

To the Bahá’ís of the World

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

54.1 Recent events have given rise to eleven vacancies in the membership  
of the Continental Boards of Counselors. Mr. Adib Taherzadeh has been  
elected to the Universal House of Justice; Dr. Farzam Arbab, Mr. Hartmut  
Grossmann, Mrs. Lauretta King, Mr. Donald Rogers, Mrs. Joy Stevenson

and Mr. Peter Vuyiya have been appointed as Counselor members of the  
International Teaching Center.

54.2 In addition, ill health has sadly made it impossible for Dr. Chellie Sun-  
dram to continue his services as a Counselor for Asia, Dr. Iraj Ayman and  
Mrs. Thelma Khelghati have been compelled by circumstances beyond their  
control to leave, respectively, the continents of Asia and Africa in which  
they were serving, and Mr. Adam Thorne has had to resign, for personal  
reasons, from the Continental Board of Counselors for Europe. We wish  
first to express our profound appreciation of the contributions these dear  
friends have made to the advancement of the Cause of God during their  
years of service as Counselors, and we pray that the blessings of Bahá’u’lláh  
will surround them in all they undertake in the future.

54.3 We now have great happiness in announcing the appointment of the  
following believers as Continental Counselors:

**Africa**: Mr. George Allen and Mr. Hizzaya Hissani

**The Americas**: Mr. Gustavo Correa, Mrs. Jacqueline Delahunt and  
Dr. William Roberts

**Asia**: Dr. Kim Myung-Jung and Mrs. Shantha Sundram

**Australasia**: Mrs. Violette Haake

**Europe**: Mr. Patrick O’Mara, Mrs. Elisabeth Mühlschlegel and  
Dr. Shapoor Rassekh.

54.4 Furthermore, as two of the Counselors now appointed to the Interna-  
tional Teaching Center had been Trustees of their respective Continental  
Funds, we now appoint Counselor Peter McLaren to be Trustee of the Con-  
tinental Fund in the Americas, and Counselor Ben Ayala to be Trustee in  
Australasia.

54.5 As was abundantly apparent at the time of the Sixth International Bahá’í  
Convention and in the meetings of the Counselors which followed, the  
Bahá’í world has entered on a stage of the greatest importance in its develop-  
ment, when the teaching work throughout the world must be in the fore-  
front of the thoughts of every ardent follower of Bahá’u’lláh. The challenges  
and opportunities are great, and are increasing in number with each passing  
day. We supplicate the Almighty to grant an unprecedented measure of  
divine confirmation to the institutions of His embryonic World Order and  
to His faithful believers who are laboring for the diffusion of His Message in  
every region of the globe.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

55  
The importance of reaching out to native  
communities

25 JULY 1988

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of Canada

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

55.1 Your letter of 30 March 1988 has been received by the Universal House  
of Justice and we have been asked to respond as follows.

55.2 It is abundantly evident, from innumerable passages in Bahá’u’lláh’s Rev-  
elation, that His Message is intended for the whole of mankind and that ev-  
ery nation and race in human society should regard Him as a Manifestation  
of God Whose teachings are directed to their upliftment and happiness. He  
has written that “The summons and the message which We gave were never  
intended to reach or to benefit one land or one people only.”[[42]](#footnote-42)55-1 The people  
of minority backgrounds who have experienced oppression and subjugation  
might well contemplate the words of Bahá’u’lláh in which He states that  
“The Ancient Beauty hath consented to be bound with chains that mankind  
may be released from its bondage, and hath accepted to be made a pris-  
oner within this most mighty Stronghold that the whole world may attain  
unto true liberty.”[[43]](#footnote-43)55-2 The Bahá’í community should regard itself as having  
been commissioned by Bahá’u’lláh to deliver His Message to the whole of  
humankind, in obedience to His injunction to “Proclaim the Cause of thy  
Lord unto all who are in the heavens and on the earth.”[[44]](#footnote-44)55-3 Such consid-  
erations should guide the Canadian Bahá’í community in disabusing the  
Native people of the misconception that the Bahá’í Faith represents one of  
the “outside agencies” which are perceived as not having the best interests of  
the Native community at heart.

55.3 Your letter raises the issue of cultural diversity within the Bahá’í com-  
munity. The Faith seeks to maintain cultural diversity while promoting the  
unity of all peoples. Indeed, such diversity will enrich the tapestry of human  
life in a peaceful world society. The House of Justice supports the view that  
in every country the cultural traditions of the people should be observed

within the Bahá’í community as long as they are not contrary to the Teach-  
ings. The general attitude of the Faith towards the traditional practices of  
various peoples is expressed in the following statement of Shoghi Effendi’s,  
published in *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, U.S. 1982 edition, pages 41–42.

55.3a Let there be no misgivings as to the animating purpose of the world-  
wide Law of Bahá’u’lláh …. It does not ignore, nor does it attempt  
to suppress, the diversity of ethnical origins, of climate, of history,  
of language and tradition, of thought and habit, that differentiate  
the peoples and nations of the world …. Its watchword is unity in  
diversity such as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá Himself has explained:

55.3b “Consider the flowers of a garden …. Diversity of hues, form and  
shape enricheth and adorneth the garden, and heighteneth the effect  
thereof ….”

55.4 Of course, many cultural elements everywhere inevitably will disappear  
or be merged with related ones from their societies, yet the totality will  
achieve that promised diversity within world unity. We can expect much  
cultural diversity in the long period before the emergence of a world com-  
monwealth of nations in the Golden Age of Bahá’u’lláh’s new world order.  
Much wisdom and tolerance will be required, and much time must elapse  
until the advent of that great day.

55.5 A Bahá’í community in a Native area of Canada, seeking to maintain the  
distinctive features of the Native culture, must doubtless find it on many  
occasions confronted with the question of whether or not it should par-  
ticipate in traditional activities, such as festivals, which may be regarded as  
having a religious origin long ago ….

55.6 When a Spiritual Assembly is faced with questions of possible conflict  
between tribal practices and Bahá’í law, it should distinguish between as-  
pects of tribal community life which are related to fundamental laws (such  
as monogamy) and matters of lesser importance, from which the friends  
can and should extricate themselves gradually. Furthermore, the House of  
Justice has offered the advice that the institutions of the Faith should be  
careful not to press the friends to arbitrarily discard those local traditions  
which are harmless and often colorful characteristics of particular peoples  
and tribes. Were a new Bahá’í suddenly to cease following the customs of  
his people, it is possible that they might misunderstand the true nature of  
the Bahá’í Faith, and the Bahá’ís could be regarded as having turned against

the traditions of the land. However, Bahá’ís should exercise vigilance, with  
the aid of the institutions of the Faith, to avoid inadvertent involvement  
in events which appear at first sight to be purely cultural and traditional  
in nature, but which are, in fact, held as a cover for politically oriented  
gatherings. The weaning away of the Bahá’ís from customs and traditions  
which have been established among communities for centuries takes time  
and is a gradual process. While an Assembly should avoid rigidity in these  
matters, it should also not compromise when the interests of the Faith and  
its integrity and independence are at stake.

55.7 You have also raised a number of questions concerning the rights of in-  
digenous people such as the Natives of Canada. It is quite clear that Native  
persons are fully entitled to all the human rights accorded to the major-  
ity population; for example, they should be guaranteed the full rights of  
citizenship, and all acts of discrimination against them, which may have  
developed over the years, should be eliminated. However, the freedom for  
indigenous people to exercise their rights carries with it the corollary need  
to recognize the rights of all others to the same expression. The implica-  
tions for indigenous people also include: realization of the virtues of cross-  
cultural influences; appreciation of the values of other cultures as accruing  
to the wealth of human experience and the freedom of all to share in such  
values without necessarily giving up their respective identities; avoidance  
of parochial attitudes which degenerate into ethnic and cultural prejudices;  
and, above all, appreciation of the necessity to maintain a global perspective  
within which the particulars of indigenous expression can find an enduring  
context. From a Bahá’í perspective it would not be proper for indigenous  
people to make a special claim to exclusive rights and privileges which ex-  
ceed the necessity to redress injustices. The Bahá’í attitude is guided by the  
statement of Bahá’u’lláh’s that “The earth is but one country, and mankind  
its citizens.”[[45]](#footnote-45)55-4

55.8 The Bahá’í approach to eradication of the multitude of problems af-  
flicting mankind, including the oppressive treatment of indigenous people,  
is outlined in the enclosed letter of 15 June 1987 written on behalf of the  
Universal House of Justice to a Bahá’í couple in …, a copy of which  
was sent to you at that time.[[46]](#footnote-46)55-5 Your attention is directed to the emphasis

upon the achievement of unity as a basis for an enduring resolution of the  
problems of mankind. It should also be noted that while Bahá’ís are called  
upon not to take partisan political action in their quest for their rights or  
for the correction of injustices they have experienced, they are free to take  
legal action or to appeal to administrative agencies for their rights. It is the  
responsibility of the Bahá’ís, in their contact with the Native people, to  
explain that the Bahá’í approach, far from being indifferent to the real needs  
of disadvantaged peoples, represents a fundamental solution derived from  
the diagnosis by the All-Knowing Physician of the manifold ills of human  
society ….

55.9 In addition, enclosed is a letter of 14 January 1988 written on behalf of  
the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of the  
Mariana Islands,[[47]](#footnote-47)55-6 which addresses a number of issues arising from their  
concerns about the relationship with an indigenous rights movement in the  
Mariana Islands. Your attention is directed to the third paragraph of this let-  
ter, which deals with the question of Bahá’í statements on issues associated  
with indigenous rights, and which relates directly to some questions raised  
in your letter of 30 March 1988.

55.10 The final point made in your letter concerns the use of the Bahá’í sys-  
tem of administration as an example of how an Indian community should  
conduct its affairs, in light of the fact that the Bahá’ís may soon be the  
majority of the people in some Native communities. The Universal House  
of Justice has pointed out, in response to questions from Bahá’í communi-  
ties in which there has been large-scale growth in village areas, that Bahá’í  
administration and the civil administration are two separate entities; the  
Local Spiritual Assembly does not automatically become the village coun-  
cil even though most, or even all, of the citizens of a village are Bahá’ís.  
However, the Bahá’ís in a village, irrespective of their numbers, can well  
offer, by precept and by their own practice, the model of consultation as an  
ideal means by which human beings may carry out their collective decision-  
making within the framework of the oneness of mankind.

55.11 When the Bahá’í community in a village is a significant proportion of  
the population, it has a wide range of opportunities to be an example and  
an encouragement of means of improving the quality of life in the village.  
Among the initiatives which it might take are measures to foster child edu-

cation, adult literacy and the training of women to better discharge their  
responsibilities as mothers and to play an enlarged role in the administrative  
and social life of the village; encouragement of the people of the village to  
join together in devotions, perhaps in the early morning, irrespective of their  
varieties of religious belief; support of efforts to improve the hygiene and  
the health of the village, including attention to the provision of pure water,  
the preservation of cleanliness in the village environment, and education in  
the harmful effects of narcotic and intoxicating substances. No doubt other  
possibilities will present themselves to the village Bahá’í community and its  
Local Spiritual Assembly.

55.12 The House of Justice commends the diligent efforts being made by your  
Assembly to address the issues associated with presentation of the Faith of  
Bahá’u’lláh to the dearly loved Native people of Canada and the consolida-  
tion of their communities. It will offer prayers in the Holy Shrines for the  
success of your endeavors.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

56  
Release of a compilation on Living a  
Chaste and Holy Life

30 SEPTEMBER 1988

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

56.1 We enclose a copy of a new compilation entitled *A Chaste and Holy Life*,  
which was prepared by the Research Department at the request of the Uni-  
versal House of Justice.[[48]](#footnote-48)56-1

56.2 Given the rapidly declining moral standards in the world, the House of  
Justice has instructed us to emphasize that it considers it both necessary and  
timely for the Bahá’í friends to increase their understanding of and adher-  
ence to the standard of a chaste and holy life that is upheld in our Teachings.  
To this end, the House of Justice urges the National Spiritual Assemblies to

make the compilation available to the friends on the widest possible scale,  
having it translated, as necessary, in whole or in part, into the major lan-  
guages of the country. It is also important that the friends be encouraged to  
study the implications set forth in these extracts, and to endeavor strenu-  
ously to exemplify these noble standards in their personal lives.

56.3 As the range of activities and projects in which the Bahá’í community  
engages necessarily continues to expand and diversify, the House of Justice  
believes it is vital that the moral and ethical teachings of our Faith be neither  
overlooked nor mistakenly regarded as being of less importance than our  
social, administrative and metaphysical teachings. Indeed, Shoghi Effendi,  
in a letter written on his behalf, stressed the need for such balance and for  
according appropriate weight to the moral principles of the Faith.

56.4 Too much emphasis is often laid on the social and economic aspects of  
the Teachings; but the moral aspect cannot be overemphasized.

56.5 In the current climate of social and moral decline, at a time when, in  
the world at large, moral decay, hypocrisy and compromise are endemic,  
and words, unsupported by actions, have lost their value, the believers are  
challenged to become “Bahá’ís in character as well as in belief,”[[49]](#footnote-49)56-2 to strive  
determinedly to exemplify the Bahá’í standard, to become distinguished for  
their moral excellence, and, by the quality of their individual lives and the  
nature of their Bahá’í community life, to demonstrate the vitalizing power  
of the Cause not only to bring peace, security and true spiritual happiness  
to the individual heart, but to transform society as well. Shoghi Effendi  
repeatedly emphasized the importance of the force of example. A letter writ-  
ten on his behalf states:

56.5a His constant hope is that the believers will conduct themselves,  
individually and in their Bahá’í Community life, in such a manner as  
to attract the attention of others to the Cause. The world is not only  
starving for lofty principles and ideals, it is, above all, starving for a  
shining example which the Bahá’ís can and must provide.[[50]](#footnote-50)56-3

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

57  
Remarkable numbers of new enrollments

13 OCTOBER 1988

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

57.1 REJOICE EVE WORLDWIDE CELEBRATIONS ANNIVERSARY BIRTH BLESSED BÁB EVI-  
DENCES GROWING NUMBER NATIONAL COMMUNITIES ENGAGED TEACHING INITIA-  
TIVES LEADING TO ENTRY BY TROOPS. THIRTY-FIVE NATIONAL ASSEMBLIES HAVE  
SPONTANEOUSLY REPORTED ENROLLMENTS TOTALING QUARTER MILLION NEW  
BELIEVERS SINCE RIḌVÁN. GRATIFIED NOTEWORTHY CONSOLIDATION ACTIVITIES  
ESSENTIAL SAFEGUARD HARD-WON VICTORIES. HOUR PROPITIOUS FRIENDS AS-  
SEMBLIES EVERYWHERE REDOUBLE SACRIFICIAL HIGHLY MERITORIOUS EFFORTS  
CONCENTRATE THEIR ATTENTION ON ALL-IMPORTANT TEACHING ACTIVITIES  
DESTINED CARRY BAHÁ’U’LLÁH’S WORLD-REDEEMING FAITH INTO LONG-AWAITED  
PERIOD UNIVERSAL RESPONSE HIS LIFE-GIVING CALL.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

58  
Success of collaboration with Network on  
Conservation and Religion

4 NOVEMBER 1988

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

58.1 FULLY ONE YEAR SINCE ACCEPTANCE BAHÁ’Í FAITH INTO NETWORK ON CONSER-  
VATION AND RELIGION OF WORLD WIDE FUND FOR NATURE, WE ARE IMMENSELY  
PLEASED TO ANNOUNCE OUTSTANDING SUCCESS FUND-RAISING BANQUET AND RE-  
CEPTION ON 26 OCTOBER IN LONDON COSPONSORED BY WORLD WIDE FUND FOR  
NATURE AND BAHÁ’Í INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY. HELD AT SYON HOUSE, AN-  
CESTRAL HOME OF DUKES OF NORTHUMBERLAND, EVENT LAUNCHED “ARTS AND  
NATURE” PROGRAM CONCEIVED BY HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS THE PRINCE PHILIP, DUKE  
OF EDINBURGH, AS MEANS OF DRAWING ON VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS TO  
ENLIST PUBLIC SUPPORT OF CRITICAL ENVIRONMENTAL NEEDS AROUND WORLD.

58.2 AMATU’L-BAHÁ RÚḤÍYYIH KHÁNUM, REPRESENTING BAHÁ’Í INTERNATIONAL  
COMMUNITY, GAVE CAPTIVATING BRIEF ADDRESS IN WHICH SHE APPEALED TO HER  
DISTINGUISHED HEARERS TO JOIN IN COMMON EFFORT TO CONSERVE NATURE. IN

HIS SUBSEQUENT SPEECH, PRINCE PHILIP REFERRED REPEATEDLY TO POINTS SHE  
HAD MADE.

58.3 ATTRACTING SOME MOST INFLUENTIAL FIGURES IN BRITISH SOCIAL AND PUBLIC  
LIFE AMONG ITS 200 GUESTS, EVENT BROUGHT TOGETHER NUMBER OF LEADING  
EUROPEAN ARTISTS IN PERFORMANCES ON THEME “ART AND NATURE,” WHICH  
WAS FURTHER HIGHLIGHTED BY DISPLAY AT SYON HOUSE OF WORKS OF ART FROM  
ROYAL COLLECTION WHICH HER MAJESTY THE QUEEN HAD LOANED FOR THE  
EVENING.

58.4 OUR SPIRITS STIRRED BY POWERFUL INDICATIONS THUS GIVEN OF GREAT PO-  
TENTIALITIES FOR SERVICE WHICH BAHÁ’Í COMMUNITY WORLDWIDE CAN AND  
MUST RENDER IN MAKING ITS DISTINCTIVE CONTRIBUTIONS TO CONSERVA-  
TION AND ENRICHMENT PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT OUR BOUNTIFULLY ENDOWED  
PLANET.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

59  
Execution of two Bahá’ís in Iran

13 DECEMBER 1988

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

59.1 It is with heavy heart that the Universal House of Justice instructed us  
to inform you that two believers who had been imprisoned in Iran for some  
time, have recently been executed.

59.2 Mr. Bihnám Páshá’í, a resident of Simnán and member of the Local  
Spiritual Assembly of that city, had been arrested on 19 November 1983 in  
Tehran. In the summer of 1988 he was transferred to Evin prison and his  
family has not been permitted to see him since July 1988. The news of his  
execution was communicated to his family on 3 December 1988. He was  
49 years old.

59.3 Mr. Páshá’í was from a Muslim family and accepted the Faith some years  
ago, the only member of his family to do so. It is assumed that this was the  
reason for his execution, for the authorities in Iran are known to be very  
severe on those who independently accept the Faith, considering them to be  
apostates according to Islamic law.

59.4 The other Bahá’í recently executed was Mr. Íraj Afshín. He was arrested  
late in 1986 and his family has not been allowed to see him since 17 July

1988. News of his execution was given to his family on 26 November 1988.  
He was 55 years old.

59.5 Mr. Afshín was a colonel in the Iranian Air Force, and the authorities  
maintain that his execution was on political grounds due to his connec-  
tions with royalists, members of a group opposed to the Government. It is  
established, however, that Mr. Afshín had not engaged in political activities,  
that he firmly maintained his faith throughout his imprisonment, and that  
he was assigned to a prison ward where other Bahá’ís were kept.

59.6 To date, neither the exact charges, nor the dates of execution nor the  
places of burial are known for these two latest victims.

59.7 It was also reported that 36 Bahá’í prisoners had recently been in great  
danger of execution. They were housed in a prison ward together with  
many mujaheddin and communists. One night, when their fellow prisoners  
were rounded up for execution, the 36 Bahá’ís were also taken out with  
them, blindfolded and lined up to be shot. Among them were two very  
old Bahá’ís, Mr. Vafá’í of Isfahan and Mr. Maẓlúmí of Sangsar. Casually,  
one of the guards asked these two men what they had done at their age to  
deserve being shot. They answered that they were Bahá’ís, whereupon their  
executioners said that they had no orders to shoot Bahá’ís. Fortunately, the  
other Bahá’ís overheard these remarks and all stepped forward identifying  
themselves as such and, in this way, they were spared ….

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

60  
Individual rights and freedoms

29 DECEMBER 1988

To the Followers of Bahá’u’lláh in the United States of America

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

60.1 We have noticed with concern evidences of a confusion of attitudes  
among some of the friends when they encounter difficulties in applying  
Bahá’í principles to questions of the day. On the one hand, they acknowl-  
edge their belief in Bahá’u’lláh and His teachings; on the other, they invoke  
Western liberal democratic practices when actions of Bahá’í institutions or  
of some of their fellow Bahá’ís do not accord with their expectations. At  
the heart of this confusion are misconceptions of such fundamental issues

as individual rights and freedom of expression in the Bahá’í community.  
The source of the potential difficulties of the situation appears to us to be  
an inadequacy of Bahá’í perspective on the part of both individual believers  
and their institutions.

60.2 Recognizing the immense challenge you face to resolve such confusion,  
we pause to reflect with you on these issues in search of a context in which  
relevant fundamental questions may be discussed and understood in the  
community.

60.3 The extraordinary capacities of the American nation, as well as the su-  
perb stewardship of the Bahá’í community within it, have repeatedly been  
extolled in the writings of our Faith. In His Tablets and utterances, ‘Abdu’l-  
Bahá, the Center of the Covenant, projected a compelling vision of the  
world-embracing prospects of that richly endowed country. “The American  
nation,” He averred, “is equipped and empowered to accomplish that which  
will adorn the pages of history, to become the envy of the world, and be  
blest in both the East and the West for the triumph of its people.”[[51]](#footnote-51)60-1 In an-  
other assertion addressed to the Bahá’í community itself, He uttered words  
of transcendent importance: “… your mission,” He affirmed, “is unspeak-  
ably glorious. Should success crown your enterprise, America will assuredly  
evolve into a center from which waves of spiritual power will emanate, and  
the throne of the Kingdom of God will, in the plenitude of its majesty and  
glory, be firmly established.”[[52]](#footnote-52)60-2

60.4 Shoghi Effendi, in various statements, celebrated the remarkable achieve-  
ments and potential glories of that specially blessed community, but was  
moved to issue, in *The Advent of Divine Justice*, a profound warning which  
is essential to a proper understanding of the relation of that Bahá’í com-  
munity to the nation from which it has sprung. “The glowing tributes,”  
he solemnly wrote, “so repeatedly and deservedly paid to the capacity, the  
spirit, the conduct, and the high rank, of the American believers, both  
individually and as an organic community, must, under no circumstances,  
be confounded with the characteristics and nature of the people from which  
God has raised them up. A sharp distinction between that community and  
that people must be made, and resolutely and fearlessly upheld, if we wish  
to give due recognition to the transmuting power of the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh,

in its impact on the lives and standards of those who have chosen to enlist  
under His banner. Otherwise, the supreme and distinguishing function of  
His Revelation, which is none other than the calling into being of a new  
race of men, will remain wholly unrecognized and completely obscured.”[[53]](#footnote-53)60-3  
It is the far-reaching, transformative implications of this distinction which  
we especially invite you to contemplate.

60.5 The vantage point that gives us perspective and is the foundation of our  
belief and actions rests on our recognition of the sovereignty of God and  
our submission to His will as revealed by Bahá’u’lláh, His supreme Mani-  
festation for this promised Day. To accept the Prophet of God in His time  
and to abide by His bidding are the two essential, inseparable duties which  
each soul was created to fulfill. One exercises these twin duties by one’s own  
choice, an act constituting the highest expression of the free will with which  
every human being has been endowed by an all-loving Creator.

60.6 The vehicle in this resplendent Age for the practical fulfillment of these  
duties is the Covenant of Bahá’u’lláh; it is, indeed, the potent instrument  
by which individual belief in Him is translated into constructive deeds. The  
Covenant comprises divinely conceived arrangements necessary to preserve  
the organic unity of the Cause. It therefore engenders a motivating power  
which, as the beloved Master tells us, “like unto the artery, beats and pul-  
sates in the body of the world.” “It is indubitably clear,” He asserts, “that  
the pivot of the oneness of mankind is nothing else but the power of the  
Covenant.”[[54]](#footnote-54)60-4 Through it the meaning of the Word, both in theory and  
practice, is made evident in the life and work of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, the appointed  
Interpreter, the perfect Exemplar, the Center of the Covenant. Through it  
the processes of the Administrative Order—“this unique, this wondrous  
System”—are made to operate.[[55]](#footnote-55)60-5

60.7 In emphasizing its distinctiveness, Shoghi Effendi has pointed out that  
“this Administrative Order is fundamentally different from anything that  
any Prophet has previously established, inasmuch as Bahá’u’lláh has Him-  
self revealed its principles, established its institutions, appointed the person  
to interpret His Word and conferred the necessary authority on the body

designed to supplement and apply His legislative ordinances.” In another  
statement, he maintains that “It would be utterly misleading to attempt a  
comparison between this unique, divinely conceived Order and any of the  
diverse systems which the minds of men, at various periods of their his-  
tory, have contrived for the government of human institutions.” “Such an  
attempt,” he felt, “would in itself betray a lack of complete appreciation of  
the excellence of the handiwork of its great Author.”[[56]](#footnote-56)60-6

60.8 The lack of such appreciation will detract from the perspective of anyone  
who measures Bahá’í administrative processes against practices prevalent in  
today’s society. For notwithstanding its inclination to democratic methods  
in the administration of its affairs, and regardless of the resemblance of  
some of its features to those of other systems, the Administrative Order is  
not to be viewed merely as an improvement on past and existing systems;  
it represents a departure both in origin and in concept. “This newborn Ad-  
ministrative Order,” as Shoghi Effendi has explained, “incorporates within  
its structure certain elements which are to be found in each of the three  
recognized forms of secular government, without being in any sense a mere  
replica of any one of them, and without introducing within its machinery  
any of the objectionable features which they inherently possess. It blends  
and harmonizes, as no government fashioned by mortal hands has as yet  
accomplished, the salutary truths which each of these systems undoubt-  
edly contains without vitiating the integrity of those God-given verities on  
which it is ultimately founded.”[[57]](#footnote-57)60-7

60.9 You are, no doubt, conversant with the Guardian’s expatiations on this  
theme. Why, then, this insistent emphasis? Why this repeated review of  
fundamentals? This emphasis, this review, is to sound an appeal for solid  
thinking, for the attainment of correct perspectives, for the adoption of  
proper attitudes. And these are impossible without a deep appreciation of  
Bahá’í fundamentals.

60.10 The great emphasis on the distinctiveness of the Order of Bahá’u’lláh is  
not meant to belittle existing systems of government. Indeed, they are to be  
recognized as the fruit of a vast period of social evolution, representing an  
advanced stage in the development of social organization. What motivates us  
is the knowledge that the supreme mission of the Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh,

the Bearer of that Order, is, as Shoghi Effendi pointed out, “none other  
but the achievement of this organic and spiritual unity of the whole body  
of nations,” indicating the “coming of age of the entire human race.”[[58]](#footnote-58)60-8  
The astounding implication of this is the near prospect of attaining an age-  
old hope, now made possible at long last by the coming of Bahá’u’lláh. In  
practical terms, His mission signals the advent of “an organic change in  
the structure of present-day society, a change such as the world has not yet  
experienced.”[[59]](#footnote-59)60-9 It is a fresh manifestation of the direct involvement of God  
in history, a reassurance that His children have not been left to drift, a sign  
of the outpouring of a heavenly grace that will enable all humanity to be  
free at last from conflict and contention to ascend the heights of world peace  
and divine civilization. Beyond all else, it is a demonstration of that love for  
His children, which He knew in the depth of His “immemorial being” and  
in the “ancient eternity” of His Essence, and which caused Him to create  
us all.[[60]](#footnote-60)60-10 In the noblest sense, then, attention to the requirements of His  
World Order is a reciprocation of that love.

\* \* \*

60.11 It is this perspective that helps ‘us to understand the question of freedom  
and its place in Bahá’í thought and action. The idea and the fact of freedom  
pervade all human concerns in an infinitude of notions and modes. Free-  
dom is indeed essential to all expressions of human life.

60.12 Freedom of thought, freedom of expression, freedom of action are among  
the freedoms which have received the ardent attention of social thinkers  
across the centuries. The resulting outflow of such profound thought has  
exerted a tremendous liberating influence in the shaping of modern society.  
Generations of the oppressed have fought and died in the name of freedom.  
Certainly the want of freedom from oppression has been a dominant factor  
in the turmoil of the times: witness the plethora of movements which have  
resulted in the rapid emergence of new nations in the latter part of the twen-  
tieth century. A true reading of the teachings of Bahá’u’lláh leaves no doubt

as to the high importance of these freedoms to constructive social processes.  
Consider, for instance, Bahá’u’lláh’s proclamation to the kings and rulers.  
Can it not be deduced from this alone that attainment of freedom is a sig-  
nificant purpose of His Revelation? His denunciations of tyranny and His  
urgent appeals on behalf of the oppressed provide unmistakable proof. But  
does not the freedom foreshadowed by His Revelation imply nobler, ampler  
manifestations of human achievement? Does it not indicate an organic rela-  
tionship between the internal and external realities of man such as has not  
yet been attained?

60.13 In his summary of significant Bahá’í teachings, Shoghi Effendi wrote that  
Bahá’u’lláh. “inculcates the principle of ‘moderation in all things’; declares  
that whatsoever, be it ‘liberty, civilization and the like,’ ‘passeth beyond  
the limits of moderation’ must ‘exercise a pernicious influence upon men’;  
observes that western civilization has gravely perturbed and alarmed the  
peoples of the world; and predicts that the day is approaching when the  
‘flame’ of a civilization ‘carried to excess’ ‘will devour the cities.’”[[61]](#footnote-61)60-11

60.14 Expounding the theme of liberty, Bahá’u’lláh asserted that “the embodi-  
ment of liberty and its symbol is the animal”; that “liberty causeth man to  
overstep the bounds of propriety, and to infringe on the dignity of his sta-  
tion”; that “true liberty consisteth in man’s submission unto My command-  
ments.” “We approve of liberty in certain circumstances,” He declared,  
“and refuse to sanction it in others.” But He gave the assurance that, “Were  
men to observe that which We have sent down unto them from the Heaven  
of Revelation, they would, of a certainty, attain unto perfect liberty.” And  
again, He said, “Mankind in its entirety must firmly adhere to whatsoever  
hath been revealed and vouchsafed unto it. Then and only then will it attain  
unto true liberty.”[[62]](#footnote-62)60-12

60.15 Bahá’u’lláh’s assertions clearly call for an examination of current assump-  
tions. Should liberty be as free as is supposed in contemporary Western  
thought? Where does freedom limit our possibilities for progress, and where  
do limits free us to thrive? What are the limits to the expansion of freedom?  
For so fluid and elastic are its qualities of application and expression that the  
concept of freedom in any given situation is likely to assume a different lati-  
tude from one mind to another; these qualities are, alas, susceptible to the

employment alike of good and evil. Is it any wonder, then, that Bahá’u’lláh  
exhorts us to submission to the will of God?

60.16 Since any constructive view of freedom implies limits, further questions  
are inevitable: What are the latitudes of freedom in the Bahá’í community?  
How are these to be determined? Because human beings have been created  
to “carry forward an ever-advancing civilization,” the exercise of freedom,  
it may be deduced, is intended to enable all to fulfill this purpose in their  
individual lives and in their collective functioning as a society.[[63]](#footnote-63)60-13 Hence  
whatever in principle is required to realize this purpose gauges the latitudes  
or limits of freedom.

60.17 Contemplating Bahá’u’lláh’s warning that “whatsoever passeth beyond  
the limits of moderation will cease to exert a beneficial influence,”[[64]](#footnote-64)60-14 we  
come to appreciate that the Administrative Order He has conceived embod-  
ies the operating principles which are necessary to the maintenance of that  
moderation which will ensure the “true liberty” of humankind. All things  
considered, does the Administrative Order not appear to be the structure  
of freedom for our Age? ‘Abdu’l-Bahá offers us comfort in this thought, for  
He has said that “the moderate freedom which guarantees the welfare of the  
world of mankind and maintains and preserves the universal relationships is  
found in its fullest power and extension in the teachings of Bahá’u’lláh.”[[65]](#footnote-65)60-15

60.18 Within this framework of freedom a pattern is set for institutional and  
individual behavior which depends for its efficacy not so much on the force  
of law, which admittedly must be respected, as on the recognition of a  
mutuality of benefits, and on the spirit of cooperation maintained by the  
willingness, the courage, the sense of responsibility, and the initiative of  
individuals these being expressions of their devotion and submission to  
the will of God. Thus there is a balance of freedom between the institution,  
whether national or local, and the individuals who sustain its existence.

60.19 Consider, for example, the Local Spiritual Assembly, the methods of its  
formation and the role of individuals in electing it. The voter elects with the  
understanding that he is free to choose without any interference whomever  
his conscience prompts him to select, and he freely accepts the authority of  
the outcome. In the act of voting, the individual subscribes to a covenant

by which the orderliness of society is upheld. The Assembly has the respon-  
sibility to guide, direct and decide on community affairs and the right to be  
obeyed and supported by members of the community. The individual has  
the responsibility to establish and maintain the Assembly through election,  
the offering of advice, moral support and material assistance; and he has  
the right to be heard by it, to receive its guidance and assistance, and to  
appeal from any Assembly decision which he conscientiously feels is unjust  
or detrimental to the interests of the community.

60.20 But occupation with the mechanics of Bahá’í Administration, divorced  
from the animating spirit of the Cause, leads to a distortion, to an arid  
secularization foreign to the nature of the Administration. Equally signifi-  
cant to the procedures for election—to further extend the example—is the  
evocation of that rarefied atmosphere of prayer and reflection, that quiet  
dignity of the process, devoid of nominations and campaigning, in which  
the individual’s freedom to choose is limited only by his own conscience,  
exercised in private in an attitude that invites communion with the Holy  
Spirit. In this sphere, the elector regards the outcome as an expression of the  
will of God, and those elected as being primarily responsible to that will,  
not to the constituency which elected them. An election thus conducted  
portrays an aspect of that organic unity of the inner and outer realities of  
human life which is necessary to the construction of a mature society in  
this new Age. In no other system do individuals exercise such a breadth of  
freedom in the electoral process.

\* \* \*

60.21 The equilibrium of responsibilities implied by all this presupposes  
maturity on the part of all concerned. This maturity has an apt analogy  
in adulthood in human beings. How significant is the difference between  
infancy and childhood, adolescence and adulthood! In a period of history  
dominated by the surging energy, the rebellious spirit and frenetic activ-  
ity of adolescence, it is difficult to grasp the distinguishing elements of  
the mature society to which Bahá’u’lláh beckons all humanity. The models  
of the old world order blur vision of that which must be perceived; for  
these models were, in many instances, conceived in rebellion and retain the  
characteristics of the revolutions peculiar to an adolescent, albeit necessary,  
period in the evolution of human society. The very philosophies which have

provided the intellectual content of such revolutions—Hobbes, Locke, Jef-  
ferson, Mill come readily to mind—were inspired by protest against the  
oppressive conditions which revolutions were intended to remedy.

60.22 These characteristics are conspicuous, for example, in the inordinate  
skepticism regarding authority, and consequently, in the grudging respect  
which the citizens of various nations show toward their governments; they  
have become pronounced in the incessant promotion of individualism,  
often to the detriment of the wider interests of society. How aptly, even  
after the lapse of half a century, Shoghi Effendi’s views, as conveyed by his  
secretary, fit the contemporary scene: “Our present generation, mainly due  
to the corruptions that have been identified with organizations, seem to  
stand against any institution. Religion as an institution is denounced. Gov-  
ernment as an institution is denounced. Even marriage as an institution is  
denounced. We Bahá’ís should not be blinded by such prevalent notions. If  
such were the case, all the divine Manifestations would not have invariably  
appointed someone to succeed Them. Undoubtedly, corruptions did enter  
those institutions, but these corruptions were not due to the very nature of  
the institutions but to the lack of proper directions as to their powers and  
nature of their perpetuation. What Bahá’u’lláh has done is not to eliminate  
all institutions in the Cause but to provide the necessary safeguards that  
would eliminate corruptions that ‘caused the fall of previous institutions.  
What those safeguards are is most interesting to study and find out and also  
most essential to know.”

60.23 We make these observations not to indulge in criticism of any system,  
but rather to open up lines of thought, to encourage a re-examination of the  
bases of modern society, and to engender a perspective for consideration of  
the distinctive features of the Order of Bahá’u’lláh. What, it could be asked,  
was the nature of society that gave rise to such characteristics and such  
philosophies? Where have these taken mankind? Has their employment sat-  
isfied the needs and expectations of the human spirit? The answers to such  
questions could lay the ground for a contrasting observation of the origin  
and nature of the characteristics and philosophy underlying that Order.

\* \* \*

60.24 As to freedom of expression, a fundamental principle of the Cause, the  
Administrative Order provides unique methods and channels for its exercise

and maintenance; these have been amply described in the writings of the  
Faith, but they are not yet clearly understood by the friends. For Bahá’u’lláh  
has extended the scope and deepened the meaning of self-expression. In His  
elevation of art and of work performed in the service of humanity to acts  
of worship can be discerned enormous prospects for a new birth of expres-  
sion in the civilization anticipated by His World Order. The significance of  
this principle, now so greatly amplified by the Lord of the Age, cannot be  
doubted; but it is in its ramifications in speech that keen understanding is  
urgently needed. From a Bahá’í point of view, the exercise of freedom of  
speech must necessarily be disciplined by a profound appreciation of both  
the positive and negative dimensions of freedom, on the one hand, and of  
speech, on the other.

60.25 Bahá’u’lláh warns us that “the tongue is a smoldering fire, and excess of  
speech a deadly poison.” “Material fire consumeth the body,” He says in  
elaborating the point, “whereas the fire of the tongue devoureth both heart  
and soul. The force of the former lasteth but for a time, whilst the effects of  
the latter endureth a century.” In tracing the framework of free speech, He  
again advises “moderation.” “Human utterance is an essence which aspireth  
to exert its influence and needeth moderation,” He states, adding, “As to its  
influence, this is conditional upon refinement which in turn is dependent  
upon hearts which are detached and pure. As to its moderation, this hath  
to be combined with tact and wisdom as prescribed in the Holy Scriptures  
and Tablets.”[[66]](#footnote-66)60-16

60.26 Also relevant to what is said, and how, is when it is said. For speech,  
as for so many other things, there is a season. Bahá’u’lláh reinforces this  
understanding by drawing attention to the maxim that “Not everything that  
a man knoweth can be disclosed, nor can everything that he can disclose be  
regarded as timely, nor can every timely utterance be considered as suited to  
the capacity of those who hear it.”[[67]](#footnote-67)60-17

60.27 Speech is a powerful phenomenon. Its freedom is both to be extolled and  
feared. It calls for an acute exercise of judgment, since both the limitation  
of speech and the excess of it can lead to dire consequences. Thus there exist  
in the system of Bahá’u’lláh checks and balances necessary to the beneficial

uses of this freedom in the onward development of society. A careful exami-  
nation of the principles of Bahá’í consultation and the formal and informal  
arrangements for employing them offer new insights into the dynamics of  
freedom of expression.

60.28 As it is beyond the scope of this letter to expatiate upon these principles,  
let it suffice to recall briefly certain of the requisites of consultation, par-  
ticularly for those who serve on Spiritual Assemblies. Love and harmony,  
purity of motive, humility and lowliness amongst the friends, patience and  
long-suffering in difficulties—these inform the attitude with which they  
proceed “with the utmost devotion, courtesy, dignity, care and moderation  
to express their views,” each using “perfect liberty” both in so doing and in  
“unveiling the proof of his demonstration.” “If another contradicts him, he  
must not become excited because if there be no investigation or verification  
of questions and matters, the agreeable view will not be discovered neither  
understood.” “The shining spark of truth cometh forth only after the clash  
of differing opinions.” If unanimity is not subsequently achieved, decisions  
are arrived at by majority vote.[[68]](#footnote-68)60-18

60.29 Once a decision has been reached, all members of the consultative body,  
having had the opportunity fully to state their views, agree wholeheartedly  
to support the outcome. What if the minority view is right? “If they agree  
upon a subject,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has explained, “even though it be wrong, it is  
better than to disagree and be in the right, for this difference will produce  
the demolition of the divine foundation. Though one of the parties may be  
in the right and they disagree, that will be the cause of a thousand wrongs,  
but if they agree and both parties are in the wrong, as it is in unity, the truth  
will be revealed and the wrong made right.”[[69]](#footnote-69)60-19 Implicit in this approach to  
the social utility of thought is the profundity of the change in the standard  
of public discussion intended by Bahá’u’lláh for a mature society.

60.30 The qualities by which the individual can achieve the personal discipline  
necessary to successful consultation find their full expression in what Shoghi  
Effendi regarded as the “spirit of a true Bahá’í.” Ponder, for instance, the ap-  
pealing remark addressed to your own community in one of his earliest let-  
ters: “Nothing short of the spirit of a true Bahá’í can hope to reconcile the  
principles of mercy and justice, of freedom and submission, of the sanctity

of the right of the individual and of self-surrender, of vigilance, discretion  
and prudence on the one hand, and fellowship, candor, and courage on the  
other.”[[70]](#footnote-70)60-20 This was an appeal to the maturity and the distinction towards  
which he repeatedly directed their thoughts.

\* \* \*

60.31 Because the Most Great Peace is the object of our longing, a primary  
effort of the Bahá’í community is to reduce the incidence of conflict and  
contention, which are categorically forbidden in the Most Holy Book. Does  
this mean that one may not express critical thought? Absolutely not. How  
can there be the candor called for in consultation if there is no critical  
thought? How is the individual to exercise his responsibilities to the Cause,  
if he is not allowed the freedom to express his views? Has Shoghi Effendi  
not stated that “at the very root of the Cause lies the principle of the un-  
doubted right of the individual to self-expression, his freedom to declare his  
conscience and set forth his views”?[[71]](#footnote-71)60-21

60.32 The Administrative Order provides channels for expression of criticism,  
acknowledging, as a matter of principle, that “it is not only the right, but  
the vital responsibility of every loyal and intelligent member of the com-  
munity to offer fully and frankly, but with due respect and consideration to  
the authority of the Assembly, any suggestion, recommendation or criticism  
he conscientiously feels he should in order to improve and remedy certain  
existing conditions or trends in his local community.” Correspondingly,  
the Assembly has the duty “to give careful consideration to any such views  
submitted to them.”[[72]](#footnote-72)60-22

60.33 Apart from the direct access which one has to an Assembly, local or na-  
tional, or to a Counselor or Auxiliary Board member, there are specific occa-  
sions for the airing of one’s views in the community. The most frequent of  
these occasions for any Bahá’í is the Nineteen Day Feast which, “besides its  
social and spiritual aspects, fulfills various administrative needs and require-  
ments of the community, chief among them being the need for open and  
constructive criticism and deliberation regarding the state of affairs within

the local Bahá’í community.” At the same time, Shoghi Effendi’s advice, as  
conveyed by his secretary, goes on to stress the point that “all criticisms and  
discussions of a negative character which may result in undermining the au-  
thority of the Assembly as a body should be strictly avoided. For otherwise  
the order of the Cause itself will be endangered, and confusion and discord  
will reign in the community.”[[73]](#footnote-73)60-23

60.34 Clearly, then, there is more to be considered than the critic’s right to self-  
expression; the unifying spirit of the Cause of God must also be preserved,  
the authority of its laws and ordinances safeguarded, authority being an  
indispensable aspect of freedom. Motive, manner, mode, become relevant;  
but there is also the matter of love: love for one’s fellows, love for one’s com-  
munity, love for one’s institutions.

60.35 The responsibility resting on the individual to conduct himself in such  
a way as to ensure the stability of society takes on elemental importance in  
this context. For vital as it is to the progress of society, criticism is a two-  
edged sword: it is all too often the harbinger of conflict and contention. The  
balanced processes of the Administrative Order are meant to prevent this es-  
sential activity from degenerating to any form of dissent that breeds opposi-  
tion and its dreadful schismatic consequences. How incalculable have been  
the negative results of ill-directed criticism: in the catastrophic divergences  
it has created in religion, in the equally contentious factions it has spawned  
in political systems, which have dignified conflict by institutionalizing such  
concepts as the “loyal opposition” which attach to one or another of the  
various categories of political opinion—conservative, liberal, progressive,  
reactionary, and so forth.

60.36 If Bahá’í individuals deliberately ignore the principles imbedded in the  
Order which Bahá’u’lláh Himself has established to remedy divisiveness in  
the human family, the Cause for which so much has been sacrificed will  
surely be set back in its mission to rescue world society from complete dis-  
integration. May not the existence of the Covenant be invoked again and  
again, so that such repetition may preserve the needed perspective? For, in  
this age, the Cause of Bahá’u’lláh has been protected against the baneful  
effects of the misuse of the process of criticism; this has been done by the in-  
stitution of the Covenant and by the provision of a universal administrative

system which incorporates within itself the mechanisms for drawing out the  
constructive ideas of individuals and using them for the benefit of the entire  
system. Admonishing the people to uphold the unifying purpose of the  
Cause, Bahá’u’lláh, in the Book of His Covenant, addresses these poignant  
words to them: “Let not the means of order be made the cause of confusion  
and the instrument of union an occasion for discord.”[[74]](#footnote-74)60-24 Such assertions  
emphasize a crucial point; it is this: In terms of the Covenant, dissidence  
is a moral and intellectual contradiction of the main objective animating  
the Bahá’í community, namely, the establishment of the unity of mankind.

\* \* \*

60.37 We return to the phenomenal characteristics of speech. Content, volume,  
style, tact, wisdom, timeliness are among the critical factors in determining  
the effects of speech for good or evil. Consequently, the friends need ever  
to be conscious of the significance of this activity which so distinguishes  
human beings from other forms of life, and they must exercise it judiciously.  
Their efforts at such discipline will give birth to an etiquette of expression  
worthy of the approaching maturity of the human race. Just as this disci-  
pline applies to the spoken word, it applies equally to the written word; and  
it profoundly affects the operation of the press.

60.38 The significance and role of the press in a new world system are con-  
spicuous in the emphasis which the Order of Bahá’u’lláh places on acces-  
sibility to information at all levels of society. Shoghi Effendi tells us that  
Bahá’u’lláh makes “specific reference to ‘the swiftly appearing newspapers,’  
describes them as ‘the mirror of the world’ and as ‘an amazing and potent  
phenomenon,’ and prescribes to all who are responsible for their production  
the duty to be sanctified from malice, passion and prejudice, to be just and  
fair-minded, to be painstaking in their inquiries, and ascertain all the facts  
in every situation.”[[75]](#footnote-75)60-25

60.39 In His social treatise, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá of-  
fers insight as to the indispensability of the press in future society. He says  
it is “urgent that beneficial articles and books be written, clearly and defi-

nitely establishing what the present-day requirements of the people are, and  
what will conduce to the happiness and advancement of society.” Further,  
He writes of the “publication of high thoughts” as the “dynamic power in  
the arteries of life,” “the very soul of the world.” Moreover, He states that  
“Public opinion must be directed toward whatever is worthy of this day, and  
this is impossible except through the use of adequate arguments and the  
adducing of clear, comprehensive and conclusive proofs.”[[76]](#footnote-76)60-26

60.40 As to manner and style, Bahá’u’lláh has exhorted “authors among the  
friends” to “write in such a way as would be acceptable to fair-minded souls,  
and not lead to caviling by the people.” And He issues a reminder: “We  
have said in the past that one word hath the influence of spring and causeth  
hearts to become fresh and verdant, while another is like unto blight which  
causeth the blossoms and flowers to wither.”[[77]](#footnote-77)60-27

60.41 In the light of all this, the code of conduct of the press must embrace the  
principles and objectives of consultation as revealed by Bahá’u’lláh. Only in  
this way will the press be able to make its full contribution to the preserva-  
tion of the rights of the people and become a powerful instrument in the  
consultative processes of society, and hence for the unity of the human race.

\* \* \*

60.42 Some of the friends have suggested that the emergence of the Faith  
from obscurity indicates the timeliness of ceasing observance in the Bahá’í  
community of certain restraints; particularly are they concerned about the  
temporary necessity of review before publishing.

60.43 That the Faith has emerged from obscurity on a global scale is certain.  
This definitely marks a triumphant stage in the efforts of the community  
to register its existence on the minds of those who influence world events.  
Consider how, because of the sufferings and sacrifices of the friends in Iran,  
the concerns of the community in these respects have become a matter of  
discussion in the most influential parliaments and the most important in-  
ternational forums on earth. That this emergence frees the Cause to pursue

objectives hitherto unreachable is also undeniable; but that it marks the  
attainment of the community’s anticipated maturity is entirely doubtful.

60.44 How could it have attained maturity, when we know from the clear guid-  
ance of the beloved Guardian that obscurity is but one of the many stages  
in the long evolution towards the Faith’s golden destiny? Has he not advised  
us all that the subsequent stage of oppression must precede the stages of its  
emancipation and its recognition as a world religion? Can the friends forget  
the oft-quoted warning of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá concerning the bitter opposition  
that will confront the Cause in various lands on all continents? In the case  
of the American believers, has Shoghi Effendi not alluded to this coming  
fury in his description of them as “the invincible Army of Bahá’u’lláh, who  
in the West, and at one of its potential storm centers is to fight, in His name  
and for His sake, one of its fiercest and most glorious battles”?[[78]](#footnote-78)60-28

60.45 Those who are anxious to relax all restraint, who invoke freedom of  
speech as the rationale for publishing every and any thing concerning the  
Bahá’í community, who call for the immediate termination of the practice  
of review now that the Faith has emerged from obscurity—are they not  
aware of these sobering prospects? Widespread as has been the public revul-  
sion to the current persecutions in Iran, let there be no mistake about the  
certainty of the opposition which must yet be confronted in many coun-  
tries, including that which is the Cradle of the Administrative Order itself.

60.46 The Faith is as yet in its infancy. Despite its emergence from obscurity,  
even now the vast majority of the human race remains ignorant of its exis-  
tence; moreover, the vast majority of its adherents are relatively new Bahá’ís.  
The change implied by this new stage in its evolution is that whereas here-  
tofore this tender plant was protected in its obscurity from the attention  
of external elements, it has now become exposed. This exposure invites  
close observation, and that observation will eventually lead to opposition in  
various quarters. So, far from adopting a carefree attitude, the community  
must be conscious of the necessity to present a correct view of itself and an  
accurate understanding of its purpose to a largely skeptical public. A greater  
effort, a greater care must now be exercised to ensure its protection against  
the malice of the ignorant and the unwisdom of its friends.

60.47 Let us all remember that the struggle of the infant Faith of God to thrive  
is beset with the turmoil of the present age. Like a tender shoot just barely  
discernible above ground, it must be nurtured to strength and maturity  
and buttressed as necessary against the blight of strong winds and deadly  
entanglements with weeds and thistles. If we to whose care this plant has  
been entrusted are insensitive to its tenderness, the great tree which is its  
certain potential will be hindered in its growth towards the spreading of  
its sheltering branches over all humankind. From this perspective we must  
all consider the latent danger to the Cause of ill-advised actions and exag-  
gerated expectations; and particularly must we all be concerned about the  
effects of words, especially those put in print. It is here that Bahá’í authors  
and publishers need to be attentive and exert rigorous discipline upon them-  
selves, as well as abide by the requirements of review at this early stage in the  
development of the Faith.

\* \* \*

60.48 The right of the individual to self-expression has permeated the forego-  
ing comments on the various freedoms, but, even so, a word more might  
be said about individual freedom. The fundamental attitude of the Faith in  
this respect is best demonstrated by statements of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá concerning  
the family. “The integrity of the family bond,” He says, “must be constantly  
considered, and the rights of the individual members must not be trans-  
gressed …. All these rights and prerogatives must be conserved, yet the  
unity of the family must be sustained. The injury of one shall be considered  
the injury of all; the comfort of each, the comfort of all; the honor of one,  
the honor of all.”[[79]](#footnote-79)60-29

60.49 The individual’s relation to society is explained by Shoghi Effendi in the  
statement that “The Bahá’í conception of social life is essentially based on  
the principle of the subordination of the individual will to that of society.  
It neither suppresses the individual nor does it exalt him to the point of  
making him an anti-social creature, a menace to society. As in everything, it  
follows the ‘golden mean.’”[[80]](#footnote-80)60-30

60.50 This relationship, so fundamental to the maintenance of civilized life,  
calls for the utmost degree of understanding and cooperation between so-  
ciety and the individual; and because of the need to foster a climate in  
which the untold potentialities of the individual members of society can  
develop, this relationship must allow “free scope” for “individuality to assert  
itself” through modes of spontaneity, initiative and diversity that ensure the  
viability of society. Among the responsibilities assigned to Bahá’í institu-  
tions which have a direct bearing on these aspects of individual freedom  
and development is one which is thus described in the Constitution of the  
Universal House of Justice: “to safeguard the personal rights, freedom and  
initiative of individuals.” A corollary is: “to give attention to the preserva-  
tion of human honor.”[[81]](#footnote-81)60-31

60.51 How noteworthy that in the Order of Bahá’u’lláh, while the individual  
will is subordinated to that of society, the individual is not lost in the mass  
but becomes the focus of primary development, so that he may find his own  
place in the flow of progress, and society as a whole may benefit from the  
accumulated talents and abilities of the individuals composing it. Such an  
individual finds fulfillment of his potential not merely in satisfying his own  
wants but in realizing his completeness in being at one with humanity and  
with the divinely ordained purpose of creation.

60.52 The quality of freedom and of its expression—indeed, the very capacity  
to maintain freedom in a society—undoubtedly depends on the knowl-  
edge and training of individuals and on their ability to cope with the chal-  
lenges of life with equanimity. As the beloved Master has written: “And the  
honor and distinction of the individual consist in this, that he among all  
the world’s multitudes should become a source of social good. Is any larger  
bounty conceivable than this, that an individual, looking within himself,  
should find that by the confirming grace of God he has become the cause of  
peace and well-being, of happiness and advantage to his fellowmen? No, by  
the one true God, there is no greater bliss, no more complete delight.”[[82]](#footnote-82)60-32

\* \* \*

60.53 The spirit of liberty which in recent decades has swept over the planet  
with such tempestuous force is a manifestation of the vibrancy of the Rev-

elation brought by Bahá’u’lláh. His own words confirm it. “The Ancient  
Beauty,” He wrote in a soul-stirring commentary on His sufferings, “hath  
consented to be bound with chains that mankind may be released from its  
bondage, and hath accepted to be made a prisoner within this most mighty  
Stronghold that the whole world may attain unto true liberty.”[[83]](#footnote-83)60-33

60.54 Might it not be reasonably concluded, then, that “true liberty” is His gift  
of love to the human race? Consider what Bahá’u’lláh has done: He revealed  
laws and principles to guide the free; He established an Order to channel  
the actions of the free; He proclaimed a Covenant to guarantee the unity  
of the free.

60.55 Thus, we hold to this ultimate perspective: Bahá’u’lláh came to set hu-  
manity free. His Revelation is, indeed, an invitation to freedom—freedom  
from want, freedom from war, freedom to unite, freedom to progress, free-  
dom in peace and joy.

60.56 You who live in a land where freedom is so highly prized have not, then,  
to dispense with its fruits, but you are challenged and do have the obliga-  
tion to uphold and vindicate the distinction between the license that limits  
your possibilities for genuine progress and the moderation that ensures the  
enjoyment of true liberty.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

61  
External Affairs consultations

5 JANUARY 1989

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

61.1 GREATLY PLEASED ANNOUNCE IMPORTANT CONSULTATIONS WORLD CENTER PAST  
WEEKEND WITH SENIOR OFFICERS BAHÁ’Í INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY HOLY  
LAND, NEW YORK, GENEVA, AND REPRESENTATIVES OF FIVE NATIONAL SPIRITUAL  
ASSEMBLIES. FAR-REACHING DELIBERATIONS CENTERED ON INCREASED EXTERNAL  
AFFAIRS ACTIVITIES FAITH. MUCH ENCOURAGED EVIDENCES EVER CLOSER TIES  
COLLABORATION WITH UNITED NATIONS, ITS AGENCIES AND NATIONAL GOV-  
ERNMENTS MANY LANDS, RESULTING EXPANDED SPHERE INFLUENCE FAITH FIELD  
INTERNATIONAL INITIATIVES. HEARTENED BY REVIEW INDICATING INCREASING OP-

PORTUNITIES SHARE BAHÁ’U’LLÁH’S WORLD-REDEEMING MESSAGE VAST REGIONS  
… SOVIET UNION AND EASTERN EUROPE. REJOICE IN MOUNTING PRESTIGE CAUSE  
GOD WORLDWIDE. INVITE ALL FRIENDS JOIN IN OFFERING PRAYERS THANKSGIVING  
BAHÁ’U’LLÁH FOR HIS SUSTAINED ABUNDANT BLESSINGS.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

62  
Education in the Law of Ḥuqúqu’lláh

23 MARCH 1989

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

62.1 One of the vital goals of the Six Year Plan is the education of the believers  
in the Law of Ḥuqúqu’lláh, observance of which has a profound spiritual  
effect beyond the practical benefits for the work of the Cause.

62.2 The Trustee of Ḥuqúqu’lláh, the Hand of the Cause of God Dr. ‘Alí-  
Muḥammad Varqá, has, at the request of the Universal House of Justice,  
been developing the structure of his Deputies and Representatives around  
the world. In addition to their function of receiving Ḥuqúqu’lláh from  
the friends, these Deputies and Representatives share with the National  
Spiritual Assemblies the responsibility for educating all the believers in this  
Law. To achieve the best results there should be close and wholehearted col-  
laboration between the National Spiritual Assemblies and the Deputies and  
Representatives of Ḥuqúqu’lláh in their countries. The House of Justice is  
confident that these newly forged links will be greatly strengthened as the  
Bahá’í world enters the second half of the Six Year Plan, and assures you all  
of its prayers for your confirmation in your efforts to achieve this goal.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

63  
Application of the Law of Ḥuqúqu’lláh

29 MARCH 1989

To an individual Bahá’í

Dear Bahá’í Friend,

63.1 The Universal House of Justice has received your letter of 5 February  
1989 in which you ask whether the Law of Ḥuqúqu’lláh is a purely personal  
law or whether it applies to elected institutions and corporate bodies as well.

63.2 We have been asked to inform you that, although the Trustee is autho-  
rized to accept contributions to Ḥuqúqu’lláh from believers who are not  
under the obligation of paying it, or from companies which are wholly  
owned by Bahá’ís, the Law of Ḥuqúqu’lláh imposes an obligation only on  
individual believers, not on Bahá’í institutions or corporate bodies.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

64  
Riḍván Message 1989

RIḌVÁN 1989

To the Bahá’ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

64.1 The spiritual current which exerted such galvanic effects at the Interna-  
tional Bahá’í Convention last Riḍván 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 mil-  
lion 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.

64.2 We look back with feelings of humble gratitude and heightened expecta-  
tions 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. Faríburz Ṣahbá’ 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 ‘Ishqábád to restore the Local Spiritual Assembly of that city;  
the initiation of steps to open a Bahá’í Information Center 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 Infor-  
mation in Hong Kong in anticipation of the time when the Faith can be  
proclaimed on the mainland of China.

64.3 Also outstanding among these developments have been the successful  
co-sponsorship by the Bahá’í International Community of the “Arts for  
Nature” program 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 curricu-  
lum 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.

64.4 No reference to such marvelous progress could fail to acknowledge the  
spiritual and social impact effected by the decade-long episode of perse-  
cution 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.

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

64.6 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 construc-  
tion 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 dur-  
ing 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, al-  
though 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.

64.7 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 organiza-  
tions, 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 Counselors,  
the Auxiliary Board members and their assistants, all of whose burgeoning

energies are being skillfully coordinated by the International Teaching Cen-  
ter—an institution whose augmented membership has already displayed a  
verve, a vision and a versatility evocative of warm admiration?

64.8 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 ongo-  
ing 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.

64.9 In conjunction with the ever-widening thrust of teaching, we must pro-  
ceed 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.

64.10 Regarding the projects on Mount Carmel, the Office of the Project Man-  
ager has been established, and a technical staff is being assembled. Geologi-  
cal 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.

64.11 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 regu-  
lar reading and study of the Holy Word.

64.12 Beloved Friends: The momentum generated by this past year’s achieve-  
ments 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 mo-  
ment 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.

64.13 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.”

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

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

65  
Restoration of Local Spiritual Assembly of ‘Ishqábád

25 APRIL 1989

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

65.1 OVERJOYED ANNOUNCE ELECTION FIRST DAY RIḌVÁN FESTIVAL LOCAL SPIRITUAL  
ASSEMBLY ‘ISHQÁBÁD. RESTORATION THIS HISTORIC BAHÁ’Í COMMUNITY, FOLLOW-  
ING ECLIPSE LASTING OVER HALF A CENTURY, SIGNIFIED INITIAL STEP REHABILITA-  
TION FAITH THROUGHOUT SOVIET UNION. WE SHALL INFORM NATIONAL ASSEM-  
BLIES IN DUE COURSE WHEN TIME RIPE ENCOURAGE BELIEVERS ESTABLISH FORMAL  
CONTACTS. OFFERING PRAYERS THANKSGIVING HOLY SHRINES.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

66  
Commencement of preliminary phase  
of Mount Carmel projects

28 APRIL 1989

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

66.1 REJOICE ANNOUNCE COMMENCEMENT GEOLOGICAL SURVEY ESSENTIAL PRELIMI-  
NARY STEP IMPLEMENTATION PROJECTS MOUNT CARMEL. THIS STEP SHARPENS  
NEED SPEEDY ACCUMULATION FIFTY MILLION DOLLAR RESERVE CALLED FOR PER-  
MIT INITIATION MAJOR WORKS, OF WHICH ONE THIRD SO FAR CONTRIBUTED.  
URGE SHARE INFORMATION FRIENDS.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

67  
Responsibilities of individual believers  
in the Administrative Order

22 JUNE 1989

To a National Spiritual Assembly

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

67.1 The Universal House of Justice wrote to you on 21 September 1988 ex-  
pressing its concern about the conditions existing within your Assembly

and asking for views and recommendations to be sent to it by members of  
the National Spiritual Assembly individually. A number of responses have  
been received, along with additional information requested by the House  
of Justice from other sources. We have been directed to convey to you the  
following.

67.2 One of the distinctive features of the Bahá’í Administrative Order, which  
stands in striking contrast to the administrative systems associated with past  
Dispensations, is the responsibility it places upon the individual believer to  
participate in its activities. In contrast to the members of congregations of  
many other religions whose role is principally that of being the recipients  
of instruction and advice from their ecclesiastical leaders, the followers of  
Bahá’u’lláh are called upon, in their relationships within the community, to  
engage in consultation, to follow closely the affairs of the Faith in their re-  
gion, to offer their views and recommendations on all matters which pertain  
to the interests of the Faith and its community, and to elect the Spiritual  
Assemblies and cooperate wholeheartedly with them. This active involve-  
ment by every Bahá’í in the life of the community provides it with access  
to each individual’s insight and wisdom and is a source of great strength to  
the organic unit.

67.3 Membership on an Assembly imposes upon the believer the spiritual re-  
sponsibility to become an active participant in its work, to be fully informed  
of its endeavors, and to ensure that its functioning is in accord with Bahá’í  
principles. Every Assembly member should recognize that he has a duty to  
ensure that his voice is heard and that appropriate consideration is given to  
his views. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has stated that consultation succeeds in avoiding “ill-  
feeling or discord” when “every member expresseth with absolute freedom  
his own opinion and setteth forth his argument,” with the further affirma-  
tion by the Guardian that “it is not only the right but the sacred obligation  
of every member to express freely and openly his views, without being afraid  
of displeasing or alienating any of his fellow members,” and “The Assembly  
members must have the courage of their convictions, but must also express  
wholehearted and unqualified obedience to the well considered judgment  
and directions of the majority of their fellow members.”[[84]](#footnote-84)67-1

67.4 No member of an Assembly should feel inhibited from participating in  
the consultation because of what he may believe to be deficiencies in his  
education, experience or knowledge of the Faith. Rather he should rely  
with unshakeable faith on the divine confirmations which will bestow wis-  
dom and guidance upon the sincere believer who approaches his assigned  
functions in a spirit of consecration and humility, beseeching the aid of  
the Omniscient Lord. He should also be guided by the observation of the  
Guardian: “Not infrequently, nay oftentimes, the most lowly, untutored  
and inexperienced among the friends will, by the sheer inspiring force of  
selfless and ardent devotion, contribute a distinct and memorable share to a  
highly involved discussion in any given assembly.”[[85]](#footnote-85)67-2

67.5 If an Assembly member feels that there are barriers affecting the consulta-  
tion of the body, he should frankly and courageously raise his concerns;  
these barriers could include, for example, the consultation moving at a  
speed which confuses him, language being used which he cannot under-  
stand, behavioral characteristics which unwittingly express condescension  
leading to the humiliation of others, or a feeling that one is being ignored.  
Such barriers may well arise as the Faith continues its inexorable progress  
in creating dynamic consultative bodies which bring together, in a spirit  
of unity and equality, the historically divided elements of humanity, thus  
laying the foundation for a new and ever advancing civilization.

67.6 It is the responsibility of all members of an Assembly to ensure that its  
officers are elected properly, function correctly and discharge their duties  
in accordance with the decisions of the Assembly. If a member feels, for  
example, that the meetings are not chaired effectively, that the minutes are  
not an accurate report of the decisions made at the meeting, or that the  
correspondence of the secretary or the financial transactions carried out by  
the treasurer do not conform to the instructions of the Assembly, he should  
bring this matter up at the Assembly meeting, taking care to ensure that this  
is done with appropriate moderation, courtesy and balance.

67.7 The Universal House of Justice trusts that these clarifications will assist  
your Assembly to improve the quality of your consultation and the effec-  
tiveness of your functioning. It requests you to ensure that copies of this  
letter are provided to each member of the Assembly, and that translations  
are provided if any individual members of the Assembly feel that this would

facilitate their understanding of it. When all members have had an opportu-  
nity to study the letter, you should arrange a special session of the Assembly  
for consultation on its contents. You may also wish to seek the advice of the  
Counselors on measures to be taken to carry out more fully its provisions.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

68  
The importance of literacy

10 JULY 1989

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

68.1 The Holy Word has been extolled by the Prophets of God as the medium  
of celestial power and the wellspring of all spiritual, social and material  
progress. Access to it, constant study of it and daily use of it in our indi-  
vidual lives are vital to the inner personal transformation towards which we  
strive and whose ultimate outer manifestation will be the emergence of that  
divine civilization which is the promise of the World Order of Bahá’u’lláh.

68.2 The blessings which flow from the Word of God are implicit in this  
instruction of Bahá’u’lláh in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, the Mother Book of His  
Revelation: “Immerse yourselves in the ocean of My words, that ye may  
unravel its secrets, and discover all the pearls of wisdom that lie hid in its  
depths.” Again in the same book, He bids us recite the “verses of God every  
morning and evening.”[[86]](#footnote-86)68-1 An astonishing insight as to the sublime influence  
of the revealed Word is conveyed in this further instruction gleaned from  
one of His Tablets: “Intone, O My servant, the verses of God that have  
been received by thee, as intoned by them who have drawn nigh unto Him,  
that the sweetness of thy melody may kindle thine own soul, and attract the  
hearts of all men. Whoso reciteth, in the privacy of his chamber, the verses  
revealed by God, the scattering angels of the Almighty shall scatter abroad  
the fragrance of the words uttered by his mouth, and shall cause the heart of  
every righteous man to throb. Though he may, at first, remain unaware of

its effect, yet the virtue of the grace vouchsafed unto him must needs sooner  
or later exercise its influence upon his soul.”[[87]](#footnote-87)68-2

68.3 The most immediate access to the dynamic influence of the sacred Word  
is through reading. The ability to read is therefore a fundamental right and  
privilege of every human being. Bahá’u’lláh promotes this right in His com-  
mand to parents to ensure the instruction of their sons and daughters in the  
“art of reading and writing.”[[88]](#footnote-88)68-3 For this essential reason, in our last Riḍván  
message we called attention to the need for systematic attention to be given  
to eventually eliminating illiteracy from the Bahá’í community. This mat-  
ter must assume its proper importance as a continuing objective of that  
community.

68.4 Let each National and Local Spiritual Assembly, according to necessity  
and circumstance, address itself to this objective, conscious that even where  
total achievement is not immediately possible, opportunities must be sought  
to make steady progress. Let each be confident that the shining example set  
by Iran, the mother community of the Bahá’í world, under the inspiration  
of Bahá’u’lláh’s teachings and the urging of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and Shoghi Ef-  
fendi, upholds a standard all can follow. In the earliest years of this century,  
when no systematic, overall plan of education existed in Iran, the Bahá’ís  
seized their chance and organized a widespread program of education. Its  
teachers were distinguished for their ability to foster child, youth and adult  
education, which led to significant self-improvement among the Iranian  
Bahá’ís. The emergence of a literate Bahá’í community was an outstanding  
result.

68.5 Some local or national Bahá’í communities may wish to follow the ex-  
ample of those who have already instituted their own literacy projects and  
are achieving notable success; others may wish to participate in literacy pro-  
grams organized by governmental or nongovernmental organizations. Each  
community will have to determine whether to engage in one or the other, or  
to do both. Progress will depend not only on the initiatives of Bahá’í institu-  
tions in relation to children, but also on the active interest of adult believers  
who want to learn to read. Such friends should definitely be encouraged and  
assisted to achieve, with dignity, their heart’s desire. Certainly, the willing  
participation of the friends in an undertaking of such importance to the

upliftment of individuals and the consolidation of the Bahá’í community as  
a whole will attract divine favors and confirmations.

68.6 The United Nations has declared 1990 to be International Literacy Year  
so as to mobilize an all-out, ongoing effort to eradicate illiteracy around the  
world. The literacy projects already in progress in the Bahá’í community,  
and those which are yet to be adopted, will surely lend support to this noble  
and necessary effort. Therefore, we commend the purpose of this special  
year to the attention of the entire Bahá’í world. The Bahá’í International  
Community’s United Nations Office will send National Assemblies infor-  
mation concerning activities associated with International Literacy Year and  
how Bahá’í communities may become involved. Moreover, agencies at the  
Bahá’í World Center having a special interest in literacy programs will offer  
helpful advice as necessary, but Spiritual Assemblies need not wait to hear  
from them before proceeding with their own plans.

68.7 We look forward with confident expectation to your achievements to-  
ward the ultimate fulfillment of this objective which is so essential to the  
progress of the Bahá’í community and indeed all humanity. And we assure  
you, as ever, of our continuing prayers at the Holy Shrines for your success.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

69  
The role of the Nineteen Day Feast

27 AUGUST 1989

To the Followers of Bahá’u’lláh

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

69.1 The Nineteen Day Feast, its framework, purpose and possibilities, have  
in recent years become a subject of increasing inquiry among the friends. It  
occupied much of the consultation at the Sixth International Bahá’í Con-  
vention last year, and we feel the time has come for us to offer clarifications.

69.2 The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh encompasses all units of human soci-  
ety; integrates the spiritual, administrative and social processes of life; and  
canalizes human expression in its varied forms towards the construction of  
a new civilization. The Nineteen Day Feast embraces all these aspects at the  
very base of society. Functioning in the village, the town, the city, it is an

institution of which all the people of Bahá are members. It is intended to  
promote unity, ensure progress, and foster joy.

69.3 “If this feast be held in the proper fashion,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá states, “the  
friends will, once in nineteen days, find themselves spiritually restored, and  
endued with a power that is not of this world.”[[89]](#footnote-89)69-1 To ensure this glorious  
outcome the concept of the Feast must be adequately understood by all  
the friends. The Feast is known to have three distinct but related parts: the  
devotional, the administrative, and the social. The first entails the recitation  
of prayers and reading from the Holy Texts. The second is a general meeting  
where the Local Spiritual Assembly reports its activities, plans and problems  
to the community, shares news and messages from the World Center and  
the National Assembly, and receives the thoughts and recommendations  
of the friends through a process of consultation. The third involves the  
partaking of refreshments and engaging in other activities meant to foster  
fellowship in a culturally determined diversity of forms which do not violate  
principles of the Faith or the essential character of the Feast.

69.4 Even though the observance of the Feast requires strict adherence to the  
threefold aspects in the sequence in which they have been defined, there is  
much room for variety in the total experience. For example, music may be  
introduced at various stages, including the devotional portion; ‘Abdu’l-Bahá  
recommends that eloquent, uplifting talks be given; originality and variety  
in expressions of hospitality are possible; the quality and range of the con-  
sultation are critical to the spirit of the occasion. The effects of different  
cultures in all these respects are welcome factors which can lend the Feast a  
salutary diversity, representative of the unique characteristics of the various  
societies in which it is held, and therefore conducive to the upliftment and  
enjoyment of its participants.

69.5 It is notable that the concept of the Feast evolved in stages in relation  
to the development of the Faith. At its earliest stage in Iran, the individual  
friends, in response to Bahá’u’lláh’s injunctions, hosted gatherings in their  
homes to show hospitality once every nineteen days and derived inspiration  
from the reading and discussion of the Teachings. As the community grew,  
‘Abdu’l-Bahá delineated and emphasized the devotional and social character  
of the event. After the establishment of Local Spiritual Assemblies, Shoghi

Effendi introduced the administrative portion and acquainted the commu-  
nity with the idea of the Nineteen Day Feast as an institution. It was as if a  
symphony, in three movements, had now been completed.

69.6 But it is not only in the sense of its gradual unfoldment as an institution  
that the evolution of the Feast must be regarded; there is a broader context  
yet. The Feast may well be seen in its unique combination of modes as  
the culmination of a great historic process in which primary elements of  
community life—acts of worship, of festivity and other forms of togeth-  
erness—over vast stretches of time have achieved a glorious convergence.  
The Nineteen Day Feast represents the new stage in this enlightened age to  
which the basic expression of community life has evolved. Shoghi Effendi  
has described it as the foundation of the new World Order, and in a letter  
written on his behalf, it is referred to as constituting “a vital medium for  
maintaining close and continued contact between the believers themselves,  
and also between them and the body of their elected representatives in the  
local community.”[[90]](#footnote-90)69-2

69.7 Moreover, because of the opportunity which it provides for conveying  
messages from the national and international levels of the administration  
and also for communicating the recommendations of the friends to those  
levels, the Feast becomes a link that connects the local community in a  
dynamic relationship with the entire structure of the Administrative Order.  
But considered in its local sphere alone there is much to thrill and amaze the  
heart. Here it links the individual to the collective processes by which a so-  
ciety is built or restored. Here, for instance, the Feast is an arena of democ-  
racy at the very root of society, where the Local Spiritual Assembly and the  
members of the community meet on common ground, where individuals  
are free to offer their gifts of thought, whether as new ideas or constructive  
criticism, to the building processes of an advancing civilization. Thus it can  
be seen that aside from its spiritual significance, this common institution of  
the people combines an array of elemental social disciplines which educate  
its participants in the essentials of responsible citizenship.

69.8 If the Feast is to be properly experienced, beyond an understanding of  
the concept must also be the preparation of it and the preparation for it.  
Although the Local Spiritual Assembly is administratively responsible for  
the conduct of the Feast, it often calls upon an individual or a group of

individuals to make preparations—a practice which is consonant with the  
spirit of hospitality so vital to the occasion. Such individuals can act as hosts  
and are sometimes concerned with the selection of the prayers and readings  
for the devotional portion; they may also attend to the social portion. In  
small communities the aspect of personal hospitality is easy to carry out,  
but in large communities the Local Spiritual Assemblies, while retaining the  
concept of hospitality, may find it necessary to devise other measures.

69.9 Important aspects of the preparation of the Feast include the proper se-  
lection of readings, the assignment, in advance, of good readers, and a sense  
of decorum both in the presentation and the reception of the devotional  
program. Attention to the environment in which the Feast is to be held,  
whether indoors or outdoors, greatly influences the experience. Cleanliness,  
arrangement of the space in practical and decorative ways—all play a sig-  
nificant part. Punctuality is also a measure of good preparation.

69.10 To a very large extent, the success of the Feast depends on the quality of  
the preparation and participation of the individual. The beloved Master of-  
fers the following advice: “Give ye great weight to the Nineteen Day gather-  
ings, so that on these occasions the beloved of the Lord and the handmaids  
of the Merciful may turn their faces toward the Kingdom, chant the com-  
munes, beseech God’s help, become joyfully enamored each of the other,  
and grow in purity and holiness, and in the fear of God, and in resistance  
to passion and self. Thus will they separate themselves from this elemental  
world, and immerse themselves in the ardors of the spirit.”[[91]](#footnote-91)69-3

69.11 In absorbing such advice, it is illuminating indeed to view the Nine-  
teen Day Feast in the context in which it was conceived. It is ordained in  
the Kitáb-i-Aqdas in these words: “It hath been enjoined upon you once a  
month to offer hospitality, even should ye serve no more than water, for  
God hath willed to bind your hearts together, though it be through heavenly  
and earthly means combined.”[[92]](#footnote-92)69-4 It is clear, then, that the Feast is rooted in  
hospitality, with all its implications of friendliness, courtesy, service, gen-

erosity and conviviality. The very idea of hospitality as the sustaining spirit  
of so significant an institution introduces a revolutionary new attitude to  
the conduct of human affairs at all levels, an attitude which is critical to  
that world unity which the Central Figures of our Faith labored so long and  
suffered so much cruelty to bring into being. It is in this divine festival that  
the foundation is laid for the realization of so unprecedented a reality.

69.12 That you may all attain the high mark set for the Feast as a “bringer of  
joy,” the “groundwork of agreement and unity,” the “key to affection and  
fellowship” will remain an object of our ardent supplications at the Holy  
Threshold.[[93]](#footnote-93)69-5

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

70  
Timing of Feast observances

28 AUGUST 1989

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

70.1 In addition to the accompanying letter addressed by the Universal House  
of Justice to the Followers of Bahá’u’lláh concerning the Nineteen Day  
Feast, we have been asked to convey its comments on the following points  
with which you will have to deal in assisting the community in its obser-  
vance of this important festival.

70.2 First, the House of Justice is aware that in many areas only a limited time  
can be devoted to the Feast by the friends, because the Feast day may come  
during the week when most people have to work, and the evening hours do  
not allow much time for its observance. While the House of Justice does  
not wish to deemphasize the preference expressed by Shoghi Effendi that the  
Feast be held on the first day of the Bahá’í month, it feels that in instances  
of difficulty, where the friends would otherwise be unable to attend, the  
National Spiritual Assembly may point out to Local Assemblies that it is  
permissible to hold the Feast at another time within the Bahá’í month, such  
as on a weekend.

70.3 Second, the administrative portion of the Feast should not be laborious or  
burdensome. It can become so because too many reports by too many local  
Bahá’í committees are presented at one Feast. Such reports could perhaps be  
conveyed in bulletins. Also, there can be too many messages from agencies  
of the national administration. While it lies within the discretion of the  
National Spiritual Assembly to send a message or items of information to  
be shared at the Feast, care must be taken not to overburden these events  
with a multiplicity of items from the National Assembly and its auxiliary  
agencies. Some National Assemblies have developed the practice of sending  
a message to every Feast; this is, of course, not wrong in principle, but they  
may need to examine their methods of communicating with the believers  
and see whether occasional messages might not be sufficient. The idea is  
that the local Bahá’í communities should exercise control over the Feast and  
not be made to feel that they are being overrun by messages, instructions  
and assignments from the national administration of the Faith. This whole  
matter needs to be studied by the National Spiritual Assembly with a bal-  
anced perspective, so that while important national issues are not ignored,  
the potentialities of the Feast for development of the local community are  
fully realized.

70.4 Third, the accompanying letter to the friends points to the desirability  
of the inclusion in the Feast of cultural elements which can enhance the  
experience without contravening Bahá’í principles. The National Spiritual  
Assemblies will want to be watchful that the incorporation of such elements  
does not lead to a degeneration of the Feast as a uniquely Bahá’í institution  
and, particularly, that no objectionable customs and practices begin to creep  
into its observance.

70.5 We have also been asked to send you the enclosed compilation, entitled  
*The Nineteen Day Feast*,[[94]](#footnote-94)70-1 as a resource on which you can draw in further  
educating the community and in answering the questions of the friends  
concerning this vital institution. You are free to share its contents with the  
friends but you are under no obligation to publish it.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

71  
Assessment of Six Year Plan pioneer goals

7 SEPTEMBER 1989

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

71.1 On 14 May 1987 we wrote to all National Spiritual Assemblies on behalf  
of the Universal House of Justice conveying the call for the minimum num-  
ber of pioneers who were to settle in their goals by Riḍván 1989, together  
with a call for pioneers to settle in a number of Eastern Bloc countries by  
the end of the Six Year Plan. This call was supplemented by a letter issued  
on 5 June 1987, listing the Inter-Assembly Collaboration Projects which  
had been included in the individual National Plans and which were, for  
the most part, intended to be pursued throughout the six years of the plan.

71.2 The Bahá’í world has now grown so large, and the flow of pioneers and  
traveling teachers so constant that it is virtually impossible to keep a detailed  
up-to-date record of the vast number of projects being undertaken in every  
country. However, the most recent information that the Department of  
Statistics has been able to collect presents the following highly encouraging  
picture of the pioneering goals so far achieved during the Plan.

71.3 During the first year of the Six Year Plan, before the pioneer call of May  
1987 was sent out, a large number of believers pioneered, of whom 523 are  
still at their posts. During the subsequent two years, in answer to the call,  
943 believers have settled in goals specified in the Plan or in posts not origi-  
nally assigned. The total number of international pioneers since April 1986  
is thus 1,466. The details of the response to the pioneer call, by continent  
receiving pioneers, are as follows.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Receiving area** | **Assigned goals** | **Goals still unfilled** | **Goals filled** | **Extra pioneers to goals** | **Pioneers to other places** | **Total pioneers received** |
| **Africa** | 100 | 42 | 58 | 56 | 68 | 182 |
| **Americas** | 119 | 45 | 74 | 133 | 38 | 245 |
| **Asia** | 50 | 5 | 45 | 93 | 101 | 239 |
| **Australasia** | 45 | 18 | 27 | 18 | 28 | 73 |
| **Europe** | 115 | 66 | 49 | 11 | 144 | 204 |
| **The World** | 429 | 176 | 253 | 311 | 379 | 943 |

71.4 Of the 176 pioneer goals outstanding, 14 have been canceled in light of  
changed circumstances and in view of the new call for short-term pioneers  
described below. There remains, therefore, the immediate task for the Bahá’í  
world to fill the 162 pioneer posts remaining vacant from the original pioneer  
call and, indeed, to increase the flow of long-term pioneers to needy areas. In  
addition to these, the tremendous recent acceleration in the twin processes of  
expansion and consolidation calls for a new flexibility in meeting the needs in  
the field. Therefore, to supplement the work of pioneers and traveling teach-  
ers, the Universal House of Justice is now calling for a range of short-term  
pioneer projects during the remaining years of the Six Year Plan.

71.5 These short-term pioneer goals are being assigned in terms of months per  
pioneer. In other words, a goal of 24 could mean one pioneer for two years  
or two pioneers for twelve months or even four pioneers for six months each.  
We can also envisage that special circumstances may warrant a succession of  
short-term pioneers for terms as short as three months. These services could  
run either concurrently or one after the other. The idea is that they should  
be for longer periods than can normally be spent by a traveling teacher but,  
since the short-term pioneer does not have the aim of settling permanently  
in his post, he will, generally, be freed of the need to find employment,  
and so will probably obtain a visa more easily and will also be able to spend  
his time in remote areas which the homefront teachers and the long-term  
pioneers find it difficult to reach or on specific tasks which others are unable  
to perform for lack of time or other reasons.

71.6 Many of the short-term pioneers may be able to cover their own expens-  
es; others will need financial help from the responsible National Spiritual  
Assemblies or the International Deputization Fund. All will need proper  
preparation for their service and orientation both before and after they arrive  
in their goal countries.

71.7 The responsibility for sending short-term pioneers has been assigned to  
specific National Spiritual Assemblies to ensure that volunteers are found  
and placed in the field. But such Assemblies do not necessarily have to draw  
the pioneers from their own communities. Volunteers may arise from com-  
munities which have no assigned goals, or from countries which neighbor  
the goal areas. The services of all these can be used and will count towards  
the achievement of the goals. The assistance and advice of the Continental  
Pioneer Committees can be sought in this regard.

71.8 Enclosed are two lists, one in the order of National Assemblies to receive  
assistance, the other in the order of National Assemblies which have the

responsibility to send it. It will be noted that no goals are included for the  
countries of the Eastern Bloc; these are being dealt with separately in view  
of the unprecedented opportunities, great urgency and special conditions  
of the work there.

71.9 The Universal House of Justice will pray in the Holy Shrines that the  
believers in every land will arise with increasing determination to speed the  
process of entry by troops and the establishment of firmly grounded, ef-  
ficiently functioning Local Spiritual Assemblies.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

72  
The Function of review in the Bahá’í Community

25 SEPTEMBER 1989

To an individual Bahá’í

Dear Bahá’í Friend,

72.1 The Universal House of Justice has received your letter … concerning  
a writing project which you had been contemplating in collaboration with  
a professional filmmaker and writer who is not a Bahá’í, and we have been  
asked to send you the following reply ….

72.2 Given the long history and overwhelming current examples of repression  
in the world, it is not surprising that in a country like the United States,  
which upholds freedom of speech as a cardinal principle, the non-Bahá’í  
collaborator in a filmmaking project, such as you have described, would be  
concerned about any perceived, or misperceived, notion of censorship. As  
you know, review of manuscripts before publication is a discipline which  
the Bahá’í community applies to its own members as a temporary necessity,  
for it is anticipated that in due time this practice will cease. The reason is  
simple: At this early stage in the development of the Bahá’í Faith, which is  
striving against great odds to establish itself in a world that is highly critical,  
often antagonistic towards new ideas, and whose communications media  
tend to emphasize negative information, it is important that Bahá’í authors,  
scriptwriters and filmmakers endeavor to present the Faith with accuracy  
and dignity. It is one thing for a non-Bahá’í to make erroneous statements  
about the Faith; this can be excused on the basis of ignorance. But for a

Bahá’í to make such errors is quite a different thing, because he is considered  
to be knowledgeable about that which he espouses.

72.3 Therefore, a Bahá’í author is expected to ensure to the extent possible a  
correct representation of the Faith in his work; as an aid he draws upon the  
reviewing facilities provided by Bahá’í institutions. A great many authors  
spontaneously and informally submit their manuscripts to a type of review,  
although they would not necessarily call it that, when they request the com-  
ments and criticisms of persons whose expertise and judgment they respect.  
Submission to Bahá’í review is no greater a requirement, and may well be  
less demanding in most cases, than the rigorous review of scientific papers  
before their publication. In the same way that scientists have acceded to the  
discipline of review in the interest of ensuring the precision and integrity  
of their dissertations, Bahá’í authors respect the function of review in the  
Bahá’í community.

72.4 The Bahá’í Faith makes very serious claims and has a rich and complex  
history, but it is as yet a young religion whose precepts are not widely under-  
stood. It has been undergoing severe persecution in the land of its birth and  
is experiencing serious opposition in other places where its detractors have  
no compunction in misrepresenting its purposes. Until its history, teachings  
and practices are well known throughout the world, it will be necessary for  
the Bahá’í community to make efforts within itself to present correct infor-  
mation about the Faith in books, films or other media. This can and must  
be done without violating the principle of freedom of expression, which,  
according to the teachings of the Faith, is a vital right of all persons.

72.5 It is not necessary for Bahá’í authors to make an issue of the function of  
review with others with whom they wish to collaborate, because it is not  
required of non-Bahá’ís, though they can, if they wish, call upon Bahá’í  
reviewing facilities when dealing with Bahá’í topics. Although the function  
of review in the Bahá’í community is concerned with checking an author’s  
exposition of the Faith and its teachings, this function is not to be confused  
with evaluation of the literary merit of a work or of its value as a publica-  
tion, which are normally the prerogative of the publisher. With or without  
review, the work presented by a Bahá’í to a non-Bahá’í collaborator will, it is  
presumed, be judged by that collaborator on its merits.

72.6 The House of Justice hopes that these points will clarify your thoughts  
on the function of review in the Bahá’í community.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

73  
Encouraging the holding of Feasts

26 SEPTEMBER 1989

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

73.1 The International Teaching Center has recently asked the Universal  
House of Justice about the possibility of direct involvement of Auxiliary  
Board members and their assistants in encouraging the holding of Nineteen  
Day Feasts in communities where the Local Spiritual Assembly is not exer-  
cising its responsibilities in this regard. The House of Justice responded as  
follows.

73.1a As you rightly point out, in many such communities the fostering  
of the Feast is an effective aid to community development. Feasts may,  
in turn, lead to other activities such as children’s classes, and gradually  
help in the activation of the Local Assembly. Assistants may therefore  
assume the important role of encouraging the believers to gather for  
the Feast as an interim measure when the Local Spiritual Assembly is  
not functioning, although the Nineteen Day Feast can be an official  
administrative occasion only when there is a Local Spiritual Assembly  
to take charge of it. Indeed groups, spontaneous gatherings of the  
friends, and even isolated believers may certainly observe the Feast.

73.1b It should nevertheless be borne in mind that the goal is for the  
Local Assembly to be strengthened in order that it may itself assume  
responsibility to conduct the Feast.

73.2 It would be appropriate for you to consult with the Counselors about the  
matter. The Auxiliary Board members and their assistants can do a great  
deal to assist.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

74  
Passing of Roddy Lutchmaya, Continental Counselor

9 OCTOBER 1989

To selected National Spiritual Assemblies

74.1 DEEPLY GRIEVED SUDDEN UNTIMELY DEATH DEVOTED PROMOTER FAITH ROD-  
DY LUTCHMAYA. HIS INCESSANT INTENSIVE EFFORTS TEACHING FIELD MAURITIUS  
FROM EARLY YEARS ESTABLISHMENT FAITH THAT ISLAND, HIS LONG RECORD AD-  
MINISTRATIVE SERVICES ON NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY, CULMINATING IN HIS  
MEMBERSHIP ON BOARD OF COUNSELORS IN AFRICA, WILL ALWAYS BE LOVINGLY  
REMEMBERED. HIS HUMILITY, STEADFASTNESS, PERSEVERANCE UNFORGETTABLE.  
HIS REWARD ABHÁ KINGDOM UNDOUBTEDLY BOUNTIFUL. MAY RISING GENERA-  
TION BAHÁ’ÍS ISLANDS INDIAN OCEAN FOLLOW HIS NOBLE FOOTSTEPS.

74.2 PRAYING HOLY SHRINES PROGRESS HIS RADIANT SOUL. CALLING FOR SPECIAL  
MEMORIAL GATHERINGS MOTHER TEMPLE KAMPALA AND IN BAHÁ’Í COMMUNITIES  
THROUGHOUT AFRICAN CONTINENT. CONVEY RELATIVES HEARTFELT SYMPATHY.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

75  
Appointment of European Bahá’í Youth Council

20 OCTOBER 1989

To all National Spiritual Assemblies in Europe

75.1 Announce appointment first European Bahá’í Youth council with follow-  
ing members: Onno Frank van Bekkum, Morten Bergsmo, Nadi Hofmann,  
Alessandra Lanfranconi, John McGill, Bahiyyih Tahzib, Robert Weinberg.

75.2 Duties Council will include coordination those activities European  
Bahá’í Youth having continental impact; assistance and advice to Continen-  
tal Board of Counselors, National Spiritual Assemblies and National Bahá’í  
Youth Committees on matters related to Bahá’í youth activities; representa-  
tion of European Bahá’í youth on continental basis with non-Bahá’í youth  
groups and other agencies.

75.3 First full meeting Council scheduled for weekend 4 to 6 November 1989  
in London.

75.4 Hail this new development Bahá’í youth work, eagerly anticipate great  
enhancement potential for promotion Faith throughout continent. Praying

Holy Shrines outpouring divine bounties confirm initial steps assumption  
highly meritorious tasks.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

76  
Release of a compilation on conservation of the  
Earth’s resources

26 OCTOBER 1989

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

76.1 We enclose a copy of a new compilation entitled *Conservation of the  
Earth’s Resources*, which was prepared by the Research Department at the  
instruction of the Universal House of Justice for the purpose of assist-  
ing the friends in responding to the call, in the Riḍván message, for an  
increase in Bahá’í activities aimed at supporting endeavors to protect the  
environment.[[95]](#footnote-95)76-1

76.2 The compilation was assembled, primarily, to deepen the believers’ ap-  
preciation of the Bahá’í concept of nature and to enhance their understand-  
ing of both man’s relationship to nature and his responsibility to preserve  
the world’s ecological balance. It could also serve as a valuable tool for use  
with non-Bahá’ís who have some knowledge of the Bahá’í Faith and its  
approach to the solution of pressing social problems.

76.3 It is the hope of the Universal House of Justice that the National Spiritual  
Assemblies will make the material in the compilation available to the believ-  
ers and that, armed with increased knowledge of this important subject, the  
friends will be inspired to lend their assistance to those who are striving to  
make this world “an earthly paradise.”[[96]](#footnote-96)76-2

76.4 With great pleasure the House of Justice takes this opportunity to an-  
nounce the establishment of an Office of the Environment, which will  
conduct the external relations of the Bahá’í International Community with  
regard to environmental matters. Thus it will foster relations with the World  
Wide Fund for Nature and other like-minded nongovernmental organiza-

tions and will work in collaboration with the Office of Social and Economic  
Development. The new Office operates alongside the other offices of the  
Bahá’í International Community in New York, namely, the United Nations  
Office and the Office of Public Information.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

77  
Appointment of new Continental Counselor

30 OCTOBER 1989

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

77.1 The untimely passing of Mr. Roddy Lutchmaya on 25 September 1989  
left a vacancy on the Continental Board of Counselors in Africa. By the ap-  
pointment of Mr. Gilbert Robert of Réunion to membership of that Board  
we have now filled this vacancy.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

78  
Formalities of membership in the Bahá’í community

9 NOVEMBER 1989

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of the Hawaiian Islands

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

78.1 The Universal House of Justice received your letter of 2 October 1989  
about your laudable desire to simplify enrollment procedures and eliminate  
obstacles to new believers’ joining the Bahá’í community. It has asked us to  
send you the following reply.

78.2 First, the House of Justice does not believe that the By-Laws of a Local  
Spiritual Assembly are intended to imply by the term “voting membership”  
that there are two classes of membership in the Bahá’í community, except  
insofar as those under the age of 21 do not have the right to vote or serve on  
a Spiritual Assembly.

78.3 As you well understand, there is no universally applicable procedure that  
a new believer must follow in making a declaration of faith. In essence, it  
is simply the act of making it known to the Bahá’ís that he too believes in  
Bahá’u’lláh, accepts the Faith, and wishes to be recognized as a member of  
the Bahá’í community. The process of considering and accepting such a  
declaration by the institutions of the Faith or their duly appointed represen-  
tatives should follow as swiftly as possible. The procedure for this is left to  
the discretion of each National Spiritual Assembly, and can vary from area  
to area within the same country.

78.4 As you indicate in your letter, the process of issuing an enrollment card  
is a separate, purely formal, step that follows the above decision.

78.5 Whether a newly declared Bahá’í should be invited to attend a Nineteen  
Day Feast before his declaration has been accepted is a matter at the discre-  
tion of the Local Spiritual Assembly in light of the specific circumstances.  
For example, where feasible, could the Assembly not provide that, if a decla-  
ration is made so soon before a Feast that the Assembly has no time to meet  
to accept it, the officers would be authorized to welcome the new believer  
to the Feast unless they have some reason for doubting that the declaration  
would be accepted? In general it would seem to be better to show a lov-  
ing and welcoming spirit rather than to stand on a point of administrative  
procedure.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

79  
A National Spiritual Assembly’s relations  
with government

20 NOVEMBER 1989

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of Guyana

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

79.1 The Universal House of Justice has received your letter of 22 September  
1989 raising the question of your National Spiritual Assembly’s relations  
with the Government of Guyana, and it has requested us to convey the  
following.

79.2 In general, the manner in which the principle of non-interference in  
political affairs should be applied in Guyana depends upon your ap-

praisal of the situation. The subject should be discussed with the friends  
in such a manner that they will not only understand its import for them-  
selves, but will also see how they can positively and confidently explain  
it to non-Bahá’ís. The adherents of this Cause uphold the principles  
of loyalty and obedience to government, do not become involved in  
subversive activities, refrain from partisanship and do not join political  
parties. At the same time, as responsible citizens, they strive to promote  
the best interests of their respective nations and governments by making  
themselves productive, helpful members of society wholly committed to  
serving humanity for the love of God. Such considerations, while orient-  
ing the Bahá’ís to the attitudes they must adopt, should also allay the  
fears and suspicions of their non-Bahá’í fellow citizens, regardless of their  
political persuasions, concerning the outlook and intentions of the Faith.  
These attitudes should be neither offensive nor threatening to anyone. As  
the friends are seen increasingly to reflect them in their daily lives, they  
should gradually earn the respect and trust of all ranks and segments of  
society.

79.3 It is up to the National Spiritual Assembly to determine which posts and  
functions are “diplomatic or political” and which are “purely administrative  
in character” and “under no circumstances are affected by the changes and  
chances that political activities and party government, in every land, must  
necessarily involve.” While the former represent activities the friends must  
avoid, the latter functions are open to Bahá’ís. Indeed, such functions are to  
be welcomed by the friends as they constitute opportunities which enable  
them “to serve, in an unselfish, unostentatious and patriotic fashion, the  
highest interests of the country” to which they belong. (*The World Order of  
Bahá’u’lláh: Selected Letters*, rev. ed., p. 65)

79.4 To throw oneself into the maelstrom of political struggles or to withdraw  
utterly from any interest in the affairs of men outside the Bahá’í community  
are two extremes that must be avoided by every loyal Bahá’í. The true course  
is more difficult to follow, and requires wisdom and mature judgment. The  
general guidelines are given with great clarity by the beloved Guardian in  
“The Golden Age of the Cause of Bahá’u’lláh,” and can be found on pages  
64 to 67 of *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh* ….

79.5 The House of Justice will offer its prayers at the Holy Shrines for your  
guidance and for the reinforcement of your devoted endeavors.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

80  
Message to the International Teaching Conference  
dedicated to the Hand of the Cause of God  
Dr. Muhájir

28 NOVEMBER 1989

To the Friends gathered at the Teaching Conference dedicated to the  
memory of the Hand of the Cause of God Dr. Raḥmátu’lláh Muhájir

c/o The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of Ecuador

Dearly loved Friends,

80.1 As our hearts turn to your assemblage, we are moved to recall the re-  
markable spirit of Dr. Muhájir, whose presence is surely felt by all of you  
gathered on this occasion.

80.2 Dr. Muhájir was a man of vision, who had an extraordinary ability to  
recognize the practical needs of the community, but he was also a man of  
action, and his greatest dream was that the masses of humanity would soon  
awaken to the call of Bahá’u’lláh. He well understood that the greatest gift  
that Bahá’u’lláh has given us is the privilege to become instruments through  
which other souls are touched by His healing message. If we offer ourselves  
in the right manner, if we make selfless efforts, if we arise with love and  
with courage, then our services and sacrifices will be confirmed and many  
seeking souls will find eternal life. Thus the Cause of God will blossom  
before our eyes.

80.3 Dr. Muhájir has left a great legacy, and by the grace of God his earthly  
remains repose in Latin America, in a land and amongst a people that he  
loved so much. We earnestly pray that the memory of his indomitable spirit  
will inspire all of those present at this International Conference to arise and  
follow his noble example by offering enthusiastic and humble service during  
the yearlong teaching plan that has been dedicated to his memory.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

81  
Release of a compilation on the  
sanctity and nature of Bahá’í elections

10 DECEMBER 1989

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

81.1 The Universal House of Justice feels it is timely to release a compilation  
on Bahá’í elections as a useful tool to help National Spiritual Assemblies to  
increase the understanding of the believers regarding the nature and sanctity  
of these elections, and to prepare themselves for the expected rapid increase  
in the number of believers. A compilation entitled *The Sanctity and Nature  
of Bahá’í Elections* has been prepared by the Research Department, and a  
copy is attached.[[97]](#footnote-97)81-1

81.2 The study of this compilation will require careful and sustained planning  
by the National Spiritual Assemblies and Local Spiritual Assemblies, and it  
should become part of the ongoing program for the deepening of the friends  
in the fundamentals of Bahá’í administration. The House of Justice urges  
all National Spiritual Assemblies to discuss the implementation of such a  
program with the Counselors, so that the rank and file of the believers,  
with the wholehearted support of the Auxiliary Board members and their  
assistants, will appreciate the importance of adhering to Bahá’í principles  
in this regard, and carry out all Bahá’í elections, on the national as well as  
the unit and local levels, in an exemplary manner, in full harmony with the  
spirit of purity and sanctity which must characterize them.

81.3 The Universal House of Justice wishes to stress at this point how impor-  
tant it is for all delegates allocated to the National Convention to be elected  
and the desirability of having all the elected delegates attend this vital na-  
tional event. It has been noticed that, although attendance at most National  
Conventions is gradually improving, in several countries every year not all  
delegates are being elected, and in numerous instances, even when elected,  
they do not participate either in person or by sending in their ballots.

81.4 Be assured of ardent prayers in the Holy Shrines that your resolute efforts  
to improve the record of devoted and enthusiastic participation in delegate  
elections, National Conventions and Local Assembly elections will attract  
the assistance and blessings of the divine Concourse.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

82  
Message to the World Forestry Charter gathering

11 DECEMBER 1989

World Forestry Charter Gathering, Savoy Hotel, London

82.1 May the noble aspirations of those working to protect and restore the  
world’s forests, among whom Richard St. Barbe Baker was so outstanding  
an advocate, be given further impetus by the World Forestry Charter Gath-  
ering. May your actions become increasingly collaborative and unified in  
nature.

82.2 Efforts such as yours to reverse the deterioration of our natural envi-  
ronment reveal a growing awareness that solutions must embrace a global  
perspective in order to be effective.

82.3 “The earth,” as Bahá’u’lláh stated a century ago, “is but one country and  
mankind its citizens.”[[98]](#footnote-98)82-1

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

83  
Progress of the Mount Carmel projects

23 JANUARY 1990

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

83.1 KINDLY CONVEY ALL BELIEVERS NEWS PROGRESS HISTORIC MOUNT CARMEL  
PROJECTS.

83.2 FOLLOWING STRENUOUS DETAILED NEGOTIATIONS, TOWN PLANNING SCHEME  
ESSENTIAL FOR INITIATION OF PROJECTS WAS OFFICIALLY APPROVED BY LOCAL

TOWN PLANNING COMMITTEE AND CITY COUNCIL OF HAIFA ON 11 OCTOBER  
1989, CONFIRMING GOODWILL TOWARDS PROJECTS EXPRESSED BY CITY COUNCIL  
AT TIME INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION. SCHEME IS NOW BEFORE DISTRICT TOWN  
PLANNING COMMISSION FOR FINAL APPROVAL. THIS PLAN INCLUDES CANCELLA-  
TION TWO ROADS PREVIOUSLY APPROVED TO CROSS BAHÁ’Í LANDS, AND LOWER-  
ING LEVEL MAIN THOROUGHFARE THUS PERMITTING CONSTRUCTION TERRACES  
LINKING GARDENS SURROUNDING SHRINE BÁB WITH THOSE ADJACENT ARCHIVES  
BUILDING. GRANTING OF APPROVALS INVOLVES OUR COMMITMENT IMMEDIATELY  
START WORK.

83.3 GEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS ANNOUNCED RIḌVÁN MESSAGE, REQUIRED FOR  
DESIGN FOUNDATIONS BUILDINGS ARC, NOW COMPLETED.

83.4 BUILDING PERMIT DRAWINGS FOR ARCHIVES BUILDING EXTENSION AND CEN-  
TER FOR THE STUDY OF THE TEXTS SUBMITTED, ENABLING CONSIDERATION AP-  
PLICATION BUILDING PERMIT RUN CONCURRENTLY LAST STAGE APPROVAL TOWN  
PLANNING SCHEME.

83.5 OF $50,000,000 CALLED FOR AS ESSENTIAL RESERVE FOR INITIATION CONSTRUC-  
TION, APPROXIMATELY $26,000,000 SO FAR CONTRIBUTED. REMAINING SUM NOW  
URGENTLY NEEDED.

83.6 EXECUTION STUPENDOUS COLLECTIVE UNDERTAKING GATHERING MOMEN-  
TUM, PARALLELING EXTRAORDINARY DEVELOPMENTS WORLD SCENE, ACCELERA-  
TION CONVERSION PEOPLES CAUSE GOD, WIDER DIFFUSION MESSAGE BAHÁ’U’LLÁH  
REMAINING AREAS GLOBE. SUPPLICATING BLESSINGS ALMIGHTY REINFORCE EVERY  
EFFORT HIS DEVOTED FOLLOWERS ACCOMPLISHMENT VITAL TASKS.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

84  
Establishment of special Two Year Plan  
for Eastern Europe and Asia

8 FEBRUARY 1990

To the Followers of Bahá’u’lláh throughout the World

84.1 FAR-REACHING EVENTS BEING ENACTED WORLD STAGE, PARTICULARLY IN EAST-  
ERN EUROPE AND SOVIET UNION, ON THRESHOLD FINAL FATE-LADEN DECADE  
CENTURY OF LIGHT, PROVIDE FURTHER DRAMATIC EVIDENCE RESISTLESS OPERA-  
TION OF GOD’S MAJOR PLAN FOR TRANSFORMATION OF HUMAN SOCIETY. RAPID  
UNFORESEEN DEVELOPMENTS NECESSITATE CORRESPONDING PARALLEL ACCELERA-

TION IN LIFE-GIVING ENTERPRISES BEING PURSUED BY INHERITORS BAHÁ’U’LLÁH’S  
RESPLENDENT REVELATION.

84.2 REJOICE THEREFORE ANNOUNCE LAUNCHING AT RIḌVÁN OF SUBSIDIARY TWO  
YEAR TEACHING PLAN FOR VAST REMAINING REACHES EASTERN EUROPE AND ASIA.  
MOMENTOUS STEP INVOLVES FURTHER SYSTEMATIC UNFOLDMENT PROVISIONS  
TABLETS MASTER-PLAN OF ‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ ALREADY IN ADVANCED STAGE OF OP-  
ERATION OTHER AREAS PLANET. REGIONAL ENTERPRISE, CONCEIVED IN CONSULTA-  
TION INTERNATIONAL TEACHING CENTER, DESIGNED SIGNIFICANTLY REINFORCE  
CURRENT SIX YEAR GLOBAL PLAN. OBJECTIVES INCLUDE ATTRACTION NUMEROUS  
NEW SUPPORTERS FAITH, GREAT INCREASE TRANSLATION, PUBLICATION AND DIS-  
SEMINATION BAHÁ’Í LITERATURE IN REQUISITE LANGUAGES ENTIRE AREA, AND EX-  
TENSION BENEFICENT INFLUENCE DIVINELY APPOINTED ADMINISTRATIVE ORDER  
THROUGH ERECTION FRAMEWORK LOCAL NATIONAL BAHÁ’Í INSTITUTIONS IN AS  
MANY EASTERN COUNTRIES AS POSSIBLE UP TO AND INCLUDING RIḌVÁN 1992.

84.3 CALLING UPON THOSE NATIONAL ASSEMBLIES EUROPE, ASIA AND AMERICA  
WHICH BEAR PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITY FOR INDIVIDUAL NATIONS INVOLVED, TO  
CONSULT WITH COUNSELORS AND FORMULATE DETAILS SPECIFIC GOALS INCOR-  
PORATING AND SUPPLEMENTING THOSE ALREADY ADOPTED AND IN PROCESS  
ACCOMPLISHMENT UNDER SIX YEAR PLAN. MOVED PAY TRIBUTE PRESENT HOUR  
REMARKABLE UNSUNG ACHIEVEMENTS THOSE INSTITUTIONS AND INDIVIDUAL  
BELIEVERS PRESENTLY LABORING ADVANCEMENT CAUSE IN EASTERN EUROPE AND  
SOVIET UNION, ACHIEVEMENTS WHICH HAVE BLAZED TRAILS FOR COMING LARGE-  
SCALE INITIATIVE. CALL UPON BAHÁ’Í WORLD ARISE SUPPORT DIFFUSION WORLD-  
REDEEMING MESSAGE FAITH GOAL AREAS THROUGH SETTLEMENT PIONEERS AND  
THROUGH DESPATCH STEADY FLOW TRAVELING TEACHERS, ESPECIALLY THOSE  
WITH KNOWLEDGE LANGUAGES COUNTRIES AND REPUBLICS EASTERN BLOC ….

84.4 BROAD VISTAS NOW OPEN TO FAITH GOD PROVIDE UNPRECEDENTED OPPORTU-  
NITIES WIN FRESH VICTORIES AS WORTHY OFFERING SACRED THRESHOLD BLESSED  
BEAUTY OCCASION COMMEMORATION FIRST CENTENARY HIS ASCENSION COMING  
HOLY YEAR. IMPLORING ABUNDANT OUTPOURING DIVINE CONFIRMATIONS PAR-  
TICIPANTS ALL FACETS HISTORIC SIX YEAR CAMPAIGN.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

85  
Establishment of the Bahá’í Chair  
for World Peace

12 FEBRUARY 1990

To the Bahá’ís of the World

85.1 With feelings of thankfulness and joy we announce an achievement of  
immense importance to the accelerating progress of the Cause of Bahá’u’lláh.  
The University of Maryland and the National Spiritual Assembly of the  
Bahá’ís of the United States recently signed a memorandum of understand-  
ing, establishing “The Bahá’í Chair for World Peace” at that University’s  
Center for International Development and Conflict Management. The  
stated purpose of the Chair is “to conduct and publish research, design  
courses and conduct seminars in the field of Bahá’í studies and world peace  
within an interdisciplinary context; to initiate public forums for discuss-  
ing the issues proposed in the Statement of the Universal House of Justice  
entitled *The Promise of World Peace*; and to establish academic linkages with  
and provide technical assistance to Bahá’í institutions in the fields of peace  
education and international development.”

85.2 This first initiative by a well-founded, significant institution of higher  
learning to formulate such a serious program of Bahá’í studies is a direct  
response to the Peace Statement, as is borne out by a letter addressed to us  
by the Director of the Center for International Development and Conflict  
Management in which he said: “With this letter I am answering on behalf  
of CIDCM and the University of Maryland your call: ‘If the Bahá’í experi-  
ence can contribute in whatever measure to reinforcing hope in the unity of  
the human race, we are happy to offer it as a model for study.’”

85.3 Fully cognizant of Bahá’u’lláh’s praise of knowledge as “wings to man’s  
life” and of the importance which He assigns to its acquisition; of ‘Abdu’l-  
Bahá’s advice that we should “seek to impart the Message to influential per-  
sons and become a cause of guidance to the learned and distinguished”; and  
of Shoghi Effendi’s call for a “resolute attempt” to reinforce measures “for  
the establishment of closer contact with the leaders of public thought, with  
colleges and universities,” we hail this seminal development both as a mark  
of the Faith’s emergence from obscurity and as the harbinger of that day  
when hosts of scholars will devote their energies to the exploration, exposi-  
tion and defense of the dynamic principles animating the World Order of

Bahá’u’lláh, thereby fulfilling the need identified by the beloved Guardian  
for “well-read and well-educated people, capable of correlating our teach-  
ings to the current thoughts of the leaders of society.”[[99]](#footnote-99)85-1 On that day, we  
shall witness an expansion and consolidation of the community as has not  
yet been experienced.

85.4 May the Blessed Beauty enable the new Bahá’í Chair for World Peace to  
achieve its laudable purpose; may He shower upon all who support it His  
abundant confirmations.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

86  
Fiftieth anniversary of the passing of May Maxwell

22 FEBRUARY 1990

The Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of Argentina

86.1 EXTEND HEARTFELT GREETINGS INTERNATIONAL GATHERING COMMEMORATING  
FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY PASSING MASTER’S BELOVED HANDMAID DISTINGUISHED  
DISCIPLE MAY MAXWELL. SOLEMN OCCASION EVOKES MEMORIES MAGNETIC IN-  
FLUENCE EXERTED UPON HER BY ‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ COURSE HER VISIT ‘AKKÁ COM-  
PANY FIRST GROUP WESTERN PILGRIMS. BRILLIANT RECORD HER UNFORGETTABLE  
ACHIEVEMENTS CROWNED PRICELESS HONOR MARTYR’S DEATH DESTINED REMAIN  
FOREVER IDENTIFIED WITH SPIRITUAL AWAKENING LATIN PEOPLES BOTH OLD  
AND NEW WORLDS. HER GLORIOUS SACRIFICE FORGED VITAL IMPERISHABLE LINK  
BETWEEN CHIEF EXECUTORS DIVINE PLAN IN LAND HER BIRTH, THEIR PRINCIPAL  
ALLY IN HER ADOPTED CANADIAN HOMELAND, AND THEIR RIGHTFUL ASSOCIATES  
IN LATIN AMERICA, SCENE OF HER FINAL EXPLOITS. HOPE EXPRESSED BY SHOGHI  
EFFENDI THAT HER NOBLE EXAMPLE WOULD INSPIRE OTHERS ARISE FOLLOW IN  
HER FOOTSTEPS AND THUS GLADDEN HER SOUL ABHÁ KINGDOM ABUNDANTLY  
REALIZED BY DYNAMIC EPOCH-MAKING SERVICES BELIEVERS WESTERN HEMISPHERE  
DURING FIVE DECADES SINCE HER PASSING. SINGULAR ACCOMPLISHMENTS LATIN  
AMERICAN BELIEVERS BOTH AT HOME AND IN FOREIGN FIELDS CONSTITUTE MEM-  
ORABLE CHAPTER HISTORY THIS PERIOD FORMATIVE AGE FAITH. THEIR PRESENT  
GROWING INVOLVEMENT WITH TEACHING VICTORIES IN AFRICA AND EASTERN  
EUROPE AS WELL AS WORTHY SERVICES OF SOUTH AND CENTRAL AMERICAN BE-

LIEVERS WORLD CENTER FAITH FURTHER ENHANCE THEIR NOTABLE CONTRIBU-  
TION ADVANCEMENT CAUSE LORD OF HOSTS. MAY CONFERENCE HELD CLOSE  
PROXIMITY HER ILLUMINED RESTING-PLACE AND BLESSED THROUGH PRESENCE  
AND INSPIRATION MRS. MAXWELL’S HIGHLY ESTEEMED DAUGHTER HAND CAUSE  
GOD AMATU’L-BAHÁ RÚḤÍYYIH KHÁNUM RELEASE NEW WAVES SPIRITUAL ENERGY  
CHARGE PARTICIPANTS FULLER VISION IMPLICATIONS MOMENTOUS WORLD MIS-  
SION LATIN AMERICAN BAHÁ’ÍS AS IMPLIED BAHÁ’U’LLÁH’S CALL TO PRESIDENTS  
AMERICAN REPUBLICS IN HIS MOST HOLY BOOK. ARDENTLY SUPPLICATING HOLY  
SHRINES FRESH OUTPOURINGS SUSTAINING GRACE ENABLE FRIENDS WIN EVER  
GREATER PRIZES REMAINING MONTHS SIX YEAR PLAN.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

87  
Passing of the Hand of the Cause of God Jalal Khazeh

25 FEBRUARY 1990

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

To all Hands of the Cause of God

To all Boards of Counselors

87.1 DEEPLY GRIEVED ANNOUNCE PASSING STAUNCH TIRELESS PROMOTER FAITH  
HAND CAUSE GOD JALAL KHAZEH. HIS STRENUOUS ENDEAVORS CRADLE FAITH  
HOLY LAND LATIN AMERICA AND WORLDWIDE TRAVELS AFTER PASSING BELOVED  
GUARDIAN SET SHINING EXAMPLE OF UNSHAKEABLE DEDICATION AND COURAGE,  
OF UNDEVIATING LOYALTY AND PERSEVERANCE. IMPERISHABLE RECORD HIS STER-  
LING SERVICES AS GIFTED TEACHER DEFENDER CAUSE NEVER TO BE FORGOTTEN.  
HIS NOBLE SPIRIT NOW ABHÁ KINGDOM WILL UNDOUBTEDLY INTERCEDE BEHALF  
PERSIAN BAHÁ’Í COMMUNITY WHOSE VITAL INTERESTS HE SERVED WITH SUCH  
HIGH DISTINCTION OVER SEVERAL DECADES. FERVENTLY PRAYING HOLY SHRINES  
FOR PROGRESS HIS ILLUMINED SOUL IN REALMS ON HIGH. ADVISE FRIENDS EVERY-  
WHERE HOLD BEFITTING MEMORIAL GATHERINGS HIS HONOR PARTICULARLY ALL  
HOUSES OF WORSHIP.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

88  
Appointment of Continental Pioneer Committees

17 APRIL 1990

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

88.1 The Universal House of Justice has reviewed the membership of all Con-  
tinental Pioneer Committees and has made new appointments. The list of  
members is attached, along with statements of the present-day purpose and  
character of the Committees and of their functions.

88.2 These Committees stand ready to help you with any problems you may  
have in planning the travels of teachers or the settlement of pioneers, and  
you are urged to make full use of their services. You should especially note  
the provisions which have been made for access to the International Depu-  
tization Fund in the financing of budgets for teachers and pioneers when  
necessary.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

Continental Pioneer Committees

A statement on their present-day purpose and character

(January 1990)

88.3 Attached to this statement is a list of the functions of the Continental  
Pioneer Committees, as revised to reflect the current stage in the develop-  
ment of these Committees, the growing needs and opportunities of the  
Faith in the fields of pioneering (long-term and short-term) and traveling  
teaching, the increasing importance of close collaboration between the  
Committees and the Continental Counselors, and the cooperation of both  
with the National Spiritual Assemblies.

88.4 With the rapid increase of opportunities opening at this period all over  
the world for teaching the Faith to the masses of humanity, it has become  
essential that all possible measures be taken to ensure the swift, effective  
mobilization of pioneers, both long-term and short-term, and of interna-  
tional traveling teachers to meet the needs of every national community.  
The Continental Pioneer Committees serve as agencies, supplemental to  
the direct involvement of National Spiritual Assemblies in sending and re-  
ceiving such manpower, by which every believer who arises for the service of

Bahá’u’lláh may be sure of receiving the prompt, comprehensive guidance  
and assistance which he may need in carrying out his intention.

88.5 If pioneers and traveling teachers are to enter the field of service as rap-  
idly, continuously, and effectively as the current historic hour demands, it is  
vital that the believers and institutions concerned are fully conversant with  
those instruments which have been created to serve their needs and with  
the methods and lines of communication which should be utilized. The  
Continental Pioneer Committees are one such instrument. This statement  
is designed to clarify their specific role in the process, to define their areas of  
responsibility, and to stipulate the resources at their disposal.

88.6 The functions of the Continental Pioneer Committees have been modi-  
fied to relieve the Committees, to some extent, of the information-gathering  
duties formerly assigned to them, to focus more on their duties as executive  
agencies in charge of facilitating pioneer and traveling teaching projects,  
to stress again to both the Committees and the Continental Boards of  
Counselors that close, creative interaction between the two institutions is an  
indispensable element in the application of the manpower resources of the  
Cause to the requirements of national Bahá’í communities, and to remind  
the National Spiritual Assemblies that they have access to the services of  
the International Teaching Center and the International Deputization Fund  
through the channel of the Continental Pioneer Committees and that these  
Committees are ever ready to assist them in the settlement of pioneers and  
the implementation of traveling teaching projects.

88.7 It is our particular hope that from time to time it may be possible for  
either the full membership, or at least the Secretary, of each Continental  
Pioneer Committee to meet with the Continental Board of Counselors  
in its region for consultation concerning the needs and possibilities of the  
continent in regard to pioneers and traveling teachers. The purpose of such  
consultation would be to ensure that areas where manpower is needed are  
quickly identified and all possible steps are taken to fill these needs. The  
Continental Boards of Counselors, with the Auxiliary Board members and  
the Continental Pioneer Committees, should likewise be alert to the need  
of cooperation with National Spiritual Assemblies in the orientation and  
briefing of pioneers and traveling teachers.

88.8 The Continental Pioneer Committees have been granted funds by the  
International Teaching Center with which to initiate or support traveling  
teaching projects which they themselves see are useful and needed. In ad-  
dition, they constitute the correct avenue by means of which the National

Spiritual Assemblies can apply for assistance from the International Deputi-  
zation Fund for the support of either pioneer or traveling teaching projects.  
It is particularly important that this function of the Continental Pioneer  
Committees in regard to budgetary assistance be fully understood by both  
the National Spiritual Assemblies and the believers generally, especially in-  
sofar as it relates to the newly instituted short-term pioneer projects.

88.9 In the past, some of the Continental Pioneer Committees have found it  
useful to appoint a small number of regional representatives, in key distant  
locations of their continent, who have assisted them in the prompt discharge  
of their duties. This possibility is still open for the Committees to explore.

88.10 One of the most important aspects of this subject is the requirement  
for the rapid and accurate exchange of information needed to facilitate the  
movement and utilization of those believers who wish to join the ranks  
of pioneers and traveling teachers. The Continental Pioneer Committees  
require the full support and prompt cooperation of both the Continental  
Boards of Counselors and the National Spiritual Assemblies in the discharge  
of their vital functions. In turn, these institutions should be able to depend  
on the reliability, experience, and knowledge of the Continental Pioneer  
Committees.

89  
Deputizing pioneers for the end of the Six Year Plan

20 APRIL 1990

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

89.1 Twenty-five years ago, when the International Deputization Fund was  
established in the Holy Land by the Universal House of Justice and the  
friends were invited to contribute to it in support of pioneering and travel-  
ing teaching projects throughout the world, these illuminating words of  
Bahá’u’lláh were quoted:

89.1a Center your energies in the propagation of the Faith of God. Whoso is  
worthy of so high a calling, let him arise and promote it. Whoso is un-  
able, it is his duty to appoint him who will, in his stead, proclaim this  
Revelation, whose power hath caused the foundations of the mighti-

est structures to quake, every mountain to be crushed into dust, and  
every soul to be dumbfounded ….[[100]](#footnote-100)89-1

It is clear from this injunction of Bahá’u’lláh’s that the primary responsibil-  
ity to promote the propagation of the Faith of God rests on the individual  
believer. It is, likewise, his responsibility, if he is unable to discharge this  
duty, to appoint one who will, in his stead, proclaim this Revelation.

89.2 Many of the friends have, ever since these words were revealed by  
Bahá’u’lláh, succeeded in responding to the call. A great number have not  
found it easy to select suitable and qualified deputies willing to undertake  
such a task for them.

89.3 We feel that the time has come, as the Bahá’í world is rapidly moving  
towards the end of the Six Year Plan, for National Spiritual Assemblies to  
take an active part in facilitating the selection and appointment of suitable  
pioneers and traveling teachers, by providing a link between those wishing  
to deputize, and those qualified and ready to be deputized. The manner in  
which this objective can be achieved is left to the discretion of each National  
Spiritual Assembly, which should consider the conditions of its national  
community, and determine, preferably in consultation with the Counselors  
or their representatives, the wisest and most effective course of action to  
follow. It is hoped that whatever procedures are adopted, they will assist the  
friends to fulfill their responsibilities, to the extent possible, in the manner  
prescribed by Bahá’u’lláh.

89.4 The way is, of course, always open for the friends to use the International  
Deputization Fund as the vehicle of their compliance with Bahá’u’lláh’s in-  
junction. Thus, those who are unable, or find it difficult, to identify suitable  
candidates to be designated as their deputies are able to send their contribu-  
tions to the International Deputization Fund on a regular basis in order to  
fulfill their sacred obligation for the promotion of the teaching work.

89.5 Responsibility for the administration of this Fund has been assigned to  
the International Teaching Center and, in its turn, the Teaching Center  
makes specific allocations through the Continental Pioneer Committees,  
whose memberships have recently been renewed and made known to the  
friends. A few months ago short-term pioneer projects were announced and

the concept of short-term pioneers has been received with great excitement  
by the friends everywhere. Whenever supplementary funds are needed to as-  
sist in the prosecution of these projects, or to finance long-term pioneering  
and traveling teaching projects, application could be made to the Interna-  
tional Deputization Fund. National Spiritual Assemblies, therefore, could  
work out cost estimates of projects needing financial support, and submit  
their requests for budget assistance to the Continental Pioneer Committees.

89.6 The occasion demands that the followers of Bahá’u’lláh should whole-  
heartedly, with fresh enthusiasm and renewed dedication, step into this  
arena of service. It is our hope and prayer that through such universal  
participation in this mighty endeavor, those whose circumstances do not  
enable them at this time to fulfill the Beloved’s call, as clearly enunciated  
in His celebrated passage quoted above, will discharge their obligation by  
contributing to the International Deputization Fund, thus providing the  
means whereby others may propel the remaining stages of the Six Year Plan  
to a triumphant conclusion.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

90  
Riḍván Message 1990

RIḌVÁN 1990

To the Bahá’ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

90.1 Having ended a year of momentous achievements, we stand at the  
threshold of the last decade of this radiant twentieth century facing an im-  
mediate future of immense challenges and dazzling prospects. The swiftness  
of events during the past year is indicative of the acceleration, as the hun-  
dredth anniversary of Bahá’u’lláh’s Ascension approaches, of the spiritual  
forces released with the advent of His revolutionizing mission. It is an accel-  
eration which, in its suddenness and wide transformational impact on social  
thought and on political entities, has aroused feelings of delight as to its  
immediate effects and of bewilderment as to its real meaning and destined  
outcome, prompting the astonished editors of an outstanding newspaper,  
finding themselves bereft of explanations, to attribute it to the workings of  
an “Invisible Hand.”

90.2 For the followers of Bahá’u’lláh throughout the world there can be no  
doubt as to the Divine Source and clear intention of these extraordinary  
happenings. Let us rejoice, therefore, in the wondrous signs of the benefi-  
cence of God’s abounding grace. The high level of teaching and enrollments  
reported last Riḍván has been sustained, and new fields of teaching have  
been opened from Eastern Europe to the China Sea. With the settlement  
in recent weeks of two Knights of Bahá’u’lláh in Sakhalin Island, the last  
remaining territory named by Shoghi Effendi in his Ten Year Global Plan  
entered the Bahá’í fold. The recreation last Riḍván of the Local Spiritual  
Assembly of ‘Ishqábád, the recent election of that of Cluj in Romania, the  
first new Assembly in the “East Bloc,” the reestablishment and formation  
this Riḍván of Local Spiritual Assemblies in other parts of the Soviet Union  
and in other countries of Eastern Europe—all these achievements and im-  
mediate prospects affirm our arrival at a significant milestone in the fourth  
epoch of the Formative Age. The Administrative Order now embraces a  
community of wider diversity than ever before. It is such prodigious devel-  
opments that prompted our recent announcement of a subsidiary Two Year  
Teaching Plan, now formally launched, to which we commend your urgent  
and active attention.

90.3 How staggering, how far-reaching have been the activities which pro-  
pelled the community in one short year towards this stage in its evolution!  
As we reflect on the wonders of Bahá’u’lláh’s confirmations, our hearts turn  
with love and appreciation to the Hands of the Cause of God everywhere,  
who, as the standard-bearers of that community, have ever upheld its bright  
emblems against the darkness of the times. With an indomitable spirit they  
persevere in fulfilling, under all circumstances and wherever they may be,  
their God-given tasks to stimulate, edify, and advise its widely scattered,  
rapidly multiplying members. In the face of the new situation in the Bahá’í  
world, we take joy in mentioning some instances in the past year of asso-  
ciation of Hands of the Cause with the developments in Europe and Asia.  
Amatu’l-Bahá Rúḥíyyih Khánum, in an extended journey to the Far East,  
represented the Universal House of Justice at the formation of the National  
Spiritual Assembly of Macau; spent time with the Knight of Bahá’u’lláh  
in Mongolia where subsequently the first native declared her belief in  
Bahá’u’lláh; and devoted much attention to the friends in different parts of  
the People’s Republic of China, where her film “The Green Light Expedi-  
tion” has been shown on television. Mr. Collis Featherstone focused much  
energy on reinvigorating the long-suffering friends in war-ravaged Vietnam.

At this very moment, Mr. ‘Alí-Akbar Furútan is visiting the USSR, which  
he was forced to leave during the persecution of the Faith there; now he  
has returned in triumphant fulfillment of a wish expressed to him by our  
beloved Guardian some sixty years ago.

90.4 Nor have the Counselor members of the International Teaching Center  
been slow in responding to opportunities to foster the climate of progress  
now evident in all quarters of the globe. Through the unified vision of  
growth to which they have called the Continental Boards of Counselors  
and their able, hardworking and self-sacrificing auxiliaries, a new vitality  
can be felt in the expansion and consolidation of the Faith throughout the  
world. The Continental Counselors deserve the deep gratitude of the entire  
Bahá’í community as they approach the close of their current five-year term,  
distinguished for their outstanding services.

90.5 Just as the community has extended its ramifications internally, it has  
also expanded its relations, influence and appeal externally in a variety of  
ways, some astonishing in their breadth and potential. A few examples will  
suffice: Through the newly established Office of the Environment, the  
Bahá’í International Community, on its own initiative and in collabora-  
tion with other environmental organizations, reinstituted the annual World  
Forestry Charter Gathering founded in 1945 by the renowned Richard St.  
Barbe Baker; since then the Office of the Environment has been invited  
to participate in important events sponsored by international organiza-  
tions concerned with environmental questions. The Bahá’í International  
Community has been involved in the work of the Task Force for Literacy  
under the aegis of UNESCO and was invited to participate in the World  
Conference on Education for All held in Thailand, where its representa-  
tive was asked to assume a variety of highly visible and important tasks  
which gave prominence to the Bahá’í community. Steps were taken, with  
the encouragement of a Fijian senior Government official, to open in Suva  
a branch of the Bahá’í International Community’s United Nations Office  
for the Pacific region. The University of Maryland in the United States  
announced its decision to establish “The Bahá’í Chair for World Peace” in  
its Center for International Development and Conflict Management, which  
will give rise to a great increase in academic efforts to examine the Cause of  
Bahá’u’lláh. At almost the same time the National Spiritual Assembly of  
India announced that an agreement had been reached to establish a Chair  
for Bahá’í Studies at the University of Indore.

90.6 The continuing efforts to secure the emancipation of the Bahá’ís of Iran  
evolved to a new stage. For the first time, a United Nations representa-  
tive was able officially to meet on Iranian soil with a representative of the  
proscribed Bahá’í community. The result was recorded in a report to the  
United Nations Commission on Human Rights, at whose recent session in  
Geneva a resolution on Iran mentioning the Bahá’ís was again adopted. In  
a corollary action of far-reaching importance the United States House of  
Representatives unanimously adopted a resolution calling for the emancipa-  
tion of the Iranian Bahá’í community and outlining steps to be taken by the  
United States Government towards this end; a similar resolution is before  
the Senate.

90.7 In the Holy Land, preparations for the execution of the building projects  
on Mount Carmel received a definite boost. It is a cause of deep satisfaction  
that, on the eve of Naw-Rúz, the District Town Planning Commission, after  
delicate and complex negotiations, decided to approve the plan submitted  
by the Bahá’í World Center. This paves the way for the ultimate issuance of  
building permits.

90.8 Beloved Friends: Merely two years separate us from the conclusion of the  
Six Year Plan and the beginning at Riḍván 1992 of the Holy Year, that spe-  
cial time when we shall pause to appreciate the tumultuous record of events  
which will have brought us to the Centenary of the Ascension of Bahá’u’lláh  
and to reflect with due solemnity upon the redemptive purpose of the life of  
the most precious Being ever to have drawn breath on this planet.

90.9 In anticipation of this high watermark in Bahá’í history, plans have been  
set in motion for two major world events: One, the gathering in the Holy  
Land of a wide representation of believers from around the globe to partici-  
pate in a befitting commemoration of that poignant consummation in the  
vicinity of the Most Holy Shrine. A component of this commemoration,  
symbolic of the transcendent and victorious influence of Bahá’u’lláh’s liber-  
ated Spirit, will be the depositing beneath the floor at the entrance door of  
His Shrine of a receptacle containing the illuminated Roll of Honor of the  
Knights of Bahá’u’lláh, a listing initiated by Shoghi Effendi during his Ten  
Year Plan of those intrepid souls who arose to conquer in the Name of their  
Lord virgin territories mentioned in that Plan. This will have brought to a  
fitting conclusion, after nearly four decades, an intention expressed by the  
beloved Guardian himself. The living Knights of Bahá’u’lláh will be invited  
to witness this occurrence.

90.10 The other event will be the Bahá’í World Congress to celebrate the cen-  
tennial of the inauguration of the Covenant bequeathed to posterity by  
Bahá’u’lláh as the sure means of safeguarding the unity and integrity of His  
world-embracing Order. It is to be convened in November 1992 in New  
York, the place designated as the City of the Covenant by Him Who is  
its appointed Center and Who anticipated that “New York will become a  
blessed spot from which the call to steadfastness in the Covenant and Testa-  
ment of God will go forth to every part of the world.”

90.11 Related events at the local and national levels will combine with these  
two primary occasions to give vent to the innermost sentiments of the  
Bahá’ís and to impress on the public the profound fact of the appearance in  
the world of the Lord of the Covenant and the aims and achievements of  
His sublime mission. Indeed, plans are in progress to mount an intensive  
campaign to emblazon His Name across the globe.

90.12 The friends everywhere must now orient themselves to the significances  
of these twin anniversaries. They must be spiritually prepared through  
prayer and study of the Teachings to obtain a deeper appreciation of the  
station and purpose of Bahá’u’lláh and of the basic meaning of His mighty  
Covenant. Such preparation is at the very core of their striving to effect a  
transformation in their individual and collective lives. Let all the friends—  
every man, woman and youth—demonstrate through the high quality of  
their inner life and private character, the unified spirit of their association  
one with another, the rectitude of their conduct in relation to all, and the  
excellence of their achievements, that they belong to a truly enlightened  
and exemplary community; that their Best Beloved, whose Ascension they  
will commemorate, had not suffered His life on earth in vain. Let these  
requisites be the standard of their efforts to teach His Cause, the hallmark  
of their homage to the King of Kings.

90.13 Our dear and valued co-workers: It is at such a time of profound antici-  
pation for us that world society finds itself in a critical phase of its transition  
to the character envisioned for it by the Lord of the Age. The winds of  
God rage on, upsetting old systems, adding impetus to the deep yearning  
for a new order in human affairs, and opening the way for the hoisting of  
the banner of Bahá’u’lláh in lands from which it has hitherto been barred.  
The rapidity of the changes being wrought stirs up the expectations which  
inspire our dreams in the closing decade of the twentieth century. The situ-  
ation is equally a bright portent and a weighty challenge.

90.14 It is portentous of the profound change in the structure of present-day so-  
ciety which attainment to the Lesser Peace implies. Hopeful as are the signs,  
we cannot forget that the dark passage of the Age of Transition has not been  
fully traversed; it is as yet long, slippery and tortuous. For godlessness is rife,  
materialism rampant. Nationalism and racism still work their treachery in  
men’s hearts, and humanity remains blind to the spiritual foundations of  
the solution to its economic woes. For the Bahá’í community the situation  
is a particular challenge, because time is running out and we have serious  
commitments to keep. The most immediate of these are: One, to teach the  
Cause of God and build its divinely ordained institutions throughout the  
world with wisdom, courage and urgency; and two, to complete on Mount  
Carmel the construction of the Terraces of the Shrine of the Báb and the  
remaining buildings on the Arc of the World Administrative Center of the  
Faith. The one calls for resolute, sustained and confident action on the part  
of the individual believer. The other requires a liberal outpouring of funds.  
Both are intimately related.

90.15 Over the last two years, almost one million souls entered the Cause. The  
increasing instances of entry by troops in different places contributed to  
that growth, drawing attention to Shoghi Effendi’s vision which shapes our  
perception of glorious future possibilities in the teaching field. For he has  
asserted that the process of “entry by troops of peoples of divers nations and  
races into the Bahá’í world … will be the prelude to that long-awaited hour  
when a mass conversion on the part of these same nations and races, and as  
a direct result of a chain of events, momentous and possibly catastrophic in  
nature, and which cannot as yet be even dimly visualized, will suddenly rev-  
olutionize the fortunes of the Faith, derange the equilibrium of the world,  
and reinforce a thousandfold the numerical strength as well as the material  
power and the spiritual authority of the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh.”[[101]](#footnote-101)90-1 We have  
every encouragement to believe that large-scale enrollments will expand,  
involving village after village, town after town, from one country to another.  
However, it is not for us to wait passively for the ultimate fulfillment of  
Shoghi Effendi’s vision. We few, placing our whole trust in the providence  
of God and regarding as a divine privilege the challenges which face us,  
must proceed to victory with the plans in hand.

90.16 An expansion of thought and action in certain aspects of our work would  
enhance our possibilities for success in meeting our aforementioned com-  
mitments. Since change, ever more rapid change, is a constant characteristic  
of life at this time, and since our growth, size and external relations demand  
much of us, our community must be ready to adapt. In a sense this means  
that the community must become more adept at accommodating a wide  
range of actions without losing concentration on the primary objectives of  
teaching, namely, expansion and consolidation. A unity in diversity of ac-  
tions is called for, a condition in which different individuals will concentrate  
on different activities, appreciating the salutary effect of the aggregate on  
the growth and development of the Faith, because each person cannot do  
everything and all persons cannot do the same thing. This understanding is  
important to the maturity which, by the many demands being made upon  
it, the community is being forced to attain.

90.17 The Order brought by Bahá’u’lláh is intended to guide the progress and  
resolve the problems of society. Our numbers are as yet too small to effect an  
adequate demonstration of the potentialities inherent in the administrative  
system we are building, and the efficacy of this system will not be fully ap-  
preciated without a vast expansion of our membership. With the prevailing  
situation in the world the necessity to effect such a demonstration becomes  
more compelling. It is all too obvious that even those who rail against the  
defects of the old order, and would even tear it down, are themselves bereft  
of any viable alternative to put in its place. Since the Administrative Order  
is designed to be a pattern for future society, the visibility of such a pattern  
will be a signal of hope to those who despair.

90.18 Thus far, we have achieved a marvelous diversity in the large numbers of  
ethnic groups represented in the Faith, and everything should be done to  
fortify it through larger enrollments from among groups already represented  
and the attraction of members from groups not yet reached. However, there  
is another category of diversity which must be built up and without which  
the Cause will not be able adequately to meet the challenges being thrust  
upon it. Its membership, regardless of ethnic variety, needs now to embrace  
increasing numbers of people of capacity, including persons of accomplish-  
ment and prominence in the various fields of human endeavor. Enrolling  
significant numbers of such persons is an indispensable aspect of teaching  
the masses, an aspect which cannot any longer be neglected and which must  
be consciously and deliberately incorporated into our teaching work, so as to  
broaden its base and accelerate the process of entry by troops. So important

and timely is the need for action on this matter that we are impelled to call  
upon Continental Counselors and National Spiritual Assemblies to devote  
serious attention to it in their consultations and plans.

90.19 The affairs of mankind have reached a stage at which increasing calls  
will be made upon our community to assist, through advice and practical  
measures, in solving critical social problems. It is a service that we will gladly  
render, but this means that our Local and National Spiritual Assemblies  
must adhere more scrupulously to principle. With increasing public atten-  
tion being focused on the Cause of God, it becomes imperative for Bahá’í  
institutions to improve their performance, through a closer identification  
with the fundamental verities of the Faith, through greater conformity to  
the spirit and form of Bahá’í administration and through a keener reliance  
on the beneficial effects of proper consultation, so that the communities  
they guide will reflect a pattern of life that will offer hope to the disillu-  
sioned members of society.

90.20 That there are indications that the Lesser Peace cannot be too far dis-  
tant, that the local and national institutions of the Administrative Order  
are growing steadily in experience and influence, that the plans for the  
construction of the remaining administrative edifices on the Arc are in an  
advanced stage—that these hopeful conditions make more discernible the  
shaping of the dynamic synchronization envisaged by Shoghi Effendi, no  
honest observer can deny.

90.21 As a community clearly in the vanguard of the constructive forces at work  
on the planet, and as one which has access to proven knowledge, let us be  
about our Father’s business. He will, from His glorious retreats on high,  
release liberal effusions of His grace upon our humble efforts, astonishing us  
with the incalculable victories of His conquering power. It is for the unceas-  
ing blessings of such a Father that we shall continue to supplicate on behalf  
of each and every one of you at the Sacred Threshold.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

91  
Commencement of work on extension of terraces  
on Mount Carmel

24 MAY 1990

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

91.1 WITH FEELINGS OF PROFOUND JOY ANNOUNCE TO FOLLOWERS OF BAHÁ’U’LLÁH  
IN EVERY LAND THAT ON MORNING OF TWENTY-THIRD MAY, ONE HUNDRED AND  
FORTY-SIX YEARS AFTER THE DECLARATION OF THE BÁB, WORK ON EXTENSION TER-  
RACES COMMENCED. THIS HISTORIC OCCASION MARKED BY VISIT HIS SHRINE AND  
SHRINE OF ‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ BY THE HANDS OF THE CAUSE OF GOD AMATU’L-BAHÁ  
RÚḤÍYYIH KHÁNUM AND ‘ALÍ-AKBAR FURÚTAN, THE MEMBERS OF THE UNIVERSAL  
HOUSE OF JUSTICE AND COUNSELOR MEMBERS OF THE INTERNATIONAL TEACH-  
ING CENTER WITH FARIBORZ SAHBA, ARCHITECT OF TERRACES AND MANAGER  
OF ARC PROJECT, TO PRAY FOR DIVINE CONFIRMATIONS ENABLE UNINTERRUPTED  
PROSECUTION THIS MAJESTIC ENTERPRISE. SUBSEQUENTLY DETAILED PLANS WERE  
VIEWED FOR LENGTHENING EASTERN WING OF MAIN TERRACE OF SHRINE, MAK-  
ING IT EQUAL TO EXISTING WESTERN WING.

91.2 GLORIOUS UNDERTAKING CREATION BEFITTING RESTING PLACE MARTYR-HER-  
ALD FAITH WAS ENVISAGED BY BAHÁ’U’LLÁH HIMSELF, WAS SOLEMNLY INITIATED  
BY ‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ, WHO RAISED WITH INFINITE PAINS ORIGINAL STRUCTURE AND  
PLACED WITHIN IT THE SACRED REMAINS OF THE BÁB, WAS VIGOROUSLY PURSUED  
BY SHOGHI EFFENDI, WHO COMPLETED CENTRAL EDIFICE, EMBELLISHED IT WITH  
BEAUTEOUS SUPERSTRUCTURE AND CONNECTED IT WITH MAIN AVENUE TEMPLAR  
COLONY THROUGH CONSTRUCTION FIRST NINE TERRACES, IS NOW ENTERING  
UPON CULMINATING PHASE ITS DEVELOPMENT THROUGH EXTENSION BEAUTIFI-  
CATION NINE EXISTING TERRACES AND CONSTRUCTION NINE MORE TO REALIZE  
MONUMENTAL CONCEPT REACHING FROM FOOT TO CREST HOLY MOUNTAIN.

91.3 CALL UPON FRIENDS EVERY LAND RALLY SUPPORT THIS SACRED ENTERPRISE  
NOW INSEPARABLY LINKED WITH ARC PROJECT EXPRESS BEFITTINGLY THEIR AWARE-  
NESS MAGNITUDE BOUNTY CONFERRED UPON MANKIND BY MINISTRY AND SACRI-  
FICE BLESSED BÁB, DEMONSTRATE THEIR COMMITMENT TO BAHÁ’U’LLÁH’S CALL  
IN TABLET OF CARMEL TO ESTABLISH UPON THAT MOUNTAIN SEAT GOD’S THRONE  
AND FULFILL, THROUGH THEIR GENEROUS CONTRIBUTIONS, ‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ’S AND  
SHOGHI EFFENDI’S VISION OF EFFLORESCENCE MIGHTY INSTITUTIONS FAITH ON  
MOUNTAIN OF THE LORD.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

92  
Completion of the restoration of the north wing  
of the house of ‘Abdu’lláh Páshá

19 JUNE 1990

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

92.1 REJOICE ANNOUNCE COMPLETION RESTORATION NORTH WING OF HOUSE OF  
‘ABDU’LLÁH PÁSHÁ IN ‘AKKÁ PERMITTING FIRST VISIT ADDITIONAL AREA THIS HOLY  
PLACE BY CURRENT GROUP PILGRIMS ON SEVENTEENTH JUNE. WING CONTAINS  
HALL IN WHICH ‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ HELD FEASTS AND OTHER GATHERINGS AND ALSO  
ROOM OCCUPIED BY SHOGHI EFFENDI DURING BOYHOOD, BOTH ROOMS BEFIT-  
TINGLY FURNISHED BY AMATU’L-BAHÁ RÚḤÍYYIH KHÁNUM.

92.2 JOYFUL EVENT COINCIDED LETTING CONTRACT MAJOR WORKS EXTENSION  
MAIN TERRACE OF SHRINE OF THE BÁB. THIS INITIAL STAGE CONSTRUCTION TER-  
RACES, COSTING APPROXIMATELY 550,000 DOLLARS, DUE TO BE COMPLETED IN  
FOUR MONTHS.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

93  
Passing of Hedayatoullah Ahmadiyeh,  
Continental Counselor

29 AUGUST 1990

To all National Spiritual Assemblies in the Americas

93.1 PROFOUNDLY DEPLORE TRAGIC CIRCUMSTANCES SUDDEN PASSING DEARLY  
LOVED, WHOLLY DEVOTED, INDEFATIGABLE SERVANT BAHÁ’U’LLÁH HEDAYATOUL-  
LAH AHMADIYEH. HIS CONSTANT PROMOTION SACRED CAUSE THROUGH HIS IN-  
TENSIVE IMMENSELY SUCCESSFUL INVOLVEMENT TEACHING WORK INCLUDING  
HIS AUTHORSHIP WIDELY USED TEACHING BOOKLET WAS AT CORE HIS DYNAMIC  
SERVICES AS CONTINENTAL COUNSELOR IN AMERICAS, AS MEMBER AND CHAIRMAN  
FOR MANY YEARS OF NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY BELIZE AND AS PIONEER DUR-  
ING HIS YOUTHFUL YEARS IRAN. OUTSTANDING ACHIEVEMENTS HIS EXTENSIVE  
TEACHING TRIPS THROUGH CENTRAL, NORTH AND SOUTH AMERICA WILL FOR-  
EVER BE ASSOCIATED WITH BRILLIANT CHAPTERS DEVELOPMENT FAITH THESE AR-  
EAS. DEEPLY SYMPATHIZE MEMBERS HIS BELOVED FAMILY WHOSE WHOLEHEARTED  
SUPPORT HIS ACTIVITIES WAS EXEMPLARY. PRAYING HOLY THRESHOLD THAT HIS

SOUL MAY RECEIVE RICH REWARDS MAY BE IMBUED WITH ETERNAL HAPPINESS  
THROUGHOUT DIVINE WORLDS.

93.2 ADVISING MEMORIAL SERVICES BE HELD TEMPLES PANAMA CITY AND WILMETTE  
AND IN COMMUNITIES THROUGHOUT AMERICAS IN HIS HONOR.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

94  
Release of a compilation on  
teaching prominent people

28 SEPTEMBER 1990

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

94.1 The Universal House of Justice draws to your attention that portion of  
the most recent Riḍván message in which the friends throughout the world  
are asked to focus on the need to attract people of capacity and prominence  
to the Faith. Because of the emphasis the House of Justice wishes the friends  
to place on this matter, the Research Department was asked to prepare a  
compilation of texts on the subject. The compilation is now ready and a  
copy is enclosed.[[102]](#footnote-102)94-1

94.2 It is the ardent prayer of the House of Justice that careful study of the  
passages included will assist the believers to appreciate the importance of  
fostering cordial relations with accomplished and distinguished figures,  
with people of capacity and with those occupying prominent positions in  
society. The aim of the believers should be to make of them friends of the  
Faith, dispelling any misconceptions they may have and unfolding before  
their eyes the vision of world solidarity and peace enshrined in the teachings  
of Bahá’u’lláh. The friends should be confident that the spiritually minded  
and receptive souls among such people will eventually accept the truth of  
the Bahá’í Revelation and join the ranks of its active supporters.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

95  
Passing of the Hand of the Cause of God  
Collis Featherstone

30 SEPTEMBER 1990

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

95.1 DEEPLY GRIEVED ANNOUNCE PASSING VALIANT HAND CAUSE GOD COLLIS  
FEATHERSTONE WHILE VISITING KATHMANDU, NEPAL COURSE EXTENSIVE JOURNEY  
ASIA.

95.2 HIS NOTABLE ACCOMPLISHMENTS AS STAUNCH, FEARLESS DEFENDER COV-  
ENANT, HIS UNCEASING COMMITMENT PROPAGATION CAUSE ALL PARTS WORLD,  
ESPECIALLY PACIFIC REGION, HIS UNREMITTING PERSEVERANCE FOSTERING ESTAB-  
LISHMENT LOCAL, NATIONAL INSTITUTIONS ADMINISTRATIVE ORDER, HIS EXEM-  
PLARY DEVOTION TO WRITINGS FAITH, HIS OUTSTANDING PERSONAL QUALITIES  
UNSWERVING LOYALTY, ENTHUSIASM, ZEAL AND DEDICATION, DISTINGUISH HIS  
MANIFOLD SERVICES THROUGHOUT MANY DECADES.

95.3 OFFERING PRAYERS HOLY SHRINES BOUNTIFUL REWARD HIS RADIANT SOUL  
ABHÁ KINGDOM. ADVISE FRIENDS EVERYWHERE HOLD BEFITTING MEMORIAL  
GATHERINGS, PARTICULARLY IN MASHRIQU’L-ADHKÁRS, RECOGNITION HIS MAG-  
NIFICENT ACHIEVEMENTS.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

96  
Means for assisting a traumatized world

24 OCTOBER 1990

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of Australia

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

96.1 The Universal House of Justice has received your letter …. We have  
been directed to convey the following on its behalf.

96.2 The several issues raised in your letter are best considered in light of  
the insights conveyed in the Bahá’í teachings about the manner in which  
the innumerable problems of an ailing society can best be resolved and its  
distressing condition ameliorated.

96.3 Bahá’u’lláh has stated in His Tablet to Queen Victoria:

96.3a That which the Lord hath ordained as the sovereign remedy and  
mightiest instrument for the healing of all the world is the union of  
all its peoples in one universal Cause, one common Faith. This can  
in no wise be achieved except through the power of a skilled, an all-  
powerful and inspired Physician. This, verily, is the truth, and all else  
naught but error.[[103]](#footnote-103)96-1

96.4 The well-being of humanity is a reflection of its spiritual state, and any  
enduring change for the better in its material affairs requires a change in its  
spiritual condition. For this reason the principal concern and contribution  
of the followers of Bahá’u’lláh is the spiritual transformation of human soci-  
ety, with full confidence that by this means they are making a most valuable  
and most fundamental contribution to the betterment of the world and the  
rectification of its many problems.

96.5 It is the responsibility of the institutions of the Faith to assist the believ-  
ers in their endeavors to acquire an accurate and profound understanding  
of the indissoluble connection between their efforts to propagate the Faith  
and consolidate its institutions and their commendable desire to contrib-  
ute to improvement in the quality of human life. They should realize also  
that their approach to the solution of the world’s problems will not be un-  
derstood, and may even be disparaged by the idealistic materialists whose  
labors are directed so assiduously to improvement in the material welfare of  
humanity, and to whom material good is the only standard by which the  
condition of society is assessed. The Universal House of Justice has stated  
on an earlier occasion that:

96.5a … most people have no clear concept of the sort of world they wish to  
build, nor how to go about building it. Even those who are concerned  
to improve conditions are therefore reduced to combating every ap-  
parent evil that takes their attention. Willingness to fight against evils,  
whether in the form of conditions or embodied in evil men, has thus  
become for most people the touchstone by which they judge a per-  
son’s moral worth. Bahá’ís, on the other hand, know the goal they are  
working towards and know what they must do, step by step, to attain  
it. Their whole energy is directed towards the building of the good,

a good which has such a positive strength that in the face of it the  
multitude of evils—which are in essence negative—will fade away  
and be no more. To enter into the quixotic tournament of demolish-  
ing one by one the evils in the world is, to a Bahá’í, a vain waste of  
time and effort. His whole life is directed towards proclaiming the  
Message of Bahá’u’lláh, reviving the spiritual life of his fellow-men,  
uniting them in a divinely created World Order, and then, as that  
Order grows in strength and influence, he will see the power of that  
Message transforming the whole of human society and progressively  
solving the problems and removing the injustices which have so long  
bedeviled the world.[[104]](#footnote-104)96-2

96.6 Such a perspective does not mean that Bahá’ís should avoid doing what-  
ever they can to help others and alleviate human distress, or that they should  
not associate with and support suitable like-minded organizations. On the  
contrary, the believers should, at all times, be alert to opportunities to do  
whatever is within their power to make the conditions of human life better;  
by this means they will manifest that commitment to action exemplified by  
the Master, will demonstrate the relevance of Bahá’í principles to the issues  
of contemporary society, and will attract the receptive and discerning to  
the Bahá’í teachings. In so doing they should keep clearly in mind that the  
ultimate purpose is to hasten the establishment and triumph of the Cause  
of Bahá’u’lláh within which resides the power to heal the ills of the world  
and to establish a world civilization.

96.7 Not only is the Bahá’í perspective unique, so too are the methods used  
by the believers to achieve their objectives. Unity and cooperation are im-  
portant values which should be the watchwords for activities in which the  
believers engage. As a consequence, Bahá’ís eschew the adversarial approach  
of dispute and confrontation, and seek rather the methods of consultation,  
with its commitment to informed discussion and mutual respect, and with  
its goal the achievement of consensus in the pursuit of truth. Bahá’ís aim  
to persuade others of the correctness of their views through their example  
and the use of reason, and shun the techniques of pressure, condemnation  
and abuse which are a deplorable feature of much of the present-day quest  
for social justice.

96.8 The injunction to avoid participation in political controversies, identifi-  
cation with political pursuits, or involvement in partisan political affairs is  
binding on all believers, whether they act as individuals or as representatives  
of the Bahá’í community. Within those bounds, there is a wide range of  
possible activities open to them in participating with other groups which  
aim to promote measures entirely in accord with the Bahá’í principles, such  
as improvement in race relations, the emancipation of women, conserva-  
tion of the earth’s resources, the promotion of world peace, and so on.  
The institutions of the Faith are generally subject to a greater restriction in  
the issues with which they would choose to identify themselves, since their  
involvement will necessarily have a direct implication for the reputation of  
the Faith and for its possible misrepresentation by its adversaries.

96.9 These considerations may be used to clarify the specific issues raised in  
your letter. For example, in light of the Bahá’í approach to the search for  
truth, it would not be proper for a Bahá’í to become involved in environ-  
mental activities which are confrontationist. The concern of the Tasmanian  
Bahá’ís for conservation is highly commendable, but they should be aided  
to find other, more productive, means to express this concern; a study of the  
recently prepared compilation on conservation of the earth’s resources may  
well be of benefit to them in this regard.[[105]](#footnote-105)96-3

96.10 In considering whether they should participate in coordinated campaigns  
such as letter writing, or signing petitions, Bahá’ís should be guided by their  
Spiritual Assemblies, and are encouraged to accept this guidance in a spirit  
of radiant acquiescence. The Assemblies should give careful consideration  
to the motives of the originators of the activity and the methods which are  
being used. Bahá’ís should avoid contention and strife, and are to be dis-  
tinguished by their honesty and fair-mindedness, and their respect for the  
rule of law. They should carefully avoid being involved in partisan activities  
which are sponsored by a political organization, and are warned to “beware  
lest they allow themselves to become the tools of unscrupulous politicians,  
or to be entrapped by the treacherous devices of the plotters and the perfidi-  
ous among their countrymen.”[[106]](#footnote-106)96-4

96.11 As your letter points out, there are instances where the Guardian endorsed  
Bahá’ís identifying themselves with protest activities on vital issues which the

Bahá’í teachings illuminate. It must be remembered that there is an important  
distinction between protest against attitudes and practices prevalent in some  
quarters of society and protest antagonistic to the government. The Bahá’í  
Faith directs its attention principally to the promotion of attitudinal change  
consequent to acceptance of the claim of Bahá’u’lláh, confident that the trans-  
formation of attitudes and values will, in due course, yield its fruit in measures  
which will resolve the problems with which humanity is now burdened.

96.12 The Universal House of Justice appreciates the serious attention you are  
giving to providing appropriate guidance to the believers as they seek to  
steer their course around the many hazards and pitfalls associated with this  
transitional stage in human affairs. Understanding the Bahá’í approach is  
facilitated by a deep appreciation of the implications of the World Order of  
Bahá’u’lláh, destined to evolve from the present-day Administrative Order;  
this divinely ordained system is an expression of the social reorganization  
of humanity far beyond the conception of present-day political and social  
movements whose aim is no more than to repair a lamentably defective  
order which is fundamentally incapable of meeting the needs of the new age  
into which humanity is being irresistibly propelled.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

97  
Appointment of Continental Boards of Counselors

25 OCTOBER 1990

To the Bahá’ís of the World

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

97.1 It gives us great pleasure to announce the membership of the Continental  
Boards of Counselors as from the Day of the Covenant, 26 November 1990.  
The number of continental Counselors remains at 72, but adjustments have  
been made in their geographical distribution in consonance with the devel-  
opment of the Faith around the world.

97.2 The membership of the Continental Boards of Counselors as now ap-  
pointed is:

97.2a **Africa (18 Counselors)**: Dr. Hushang Ahdieh (Trustee of the  
Continental Fund), Mr. George Allen, Mrs. Beatrice O. Asare,

Mr. Gila Michael Bahta, Mr. Kiser Barnes, Mrs. Parvin Djoneidi,  
Mr. Mehraz Ehsani, Mr. Friday Ekpe, Mr. Shidan Fat’he-Aazam, Mr.  
Kassimi Fofana, Mr. Hizzaya Hissani, Mr. Zekrollah Kazemi, Mr.  
Muhammad Kebdani, Mr. Daniel Ramoroesi, Mr. Gilbert Robert,  
Mrs. Edith Senoga, Mrs. Lucretia M. Warren, Mr. Wingi Mabuku.

97.2b **The Americas (17 Counselors)**: Mr. Eloy Anello, Mr. Gustavo  
Correa, Mr. Rolf von Czékus, Mrs. Jacqueline Delahunt, Dr. Wil-  
ma M. Ellis, Dr. Peter McLaren (Trustee of the Continental Fund),  
Mr. Shapoor Monadjem, Mrs. Linda Neufeld, Mrs. Ruth Pringle,  
Dr. William Roberts, Mrs. Isabel de Sanchez, Mr. Fred Schechter,  
Mr. Errol Sealy, Dr. Arturo Serrano, Mr. Alan Smith, Dr. David R.  
Smith, Mr. Rodrigo Tomás.

97.2c **Asia (17 Counselors)**: Dr. Sabir Afaqi, Mr. Burháni’d-Dín Af-  
shín, Mr. Faḍil Ardikání, Mr. Jabbar Eidelkhani, Mr. Bijan Farid,  
Dr. John Fozdar, Mr. David Huang, Mr. Abbas Katirai, Dr. Kim  
Myung Jung, Mrs. Lee Lee Ludher, Mr. S. Nagaratnam, Dr. Perin  
Olyai, Mrs. Rose Ong, Mr. Vicente Samaniego, Mrs. Kimiko  
Schwerin, Mrs. Zena Sorabjee, Mrs. Shantha Sundram (Trustee of  
the Continental Fund).

97.2d **Australia (10 Counselors)**: Mr. Ben Ayala, Mrs. Beatrice Benson,  
Mr. Afemata Moli Chang, Dr. Kamran Eshraghian (Trustee of the Con-  
tinental Fund), Mrs. Violette Haake, Mrs. Tinai Hancock, Mrs. Betra  
Majmeto, Mrs. Gayle Morrison, Dr. Sírús Naráqí, Mr. Bruce Saunders.

97.2e **Europe (10 Counselors)**: Mr. Louis Hénuzet, Mr. Foad Kazemza-  
deh, Mrs. Elisabeth Mühlschlegel, Mr. Patrick O’Mara (Trustee  
of the Continental Fund), Mr. Nabil Perdu, Mrs. Polin Rafat,  
Dr. Shapour Rassekh, Mr. Paul Semenoff, Dr. Ilhan Sezgin,  
Mr. Sohrab Youssefian.

97.3 The following eighteen devoted believers who are now being relieved  
of the onerous duties of membership on the Boards of Counselors will, as  
distinguished servants of the Cause, continue through their outstanding  
capacities and experience to be sources of stimulation and encouragement  
to the friends.

97.4 Mr. Suhayl Ala’i, Mr. Husayn Ardekani, Justice Richard Benson, Mrs. Is-  
abel de Calderón, Mr. Oloro Epyeru, Dr. Agnès Ghaznavi, Mr. Zabíhu’lláh  
Gulmuḥammadí, Mr. Robert Harris, Mr. Bharat Koirala, Mr. Lisiate Maka,  
Mr. Rouhollah Momtazi, Mrs. Ursula Mühlschlegel, Dr. Leo Niederreiter,  
Mr. Khudáraḥm Paymán, Mr. Masíḥ Rawḥání, Dr. Mihdi Samandari, U  
Soe Tin, Mr. Michitoshi Zenimoto.

97.5 We express to each and every one of these dear friends our heartfelt grati-  
tude and assure them of our prayers in the Holy Shrines for the confirma-  
tion of their highly meritorious and self-sacrificing services to the Cause of  
Bahá’u’lláh.

97.6 Throughout all the continents the influential and energetic services of  
the Counselors have demonstrated the progressive development of their es-  
sential sphere of operation. The effective manner in which they inspire both  
the believers and institutions with a greater sense of vision and direction; the  
extensive consultations they carry out with National Spiritual Assemblies in  
the prosecution of the objectives of the Six Year Plan; the part they play in  
the vanguard of believers addressing the needs of the supplementary Two  
Year Plan in Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union, Mongolia and China; the  
widespread support they offer to the consolidation efforts at the grass roots  
of the communities through the dedicated untiring efforts of their Auxiliary  
Board members and their assistants; the steady encouragement they lend  
to both the enrollment and deepening of youth and children; the gener-  
ous assistance they extend to the teaching work through the allocation of  
subvention funds to special projects and the publication and dissemination  
of Bahá’í literature and audio-visual materials—in all these activities we wit-  
ness the manifold evidences of the vital role exercised by these high-ranking  
officers of the Faith in the protection and propagation of the Cause of God.

97.7 We are calling upon the Counselors from all continents to gather at the  
World Center from 28 December 1990 through 3 January 1991 for a confer-  
ence to deliberate on the tasks and opportunities of the years immediately  
ahead, as we approach the end of the Six Year Plan and the observance of  
the Holy Year marking the Centenary of the Ascension of Bahá’u’lláh and  
of the inauguration of His Covenant.

97.8 It is our fervent hope that from this Conference will flow a stream of guid-  
ance and inspiration to the followers of Bahá’u’lláh in every land, reinforcing  
a hundredfold their endeavors to achieve the triumph of the Cause of God.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

98  
Formation of new Local Spiritual Assemblies in  
Eastern Europe and former USSR

12 NOVEMBER 1990

To the Followers of Bahá’u’lláh throughout the World

98.1 SEVEN MONTHS AFTER LAUNCHING SUPPLEMENTARY TWO YEAR PLAN REJOICE  
ANNOUNCE FOURTEEN LOCAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLIES IN SOVIET UNION, PLUS SIX  
IN ROMANIA WHERE THERE ARE NOW OVER 600 BELIEVERS, AND ONE LOCAL SPIRI-  
TUAL ASSEMBLY EACH IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA, HUNGARY AND YUGOSLAVIA. DEVELOP-  
MENT FAITH IN ALL THESE COUNTRIES AS WELL AS IN ALBANIA, BULGARIA, MON-  
GOLIA AND POLAND GOING FORWARD WITH EXTRAORDINARY SPEED, FORMATION  
MORE LOCAL ASSEMBLIES IN PROCESS OR EXPECTED SHORTLY.

98.2 IN HOLY LAND WORK ON TERRACE OF SHRINE OF THE BÁB PROGRESSING. RE-  
SERVE REQUIRED FOR COMMENCEMENT WORK ON ARC NOW REACHED $45,000,000:  
$29,000,000 FROM EARMARKED CONTRIBUTIONS, $16,000,000 THROUGH TRANSFERS  
MADE FROM CONTRIBUTIONS TO ḤUQÚQU’LLÁH AND THE BAHÁ’Í INTERNATIONAL  
FUND. IMPERATIVE FULFILL INITIAL GOAL $50,000,000 FORTHWITH, AND ENSURE  
ANNUAL CONTRIBUTION $20,000,000 FOR MOUNT CARMEL PROJECTS TO ENABLE  
WORK PROCEED WITHOUT INTERRUPTION.

98.3 CONFIDENT INVINCIBLE SPIRIT BAHÁ’U’LLÁH WILL ENABLE HIS FOLLOWERS EV-  
ERY LAND MEET CHALLENGE WORLDWIDE EXPANSION CAUSE AND INTERNATIONAL  
NEEDS OF THE FAITH AT WORLD CENTER.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

99  
Message to the Moscow Conference

21 NOVEMBER 1990

To the Friends gathered at the Moscow Conference

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

99.1 It is with a sense of joy and wonderment that we address you, the rep-  
resentatives of the Bahá’í communities throughout the USSR and of the  
National Spiritual Assemblies which have been given the awesome respon-  
sibility for raising up the Cause of Bahá’u’lláh in that vast area. The march  
of world events has utterly transformed the scene of your labors, presenting

you with formidable problems but with achievements and opportunities  
which must cause your hearts to sing with joy to the Almighty.

99.2 In the Heroic Age of the Faith many events occurred to link it with the  
peoples of Russia. We need but mention the offer of asylum extended to  
Bahá’u’lláh by the Russian Government prior to His banishment to Iraq;  
His Tablet addressed to Tsar Alexander II; the deep interest that the Cause  
aroused in Russian scholars and leading literary figures; the glories of the  
Bahá’í community which arose in ‘Ishqábád; the exemplary action of the  
members of that community in appealing for clemency for its persecutors;  
and the raising of the first Mashriqu’l-Adhkár in that city. A beginning  
which showed such promise was eclipsed by the restrictions following the  
First World War but, even in those dark days, the beloved Guardian saw  
clearly that it was but a temporary veiling of the light of this Revelation. In  
a letter he wrote in Persian to the believers in ‘Ishqábád on 11 January 1923  
we find these insightful words:

99.2a There is no doubt that the day will come when the very people who  
are now engaged in destroying the foundations of faith in God and  
promoting this baseless doctrine of materialism will arise and, by their  
own hand, snuff out the flame of this commotion. They will sweep  
away the entire structure of their unrestrained godlessness and will  
arise with heart and soul, and with hitherto unmatched vigor, to atone  
for their past failures. They will join the ranks of the followers of  
Bahá’u’lláh and arise to promote His Cause …. If the friends remain  
steadfast, and discharge their duties with loyalty and prudence, the  
veils of God’s inscrutable wisdom will be lifted and extraordinary  
events will be witnessed. The hosts of divine confirmation, fortified  
by the power of the Spirit will, in unimaginable ways and from unex-  
pected quarters, provide the means for the triumph of the Cause of  
our Self-Subsisting Lord, and in so doing will brighten the eyes of the  
faithful throughout the world.

And again, on 2 January 1930:

99.2b Russia will in the future become a delectable paradise, and the teach-  
ing work in that land will be carried out on an unprecedented scale.  
The House of Worship established in its very heart will shine forth  
with dazzling splendor, and the call of the Most Great Name will

reverberate in its temples, its churches, and its places of worship. We  
need to show forth patience and forbearance. In these momentous  
convulsions there lie concealed mighty and consummate mysteries,  
which will be revealed to men’s eyes in the days to come.

99.3 We have been blessed to see the beginning of the unfoldment of these  
mysteries, and to this generation has been entrusted the task of conveying  
the Message of Bahá’u’lláh to the many races and peoples of that land, and  
of raising up Bahá’í communities in its cities, towns and villages.

99.4 The society in the midst of which you are called upon to work is un-  
dergoing radical changes in every aspect of its life, changes which are but a  
concentration of the problems with which every country, and world society  
as a whole, is grappling. The underlying cause of this transformation is  
that this is the age of the Oneness of Mankind, and therefore every people,  
whether of the USSR or in other parts of the world, must find its way to  
the unity in diversity, the harmony of formerly conflicting elements, which  
Shoghi Effendi held forth as the goal towards which mankind is striving. On  
this theme he wrote on 11 March 1936 to the emerging Bahá’í communities  
of the West, directing their attention to the challenging statements made by  
the Founder of their Faith:

99.4a “A new life,” Bahá’u’lláh proclaims, “is, in this age, stirring within  
all the peoples of the earth; and yet none hath discovered its cause, or  
perceived its motive.” “O ye children of men,” He thus addresses His  
generation, “the fundamental purpose animating the Faith of God  
and His Religion is to safeguard the interests and promote the unity of  
the human race …. This is the straight path, the fixed and immovable  
foundation. Whatsoever is raised on this foundation, the changes and  
chances of the world can never impair its strength, nor will the revolu-  
tion of countless centuries undermine its structure.” “The well-being  
of mankind,” He declares, “its peace and security are unattainable un-  
less and until its unity is firmly established.” “So powerful is the light  
of unity,” is His further testimony, “that it can illuminate the whole  
earth. The one true God, He Who knoweth all things, Himself testifi-  
eth to the truth of these words …. This goal excelleth every other goal,  
and this aspiration is the monarch of all aspirations.” “He Who is your  
Lord, the All-Merciful,” He, moreover, has written, “cherisheth in His  
heart the desire of beholding the entire human race as one soul and

one body. Haste ye to win your share of God’s good grace and mercy  
in this Day that eclipseth all other created days.”[[107]](#footnote-107)99-1

Commenting on the implications of these momentous words, Shoghi  
Effendi states:

99.4b The unity of the human race, as envisaged by Bahá’u’lláh, implies  
the establishment of a world commonwealth in which all nations,  
races, creeds and classes are closely and permanently united, and in  
which the autonomy of its state members and the personal freedom  
and initiative of the individuals that compose them are definitely and  
completely safeguarded ….

99.4c A world federal system, ruling the whole earth and exercising un-  
challengeable authority over its unimaginably vast resources, blending  
and embodying the ideals of both the East and the West, liberated  
from the curse of war and its miseries, and bent on the exploitation  
of all the available sources of energy on the surface of the planet, a  
system in which Force is made the servant of Justice, whose life is sus-  
tained by its universal recognition of one God and by its allegiance to  
one common Revelation—such is the goal towards which humanity,  
impelled by the unifying forces of life, is moving.[[108]](#footnote-108)99-2

99.5 No one who contemplates the present conditions of the world, let alone  
of the USSR, could expect that such a consummation will come without  
great effort, without traversing manifold difficulties. But the mainspring of  
its achievement is the awakening of ever more human beings to the truth  
of the Message of Bahá’u’lláh, and their adherence to His Cause and His  
Covenant, the illumination of their spiritual and moral lives by the light  
of His Teachings, and the unification of their efforts through His Admin-  
istrative Order. Through their individual transformation and through their  
combined efforts they will transform the conditions of the world and bring  
to birth a new, worldwide civilization.

99.6 The culmination of this process lies in centuries ahead, but it is not in the  
end alone that joy is found. The true nature of the human soul is spiritual;  
it is the relationship of each soul to God and its kinship with every other

soul that brings true happiness and fulfillment. Our Bahá’í communities are  
still far from the perfection that Bahá’u’lláh desires for us, but it is in our  
loving support of one another, in our forbearance of each other’s failings, in  
our determination to develop and uphold the institutions which Bahá’u’lláh  
has ordained, in our spirit of love and of tolerance towards all people, and  
in our courage and perseverance through all difficulties, that we achieve the  
fulfillment of our lives.

99.7 Now, at this Conference, you are to consider the conditions of the Cause  
in your lands, to examine the possibilities before you and to recommend the  
courses of action that you deem to be most advantageous in the months im-  
mediately ahead. There are tasks to which you must now set your hands to  
prepare for the achievements of tomorrow. Do not permit the problems in  
your way to dismay you or deflect you from your goals; it is to overcome the  
problems of humankind that the Bahá’í community has been brought into  
being. Your vital task is to immerse yourselves in the study of the Teachings  
of Bahá’u’lláh, to enrich your spiritual lives and to discover thereby the  
best direction for your endeavors, to express them in your actions, and to  
convey them to those who thirst for guidance. You are the instruments of  
the purpose of God, the channels of His grace, the bearers of His Message,  
the holders of the key to the challenges of the age. Follow His guidance and  
the successes you will achieve will be an inspiration to your fellow-believers  
and the quickener of hope in the hearts of the people.

99.8 Be assured that as you arise for the promotion of His Cause, the confir-  
mations of Bahá’u’lláh will surround you, and you will witness the truth of  
these exalted words uttered by Him in His Most Great Prison:

99.8a Verily, We behold you from Our realm of Glory, and shall aid who-  
soever will arise for the triumph of Our Cause with the hosts of the  
Concourse on high and a company of Our favored angels.[[109]](#footnote-109)99-3

99.9 We shall pray ardently on your behalf in the Holy Shrines and eagerly  
await news of the outcome of your deliberations.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

100  
Suspension of pilgrimage program

3 DECEMBER 1990

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

100.1 Further to our letter of 8 October 1990, in view of the continued un-  
settled conditions in the Middle East, the Universal House of Justice has  
decided that pilgrimages to the Holy Land up to the end of March 1991  
should be canceled. The individual pilgrims scheduled for this period are  
also being informed.

100.2 For the same reason, the conference for the Counselors which was  
scheduled to be held in the Holy Land from 28 December 1990 through 3  
January 1991 has also been canceled. The House of Justice hopes it will be  
possible to convene such a conference at a later date.

100.3 The friends should not allow their concern about the situation in these  
regions to deter them from their efforts to promote the vital interests of the  
infinitely precious Faith of God.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

101  
Message to the Continental Boards of Counselors

20 DECEMBER 1990

To the Continental Boards of Counselors

101.1 On the occasion of the initial meetings of your newly reappointed Boards  
we express to each of your members our abiding love and esteem and the  
assurance of our fervent prayers at the Holy Shrines for your abounding  
success in this new term of service. It was with deep regret that we found it  
necessary to postpone your much anticipated gathering in the Holy Land.  
Despite this, we feel confident you will draw upon the challenge of the hour  
to charge yourselves with ever greater feelings of responsibility, to enliven  
your vision of the clear needs ahead, and to fortify your resolve to unflinch-  
ingly carry forward your far-reaching activities, keenly aware of the great  
role to which you have been called.

101.2 After some two decades of development, the vital importance of the ser-  
vices of the Counselors is appreciated by institutions and believers alike—  
a recognition which greatly enhances your possibilities. A brief period of  
fifteen months separates us from the end of the worldwide Six Year Plan  
and the supplementary Two Year Plan, and the opening of the Holy Year  
which will mark the hundredth anniversary of the Ascension of the Blessed  
Perfection and of the inauguration of His triumphant Covenant. Many  
objectives have already been attained. Much beyond our expectations has  
been accomplished. Numerous and extraordinary achievements still lie  
within our grasp. May the Counselors, at this urgent and propitious time,  
through both their inspiration and their example, sustained by the unfailing  
and energizing confirmations of the hosts on high, rouse and electrify the  
friends everywhere to perform such heroic and luminous deeds as will strike  
a worthy and commensurate contrast to the darkening agonies of a world in  
its travail, and bring the Bahá’í community to the conclusion of its current  
collective enterprise laden with undreamed-of victories.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

102  
Features of Bahá’í elections and administration

2 JANUARY 1991

To an individual Bahá’í

Dear Bahá’í Friend,

102.1 The Universal House of Justice has studied your letter … which contains  
proposals for a number of changes to Bahá’í electoral, judicial and reviewing  
procedures ….

102.2 The questions you have raised are worthy of the most serious consid-  
eration. Although they are specifically concerned with certain administra-  
tive procedures, they touch upon fundamental principles of far-reaching  
implications. To a significant extent the answers to them relate to the  
basic attitude we as Bahá’ís have both toward the nature of man at the  
advent of the coming of age of the entire human race, and toward the  
developmental processes of a world community in the initial stages of  
its formative age during the most critical time of transition from the old  
dispensation to the new.

102.3 The sense of our newness as an evolving community is underscored by  
the fact that at this very moment we are engaged for the first time in prepar-  
ing for the publication of the full text of our Book of Laws, the Kitáb-i-  
Aqdas, with annotations. This anticipated event indicates how much more  
we have to understand our fundamental laws before our institutions can  
proceed to lay down rules and regulations beyond those which are already  
in effect. The House of Justice feels that enough has been stated by the  
Guardian to enable the friends to cope for the time being with the problems  
you have cited. However, we are to convey the following comments on the  
various points of your letter.

102.4 For all its size—some five million members worldwide, the majority of  
whom have joined the Faith in the past 15 years—the Bahá’í community is  
still far from attaining the administrative maturity that would allow for the  
imposition, even if it were permissible, of certain rules. However acute your  
observations, they are based on a history limited in time and in experience.  
It bears noting that even though the systematic efforts of establishing the  
Bahá’í administration began some seven decades ago, a large majority of the  
current National Spiritual Assemblies (95 out of 151) came into existence  
only during the last 26 years and have emerged in communities the vast  
majority of whose members are not yet deeply grounded in the adminis-  
trative principles of the Faith. Ordinarily, a substantial proportion of the  
voting members of the communities do not regularly participate in Bahá’í  
elections. Moreover, because of the relatively small number of nationally  
active believers, the range of choice in many communities may seem to  
the conscientious voter to be limited in terms of the stated qualifications  
for membership on the National Spiritual Assembly. Given these facts, it is  
remarkable that at this stage in the development of the world community,  
National Spiritual Assemblies are successfully elected annually in accor-  
dance with basic Bahá’í principles.

102.5 You hold that for the National Spiritual Assembly of a country like Ger-  
many or the United States to be composed of almost the same members over  
many years is neither comprehensible nor advantageous. Change is indeed  
healthy for a living organism, as Shoghi Effendi pointed out, but he also said  
that change for change’s sake is unwise. Without defending any particular  
position, we feel it important to recognize that a period of no change in  
Assembly membership could be a stabilizing necessity for a community. A  
believer who had concerns similar to your own in his wish to see more rapid  
change in the membership of his National Spiritual Assembly suggested to

Shoghi Effendi two alternative solutions: (1) that only delegates would be  
eligible for membership on the National Spiritual Assembly; and (2) that no  
believer should serve more than nine consecutive years on a Spiritual Assem-  
bly, suggesting that after the lapse of one year the believer could be reelected  
for another period of nine years. The Guardian’s reply was conveyed in a  
letter written by his secretary on 6 July 1944:

102.5a Regarding your questions concerning the advisability of changing the  
basis of the National Assembly’s election and confining it to the body  
of delegates or of limiting the term of office: He feels that as any such  
changes are of a radical nature and should therefore also apply to the  
National Spiritual Assemblies of other countries they are inadvisable  
and premature, both for this reason and because of their very nature.

102.5b What is needed is to get the Administration in its present form  
to run more efficiently and at the same time to build up a higher  
sense of responsibility among the body of the believers. They should  
be encouraged to think more, not only about the qualifications of  
members of their elected bodies, but also about such things as you  
mention, the law of averages, the age and indisposition of some of the  
members, etc.[[110]](#footnote-110)102-1

102.6 With respect to the United States, your observation does not quite hold  
up if you consider the numerous changes in membership which have oc-  
curred in that country’s National Assembly over the last 30 years, and even  
in the last eight years when two-thirds of the membership has changed and  
there have been several changes of officers. Nor has the membership of  
the National Spiritual Assembly of Germany remained static: according to  
records at the Bahá’í World Center, during the last 12 years, there have been  
12 individual changes in that Assembly’s membership; today only one from  
the members of the 1978–79 Assembly remains on the body.

102.7 You contend that an elected body which has been formed in the same  
manner over many years conceals the danger of rigidity, immobility, in-  
sistence on tradition, etc. Such condition cannot indefinitely remain con-  
cealed if the body of the community with its many local entities and varied  
activities, including the Nineteen Day Feast, is functioning conscientiously.  
There is a direct relationship between the quality of the functioning of the

local communities and the condition of the National Spiritual Assembly,  
but the dynamics of this relationship have yet to be fully recognized in all  
national communities. In this regard the work of the Continental Coun-  
selors and their Auxiliary Boards is of particular relevance, since assisting  
Spiritual Assemblies to function properly is one of their duties.

102.8 There is a tendency on the part of the friends, because of its broad au-  
thority and overarching responsibilities, to concentrate unduly on the influ-  
ence, real or imagined, of the National Spiritual Assembly; however, little  
is appreciated of the latent vast and salutary effect which well-functioning  
local communities can exert on the development of the national commu-  
nity and thus on the very shaping of the National Spiritual Assembly itself.  
Some of the problems now evident in the composition and performance of  
National Spiritual Assemblies have their roots in weakness and malfunc-  
tioning at the local level, where the true character of the Faith has the widest  
latitude to express itself both in the corporate manner in which practical  
matters are dealt with and in the quality of the involvement and initiative  
of the individuals composing these communities. The ideal functioning of  
a National Spiritual Assembly and of the electoral system that sustains it  
obviously cannot be forced and must trust to development over time as  
experience is gained.

102.9 The Bahá’í system of elections provides the voter with a degree of free-  
dom unequalled by any other system; as a corollary, it restricts the free-  
dom of those called upon to serve. The voter is called upon to consider  
prayerfully the range of believers for whom he can vote, and then to vote  
only for those who best combine the necessary qualities, irrespective of any  
extraneous or material factors. Such an attitude, if dispassionately exercised  
by every voter at each election, should ensure that those elected are among  
those best suited, making allowance for lack of ‘perfection in the voters.

102.10 Your observation that the current system of Bahá’í elections can lead to  
a perpetuation of the same membership on a Spiritual Assembly is quite  
accurate, but the system is not bound by any requirement to reelect the  
same membership; it is as free to do so as it is capable of effecting gradual  
or radical change, depending solely on the voters’ perception of prevailing  
circumstances and conditions and of the needs of the Cause. Time and  
education of the friends will bring about corrections of any faults in the  
current operation of the electoral system.

102.11 The sacred nature of Bahá’í elections, especially as it is expressed in the  
freedom of conscience of the voters, is, of course, a major consideration

in any attempt to introduce rules such as you have recommended. A letter  
dated 4 February 1935 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual  
believer stresses the importance of such freedom and indicated that it

102.11a constitutes the distinguishing feature and the marked superiority of  
the Bahá’í electoral methods over those commonly associated with  
political parties and factions ….

(*The Light of Divine Guidance: The Messages from the Guardian of the  
Bahá’í Faith to the Bahá’ís of Germany and Austria*, p. 67)

Further, in a letter dated 14 May 1927 Shoghi Effendi described ways in  
which the voters should carry out their sacred responsibilities in electing  
members of Spiritual Assemblies:

102.11b I feel that reference to personalities before the election would give  
rise to misunderstanding and differences. What the friends should do  
is to get thoroughly acquainted with one another, to exchange views,  
to mix freely and discuss among themselves the requirements and  
qualifications for such a membership without reference or application,  
however indirect, to particular individuals. We should refrain from  
influencing the opinions of others, of canvassing for any particular  
individual, but should stress the necessity of getting fully acquainted  
with the qualifications of membership referred to in our Beloved’s  
Tablets and of learning more about one another through direct, per-  
sonal experience rather than through the reports and opinions of our  
friends.

[*Principles of Bahá’í Administration: A Compilation*, 1st Indian ed. (New  
Delhi: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1982), p. 47]

It is clear then that to adopt a rule limiting the eligibility of an Assembly  
member for reelection would limit the freedom of choice of the electors and  
would add an element completely discordant to the entire pattern of Bahá’í  
elections.

102.12 The question of limiting the terms of office must be considered in the  
same light, but a National Spiritual Assembly need not accept an untenable  
situation with regard to any of its officers. While the National Spiritual  
Assembly has no control over the composition of its membership, it does  
have control over the performance of its own officers and is free to discuss its

concerns if an officer is declining in his functions. If it becomes imperative  
not to reelect an officer, the members should not be inhibited by secondary  
considerations. If the disadvantage to the institution of reelecting an officer  
outweighs all other considerations, the members should not fail in their  
duty to act in the best interest of the Cause as conscience dictates. This  
requires moral courage. One of the virtues of secret balloting and non-elec-  
tioneering in Bahá’í elections at any level is the freedom afforded the voter  
to act privately and conscientiously, and it removes any need for the voter  
to reveal or justify his choice to anyone. Questions affecting the personal  
circumstances of the officer, such as his employability outside the Bahá’í  
community, financial needs, etc. should be dealt with separately and with  
candor and considerateness. In a case of extreme difficulty the guidance of  
the House of Justice may be sought.

102.13 You raise concerns about the problems that can arise from the service of  
a husband and wife on the same Assembly. We should point out that the  
same problems can arise from the joint service of a parent and child, of  
two brothers, of two partners in business, or of any two other people who  
have close association outside their membership on the Assembly. A rule to  
deal with all these possibilities would itself introduce serious problems. The  
solution to this is a question of maturation. Bahá’ís have to learn to stand on  
their own two feet and speak their minds and judge according to their own  
understanding, as strongly exhorted by Bahá’u’lláh in the Hidden Words,  
in which He declares that “The best beloved of all things in My sight is  
justice.”[[111]](#footnote-111)102-2

102.14 You call attention to the conflict of interest and other problems which  
can arise if a member of an Assembly is called upon to consult on a matter  
which concerns him personally and intimately; for example, to be a judge in  
his own case or in that of his spouse. Such a situation can, indeed, produce  
serious and embarrassing complications. The House of Justice has held that  
it is not proper for a member of a Spiritual Assembly to be debarred from  
exercising his right to membership in the consideration of such matters. (In  
some instances, the individual concerned has exercised on his own initiative  
the option of absenting himself from the proceedings to allow his fellow  
members greater freedom to judge the case.) However, in certain circum-  
stances, an Assembly may find it wise and helpful to avoid the problems

latent in such a situation by adopting different approaches: it could appoint  
a special committee to deal with the matter on its behalf; or it could refer  
the case to the National Spiritual Assembly for it to deal with, either directly  
or through a committee.

102.15 You offer the suggestion that a “Bill of Rights” be formulated to define  
basic human rights and to set out the legal position of the believers in rela-  
tion to the institutions as a means of eliminating arbitrary behavior and  
the possible miscarriage of justice. The House of Justice asks us to say that  
undoubtedly such procedures as will be required in the future to protect  
the rights of individuals in their relationship to the institutions will evolve.  
At the present time, however, the imposition of them would complicate  
the functioning of Spiritual Assemblies without providing a commensu-  
rate degree of advantage. The basic safeguard, which has been in force, is  
the right of every believer to appeal a decision, first to the Local Assembly  
which rendered it, then to his National Spiritual Assembly, and finally to  
the Universal House of Justice. As you are well aware, Bahá’í institutions  
are bound by the teachings of the Faith to uphold freedom of expression  
and to safeguard the personal rights and initiative of the individual. The  
responsibilities and duties of the institutions towards the believers are also  
incorporated, in broad terms, in such documents as the Constitution of the  
Universal House of Justice and the Declarations of Trust and the By-Laws  
of the National and Local Spiritual Assemblies. In addition, the letter of 29  
December 1988 to the American Bahá’í community from the House of Jus-  
tice draws attention to the “equilibrium of responsibilities” that underpins  
the relationship between the Assemblies and the believers, and it reaffirms a  
non-adversarial framework to guide their interactions.[[112]](#footnote-112)102-3

102.16 Regarding the issue of the competent review of the writings of Bahá’í  
authors, the House of Justice is of the opinion that the difficulties which  
arise in the review process come, not from a need for clarification of the  
guidelines, but from a need for good judgment and common sense in their  
application. It endeavors from time to time to improve the functioning of  
National Spiritual Assemblies and their reviewing committees in this area.

102.17 In relation to your suggested minimum requirement that reviewers  
possess the requisite factual competence to perform the reviewing task,

we are to say that the House of Justice does not feel that it is necessary  
for the reviewer to be qualified in the same discipline as the writer of  
the document. For example, in the case of an article by a professional  
historian, it is not the function of the reviewer to ascertain the correct-  
ness of the article from a historian’s point of view; it is his task to ensure  
that the writer has not, in the course of his discussion, misrepresented  
the Bahá’í teachings or put forward theses which are incompatible with  
being a Bahá’í. It is evident, then, that reviewers should combine a pro-  
found knowledge of the Faith and understanding of its principles with  
the wisdom and good judgment to understand their limitations in the  
author’s specific area of expertise. Furthermore, authors of scholarly  
works that are based on materials that may not be known or available to  
those who must do the reviewing are at liberty to bring this situation to  
the attention of the responsible National Assembly. Should a difference  
of opinion arise between the author and the reviewing committee, and  
the National Spiritual Assembly is unable to find a resolution, the matter  
may be referred to the Universal House of Justice.

102.18 Finally, we are to say that the House of Justice entirely agrees with your  
perception that elements of the “old” order should not be discarded simply  
because they are old. The Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh provides the essential  
Laws and Principles on which all must be built, but in this building, and  
in the carrying out of our work, we Bahá’ís should take the utmost ad-  
vantage of every skill and element of experience available to us, no matter  
from where it comes. We must, however, be careful in our approach. As the  
methods of the old order fit the stage of the evolution of society in which  
they were conceived, it is not always possible to judge clearly which of them  
may safely be applied to the operation of the Bahá’í community. What we  
have to bear in mind is that the old systems represent immature stages in  
the political evolution of mankind and that their best features have, ac-  
cording to Shoghi Effendi, been incorporated into the Bahá’í Administrative  
Order. We should therefore not be too anxious to adopt old methods in our  
efforts to correct perceived irregularities, which may only be incidental to  
the transition taking place rather than intrinsic to the system ordained by  
Bahá’u’lláh.

102.19 The House of Justice trusts that these comments will aid your thinking  
about these important issues and assures you of its prayers on your behalf.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

103  
Safeguarding against unsettled conditions  
in the Middle East

7 JANUARY 1991

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

103.1 We are conscious that the friends around the world are concerned by the  
unsettled conditions in the Middle East, so we are writing to assure you that  
we have taken all steps that are necessary to safeguard the essential require-  
ments of the Cause of God.

103.2 In January 1981 we addressed a message to all Continental Boards of  
Counselors through the International Teaching Center, and a copy of that  
message was shared at the time with all National Spiritual Assemblies. It  
confirmed that if at any time communication with the World Center would  
be cut off, the Counselors would, both collectively and individually, assist  
National Spiritual Assemblies to ensure the uninterrupted continuation of  
the normal administration of the Faith by these Assemblies until communi-  
cations could be restored.

103.3 We rely now, as then, on the Continental Boards of Counselors and  
the National Spiritual Assemblies to ensure that the all-important work of  
teaching the Faith and consolidating its institutions will continue with un-  
abated zeal in every part of the world.

103.4 On a number of occasions in the history of the Faith the World Center  
has been threatened by dangers of various kinds, and the knowledge of how  
the Almighty has preserved the vital interests of His Faith in the past will  
reinforce the certainty of all the believers that whatever occurs will but serve  
to carry forward the realization of His immutable purpose for mankind.

103.5 We shall remember you all at the Sacred Threshold and shall pray for the  
bounties of Bahá’u’lláh to guide and sustain you in the execution of your  
vital responsibilities in the promotion of His Cause.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

104  
Formation of two new National Spiritual Assemblies

9 JANUARY 1991

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

104.1 REJOICE ANNOUNCE DECISION ESTABLISH AT RIḌVÁN 1991 TWO NEW NATIONAL  
SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLIES: ONE FOR THE USSR WITH ITS SEAT IN MOSCOW, AND ONE  
FOR ROMANIA WITH ITS SEAT IN BUCHAREST OFFERING PRAYERS BOUNDLESS  
GRATITUDE TO BAHÁ’U’LLÁH FOR OUTPOURING HIS DIVINE CONFIRMATIONS.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

105  
Formation of another new  
National Spiritual Assembly

20 FEBRUARY 1991

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

105.1 OUTSTANDING PROGRESS TEACHING WORK CZECHOSLOVAKIA MOVES US CALL  
FOR ELECTION NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY THAT COUNTRY COMING RIḌVÁN.  
WITH FORMATION NATIONAL ASSEMBLIES USSR AND ROMANIA ALREADY AN-  
NOUNCED, AND THAT OF WEST LEEWARD ISLANDS WITH ITS SEAT IN BASSE TERRE,  
ST. KITTS, IN FULFILLMENT GOAL SIX YEAR PLAN, NUMBER OF PILLARS UNIVERSAL  
HOUSE OF JUSTICE WILL BE RAISED TO ONE HUNDRED FIFTY-FIVE.

105.2 WORK MOUNT CARMEL PROJECTS CONTINUING WITH UTMOST SPEED IN SPITE  
TROUBLED CONDITIONS MIDDLE EAST REJOICE ANNOUNCE INITIAL GOAL FIFTY  
MILLION DOLLARS FUND THIS PURPOSE NOW ACHIEVED. URGE FRIENDS ALL LANDS  
CONTINUE FLOW VITALLY NEEDED FUNDS ENABLE THESE HISTORIC PROJECTS BE  
CARRIED FORWARD WITHOUT HESITATION DURING MONTHS AND YEARS IMME-  
DATELY AHEAD.

105.3 IRRESISTIBLE ADVANCE CAUSE GOD DURING TIMES INTERNATIONAL CRISIS  
STRIKING EVIDENCE DIVINE CONFIRMATIONS. PRAYING FERVENTLY HOLY SHRINES  
REALIZATION BRILLIANT VISION FOUNDER FAITH FUTURE MANKIND.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

106  
Update on Bahá’ís in Kuwait

4 MARCH 1991

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

106.1 Offering thanksgiving Blessed Beauty news just received all dear friends  
Kuwait are safe.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

107  
The Holy Year 1992–1993

3 APRIL 1991

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

107.1 Further to the Riḍván 1991 message which has already been mailed to  
you,[[113]](#footnote-113)107-1 the Universal House of Justice has instructed us to convey the fol-  
lowing advice and information with regard to the forthcoming Holy Year.

107.2 You are already aware of the two major events of the Year: the commemo-  
rative gathering in the Holy Land during May 1992 to mark the 100th an-  
niversary of the Ascension of Bahá’u’lláh, and the World Congress in New  
York during November 1992 to celebrate the centenary of the inauguration  
of His Covenant. As the time draws closer, you will be receiving more and  
more communications from the various agencies acting on behalf of the  
House of Justice in making preparations for these events. To prevent confu-  
sion and to enable you to respond effectively to these communications, the  
House of Justice suggests that, if you have not already done so, you appoint  
an active, efficient and reliable individual or small committee to study these  
communications on your behalf, keep you thoroughly informed of their  
contents and requirements, and assist you to coordinate your responses and  
to take timely and necessary actions in relation to your community.

107.3 As was pointed out in the Riḍván 1990 message,[[114]](#footnote-114)107-2 the two major events  
being planned should not be the only commemorative activities of the Holy

Year; indeed, the entire Bahá’í world at its local and national levels will  
engage in activities appropriate to the purposes of the Holy Year. It is impor-  
tant that throughout this period the attitude of the friends in all localities  
reflects the significance of the two occasions to be commemorated.

107.4 For the observance of the first occasion, the centenary of Bahá’u’lláh’s  
passing, you will want to make sure that a proper devotional program takes  
place in each locality, at the appropriate time on 29 May, and that the best  
effort is made to uphold the preeminent importance, the dignity and the  
profoundly spiritual character of the occasion, to which non-Bahá’ís may be  
invited according to the discretion of the Spiritual Assemblies. To support  
your preparations and to unite the hearts and experience of the believers  
worldwide, the House of Justice will soon be sending to you the sacred  
readings which have been selected for the gathering at the Most Holy Shrine  
on that occasion. Beyond these devotional programs, the friends may plan  
to hold other special events—national, regional or local—for the benefit  
of both themselves and non-Bahá’ís, to give a more public character to the  
observance of this anniversary and at which informative and inspirational  
presentations on the life and teachings of Bahá’u’lláh can be made and dis-  
cussions held.

107.5 For the second commemoration, communities everywhere, at local, re-  
gional and national levels, should plan to hold events in relation to the  
World Congress. Some of these may be held at the same time as the World  
Congress, some at other times. Whatever the decision of the Spiritual As-  
semblies, the events should have the same objective as the World Congress,  
which is to celebrate the centenary of the inauguration of the Covenant of  
Bahá’u’lláh and to proclaim its aims and unifying power. The prospect of  
such events should encourage the friends to study the history and meaning  
of the Covenant; in such study, the Continental Counselors, the Auxiliary  
Board members and their assistants will, no doubt, be sources of encourage-  
ment, stimulation and assistance.

107.6 Celebration in this connection does not mean merely festive activities.  
It is primarily a spiritual celebration that is called for: occasions for deep  
reflection on the historic importance, the uniqueness, the meaning and the  
efficacy of the Covenant established by Bahá’u’lláh, on the outstanding  
results of its influence in raising up a worldwide community comprising a  
great diversity of members, and on the triumph of its virtue as a unifying  
power. At the heart of such reflection will be contemplation of the peer-  
less purpose, magnetic person, luminous character and exemplary acts of

‘Abdu’l-Bahá in His station as the Center and living embodiment of the  
Covenant of Bahá’u’lláh. Consciousness of the exceptional and glorious  
stage in humanity’s spiritual evolution initiated by the Covenant, the awe  
such consciousness inspires and the thankful gladness it induces are of the  
essence of the celebration intended by the World Congress and all other  
events associated with this centenary. A major purpose of these events will  
therefore be to evoke this solemn consciousness, which is itself the well-  
spring of the most exquisite celebratory joy. In this spirit the commemora-  
tive activities around the world should acclaim and proclaim the Covenant  
as the pivotal center of unity for all humankind and illustrate its dynamic  
effect on the struggle, the spread, and the redemptive achievements of the  
Bahá’í community since the passing of the Blessed Beauty.

107.7 You will undoubtedly appreciate that publicity through the mass media  
should be incorporated into your plans for the Holy Year. All suitable and  
available creative resources—writers, artists, composers, musicians, poets,  
public information experts—should be called to the aid of the community,  
so as to imbue its plans with the most effective and attractive variety of  
expression. The World Center will be interested in learning of these plans  
as they are developed, so that news of them might be shared with others.

107.8 An important feature of the activities of the Holy Year will be the widest  
possible proclamation of the Name of Bahá’u’lláh; care must, of course,  
be exercised in all situations to uphold the dignity of this Name. As an as-  
sistance to your efforts, a statement on Bahá’u’lláh has been prepared, at the  
request of the House of Justice, by the Office of Public Information at the  
Bahá’í World Center. We are happy to enclose a copy.

107.9 Bearing the title *Bahá’u’lláh*, the statement is intended primarily for wide  
distribution to the public; however, as you will readily see, it has great value  
as a source of study and inspiration for the friends themselves. You are free  
to translate and print it in dignified but moderately priced editions so that  
its cost to the friends will be affordable. Perhaps you will want to collaborate  
with other National Assemblies or with the publishing trust of any one of  
them in acquiring a supply of the printed material for your community. You  
may also wish to produce a special edition for presentation to dignitaries  
and prominent figures in your country; the Office of Public Information is  
planning to print a special edition in English for limited use and you may  
find such an edition appropriate to your needs. Furthermore, you will want  
to draw upon the statement in providing substance for various presentations  
on the Faith to be made during the course of the Holy Year. It is left entirely

to your discretion to determine in what ways you can most effectively ex-  
ploit its contents. ‘Whatever your plans, the House of Justice expects that  
the statement will be published widely and abundantly for liberal distribu-  
tion and use by the friends everywhere.[[115]](#footnote-115)107-3 National and Local Spiritual  
Assemblies and their agencies, with the encouragement and support of the  
Continental Counselors and their auxiliaries, will certainly see to the suc-  
cessful pursuit of these important objectives.

107.10 We have been asked to assure you of the ardent prayers of the House  
of Justice at the Holy Shrines that your endeavors to raise ever higher the  
standard of Bahá’u’lláh during the special year ahead may evoke His good  
pleasure and constant confirmations.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

108  
Riḍván Message 1991

RIḌVÁN 1991

To the Bahá’ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

108.1 No earthly tongue can voice the gratitude we feel for the extraordinary  
bestowals vouchsafed by the Blessed Beauty to His worldwide community  
and to the World Center of His Faith during the year just ended. We bow  
our heads in humility before the striking evidences of His sustaining grace  
and all-compelling might.

108.2 The overwhelming danger which, as a result of the turmoil in the Middle  
East, enveloped the Holy Land during the latter part of the year receded  
without halting or even seriously hampering the operation of the Bahá’í  
administration. The situation was a poignant reminder of the contrast be-  
tween the unobtrusive, steadily developing, distinctly integrative System of  
Bahá’u’lláh and the turbulent character of the Age of Transition, “whose  
tribulations,” Shoghi Effendi avers, “are the precursors of that Era of blissful

felicity which is to incarnate God’s ultimate purpose for all mankind.” It was  
another of the “ominous signs simultaneously proclaiming the agonies of a  
disintegrating civilization and the birth pangs of that World Order—that  
Ark of human salvation that must needs arise upon its ruins.”[[116]](#footnote-116)108-1

108.3 The forces which united the remedial reactions of so many nations to the  
sudden crisis in this region demonstrated beyond any doubt the necessity  
of the principle of collective security prescribed by Bahá’u’lláh more than  
a century ago as a means of resolving conflict. While the international ar-  
rangement envisioned by Him for the full application of this principle is far  
from having been adopted by the rulers of mankind, a long step towards  
the behavior outlined for the nations by the Lord of the Age has thus been  
taken. How illuminating are Bahá’u’lláh’s words foreshadowing the future  
reorientation of the nations: “Be united, O concourse of the sovereigns of  
the world,” He wrote, “for thereby will the tempest of discord be stilled  
amongst you, and your peoples find rest. Should any one among you take  
up arms against another, rise ye all against him, for this is naught but mani-  
fest justice.”[[117]](#footnote-117)108-2

108.4 Indeed, from whatever direction we gaze, the power of Bahá’u’lláh’s Rev-  
elation is visibly at work in the world. In the call for a new world order,  
which has issued like a refrain from the statements of political leaders and  
influential thinkers, even when they themselves were incapable of defin-  
ing their own meaning, can be discerned the slow awakening of humanity  
to the principal purpose of His Revelation. That such a call should have  
come so insistently from the head of that republic which is destined, in  
‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s words, to be “the first nation to establish the foundation of  
international agreement” and to “lead all nations spiritually,” is an indica-  
tion of the efficacy and the acceleration of two simultaneous processes, one  
operating outside and one inside the Cause, which Shoghi Effendi tells us  
are destined to culminate “in a single glorious consummation.”[[118]](#footnote-118)108-3

108.5 Within the Cause, the signs of overwhelming achievements for the Six  
Year Plan, though not necessarily as projected at the outset, are abundant.  
Arresting examples are evident in the wake of the phenomenal changes oc-  
curring in the Soviet Union and its former satellite countries. Just one year  
since the reestablishment of the Local Spiritual Assembly of Moscow, a

National Spiritual Assembly of the Soviet Union is to be formed. Similarly,  
little more than a year since the revolutionary political changes in Romania,  
the Government has recognized the Bahá’í community as a religious as-  
sociation with the right to spread the teachings of Bahá’u’lláh; here, too, a  
National Spiritual Assembly is to be formed this Riḍván. Rapid expansion  
of the Faith in Czechoslovakia compelled the decision taken only in recent  
weeks also to establish a National Spiritual Assembly there. At the same  
time, in the Caribbean area, the National Spiritual Assembly of the West  
Leeward Islands will be formed as a result of the division of the Leeward  
Islands group into two regional administrative units. With these four very  
welcome formations, the number of National Spiritual Assemblies reaches  
155.

108.6 We are happy to say that three Hands of the Cause of God will repre-  
sent the Universal House of Justice at these historic events: Amatu’l-Bahá  
Rúḥíyyih Khánum in Romania, Mr. ‘Alí Akbar Furútan in the Soviet Union,  
and Dr. ‘Alí-Muḥammad Varqá in Czechoslovakia. Counselor Ruth Pringle  
will be the representative in the West Leeward Islands.

108.7 Another illustration of the rising authority of the Cause of Bahá’u’lláh  
in the public mind emerges from Germany, where the Federal Constitu-  
tional Court, the highest legal authority in the land, rendered a decision of  
capital importance to the recognition of the Faith. A series of lower courts  
had refused to register the by-laws of a Local Spiritual Assembly on the  
grounds that the authority granted to the National Spiritual Assembly in  
that document violated the legal principle requiring the autonomy of all le-  
gally incorporated associations. The issues involved are indeed complex and  
cannot be elaborated here. Suffice it to say that the Federal Constitutional  
Court upheld the appeal of the Local Spiritual Assembly in a long, closely  
reasoned decision in which, among other things, it affirmed the right of  
the Bahá’í community to gain legal capacity in the very shape ordained in  
the scriptures of the Bahá’í Faith and stated that its nature as a recognized  
religion was unquestionably confirmed by its inherent character, by public  
knowledge, and by the testimony of scholars of comparative religion. So  
significant was the verdict in the Court’s own estimation that it took the  
rare step of issuing a statement to the press explaining its decision. This  
outstanding act will have implications for the Bahá’í community far beyond  
the borders of a united Germany.

108.8 Yet another instance of the growing public appreciation for the penetrat-  
ing perspectives of the Cause involves the Republic of South Africa, where

the National Spiritual Assembly, taking advantage of the initiatives of the  
Government towards resolving the decades-long problem of apartheid,  
decided to submit its views for the drafting of a new constitution for the  
country. The President of the South African Law Commission, the judge  
acting on behalf of the Government, who received the National Spiritual  
Assembly’s submission from a delegation appointed by it, commented that  
the Bahá’ís were the only group thus far whose ideas had provided a spiritual  
and moral foundation for a constitution.

108.9 Whatever may be the individual effects of any one of these aforemen-  
tioned developments—and of such others as the appearance of a represen-  
tative of the Bahá’í International Community as the only non-Buddhist  
speaker invited to address a public meeting held in conjunction with the  
Asian Buddhist Conference for Peace in Mongolia; the specific mention of  
the Bahá’ís by Pope John Paul II at a reception during his recent visit to Bu-  
rundi; the official listing of the Bahá’í Faith as one of the common religions  
in Tuvalu; the International Exposition on Education for Peace sponsored  
by the Brazilian National Spiritual Assembly with the participation of 23  
embassies and educational institutions—one thing is abundantly clear: the  
cumulative impact across the globe affirms the emergence of the Faith from  
obscurity. Such marks of increasing public recognition of the true character  
and rich potentialities of the Bahá’í community are a distinctive feature of  
the advancement of the Faith in the fourth epoch of the Formative Age.

108.10 In contemplating these marvelous signs and portents, we cannot resist  
the impulse to express our profound love and appreciation to the Continen-  
tal Counselors, and to their Auxiliary Boards, who stimulate and buttress ef-  
forts which make possible the accomplishment of such stupendous develop-  
ments as have already been cited and whose ministrations, more especially,  
spur the dynamic thrust of the teaching work, which is fundamental to all  
of the community’s successes. We are delighted and encouraged beyond  
measure by the vigorous beginning which the Boards of Counselors have  
made as they entered the new term of their indispensable and highly ap-  
preciated services to the Bahá’í world. The fresh initiatives to which, with  
the wholehearted encouragement and splendid support of the International  
Teaching Center, they now bend their energies augur well for a gratifying  
completion of the Six Year Plan. May their exertions be greatly bolstered  
by the increase, as of the Day of the Covenant this year, in the number  
of Auxiliary Board members to 846—90 more than exist at present. The  
worldwide community will certainly welcome the strength which this action

will bring to the scope and quality of the spiritual duties assigned to the  
Auxiliary Board members and their assistants, whose operation at the grass  
roots is a guarantee of the continued expansion and consolidation of our  
glorious Faith.

108.11 The magnificent progress of the Six Year Plan brightens our spirits and  
exalts our hopes. All but one of the years of that Plan have passed and a  
mighty advance toward achieving its seven major objectives has been made.  
Our community has changed dramatically from what it was at the Plan’s be-  
ginning in 1986. It has greatly expanded and developed. It is more diverse,  
more dynamic, more distinctive. As we enter the closing year of the Six Year  
Plan, a horizon of thrilling prospects stands before us all:

108.11a The preparation of the long-expected, annotated English transla-  
tion of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, the Book of Laws, the Most Holy Book,  
the Mother Book of Bahá’u’lláh’s Revelation, will be completed—a  
monumental achievement which alone and of itself will usher in a  
new stage in the evolution of the Bahá’í world and thus crown the  
accomplishments of the Six Year Plan.

108.11b Earthwork on the lower Terraces of the Shrine of the Báb and ex-  
cavation for the Center for the Study of the Texts and the Annex to  
the International Archives Building will commence, initiating a new  
phase of these mighty and incalculably significant enterprises on  
God’s Holy Mountain.

108.11c The Plan’s end will mark the beginning of the Holy Year, 1992–1993,  
a conscious year-long pause to allow His followers to pay befitting  
regard to the Centenary of the Ascension of Bahá’u’lláh and of the  
inauguration of His world-unifying Covenant. As has already been  
announced, major observances are being planned to reflect the distinc-  
tive character and world-shaking importance of the two occasions.

108.11d The one: the gathering of representatives of the Bahá’í world, along  
with Knights of Bahá’u’lláh, at Bahjí in the precincts of the Man-  
sion, from whence Bahá’u’lláh’s liberated Spirit repaired to the throne  
of His heavenly sovereignty, and in the vicinity of the Most Holy  
Shrine, wherein the Roll of Honor of the Knights of Bahá’u’lláh will  
be deposited as a gesture indicative of the response of His lovers to His

call to spread His teachings throughout the earth. There at Bahjí this  
gathering will engage in a solemn act of worship, the sacred readings  
for which will soon be shared with Bahá’í communities everywhere for  
use in their own commemorations, so as to unify the devotional ex-  
perience of the entire Bahá’í world during this centennial observance.

108.11e The other: the World Congress scheduled to be held on 23–26 No-  
vember 1992 in New York City, where the beloved Master revealed the  
implications of His station as the appointed Center of the Covenant  
of Bahá’u’lláh and which He designated as the City of the Covenant.  
Throughout the world, Bahá’í communities will hold appropriate aux-  
iliary events to magnify the Congress’s purpose, which is to celebrate  
the centenary of the inauguration of the Covenant of Bahá’u’lláh and  
to proclaim its aims and unifying power. A corollary to these activities  
will be the wide distribution of a statement on Bahá’u’lláh, prepared at  
our request by the Office of Public Information, which will serve both  
as a source of study and inspiration for the Bahá’ís themselves and  
as an informative publication for presentation to the public. In these  
and other ways the community of the Greatest Name will endeavor to  
blazon the Name of Bahá’u’lláh across the globe, to make it a known  
eminence in the consciousness of peoples everywhere.

108.12 Such an exceptional confluence of imminent achievements—the publi-  
cation of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, the progress of the building projects on Mount  
Carmel, the conclusion of the Six Year Plan, the inception of the Holy  
Year—animates the expectations of the Bahá’í world, sets the stage for  
mightier endeavors than have already been attempted, and points us all to  
the opening of a new phase of history. It seems fitting, then, that the sacred  
law which enables each one to express his or her personal sense of devotion  
to God in a profoundly private act of conscience that promotes the common  
good, which directly connects the individual believer with the Central In-  
stitution of the Faith, and which, above all, ensures to the obedient and the  
sincere the ineffable grace and abundant blessings of Providence, should,  
at this favorable juncture, be embraced by all who profess their belief in  
the Supreme Manifestation of God. With humility before our sovereign  
Lord, we now announce that as of Riḍván 1992, the beginning of the Holy  
Year, the Law of Ḥuqúqu’lláh, the Right of God, will become universally  
applicable. All are lovingly called to observe it.

108.13 Our very dear brothers and sisters: Witness how the Beloved One has an-  
swered our entreaties. See how He has enriched our lives with new brethren  
and new institutions in lands hitherto closed to His healing Word. Consider  
with what potency His divine prescriptions are being affirmed as guidelines  
for the behavior of nations large and small. Surely such abounding benedic-  
tions have imbued you with indomitable courage and with confidence to  
face a challenging but brilliant future. Indeed, you have embarked on this  
auspicious year poised for the ultimate triumph of the Six Year Plan.

108.14 May you continue, through your selfless deeds in His service, to be  
blessed from the inexhaustible treasury of His love and tender care.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

109  
Acceptance of Bahá’u’lláh  
and the Laws He has revealed

1 MAY 1991

To two individuals

Dear Friends,

109.1 The Universal House of Justice has received your letters … and has  
instructed us to send you the following reply ….

109.2 First of all, we are asked to explain that although Bahá’ís believe that the  
Teachings and Order of Bahá’u’lláh are the solution to the current problems  
of mankind, they abstain completely from ever attempting to put them into  
effect through political action. Only if people voluntarily accept them and  
submit themselves freely to this Order will it be implemented in the world.  
Bahá’ís should never attempt to impose their belief on anyone. Bahá’u’lláh  
has given certain teachings which Bahá’ís believe to be true; they offer these  
teachings to the rest of mankind. Whosoever accepts them is a Bahá’í, but  
everyone is free to reject them. No one is ever compelled to become a Bahá’í,  
nor is anyone compelled to remain a Bahá’í. If one has accepted the Bahá’í  
Faith and later concludes that one has made a mistake, one is free to with-  
draw, and no stigma is attached to such an action. In all such things Bahá’ís  
uphold Bahá’u’lláh’s principle of independent investigation of truth.

109.3 But one must ask what is the truth? Naturally human beings are con-  
tinually discovering more and more about the truth. God is infinite, so His

truth also is infinite. Nevertheless, as human knowledge progresses there are  
certain truths that are clearly established. Acceptance of such truths is not  
a surrender of freedom but is a free acceptance of things as they are. For  
example it is now clearly established by science that the earth moves round  
the sun, and not vice versa. Any human being is free to believe the contrary  
but to do so is not an assertion of freedom, it is an evidence of ignorance or  
foolishness. In the same way, to accept that Bahá’u’lláh’s claim to be a Mani-  
festation of God is true is not a surrender of freedom but the acceptance of  
a conclusion that one has confirmed to one’s own satisfaction.

109.4 Bahá’u’lláh teaches, and Bahá’ís believe, that the fundamental truths of  
religion are not discovered by human beings but are revealed to mankind  
by God through His Manifestations. Whether or not this belief is true is,  
clearly, a matter of profound importance. If one does not accept it, one is  
free to adopt all manner of viewpoints including the one propounded by  
you in your letter, namely, that the followers of all the different religions  
should live together in harmony without becoming one religion, and that  
one can choose certain of Bahá’u’lláh’s teachings and reject others. This  
is a valid position, but the point that you should realize is that it is not  
the Bahá’í position. Bahá’ís respect your right to hold it, but you cannot  
hold it and be a Bahá’í because a Bahá’í, by definition, accepts Bahá’u’lláh  
as the Manifestation of God for this age and upholds His Covenant as,  
in the words of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, “the axis of the oneness of the world of  
humanity.”[[119]](#footnote-119)109-1

109.5 Bahá’ís believe that in this age God has revealed through Bahá’u’lláh the  
Teachings which will lead the followers of all religions to recognize their  
common foundation so that they will flow into this latest Dispensation of  
God’s Revelation like rivers into one ocean and, in the words of Jesus, “there  
shall be one fold and one shepherd.”[[120]](#footnote-120)109-2 They also believe that the Law  
of God revealed by Bahá’u’lláh for this stage of human history, and the  
institutions that He has founded, are the bedrock on which the unity and  
harmony of mankind will be built. This is what they teach, because this is  
what they believe to be the truth. Nevertheless, this does not prevent their  
living together in harmony with those who believe otherwise, or stop their  
collaborating in humanitarian activities with their fellow human beings of  
all other religions and of none.

109.6 It is apparent from your letters that you have not properly studied or  
understood the Bahá’í teachings and may well have been antagonized by  
shortcomings among members of the Bahá’í community. Of course, Bahá’ís  
try not to have shortcomings. They are striving with varying success to put  
the teachings of Bahá’u’lláh into effect in their lives and to raise up the in-  
stitutions which He has ordained. Individuals and even Spiritual Assemblies  
are imperfect—this is an inevitable aspect of growth—but they have the  
satisfaction of witnessing improvement and maturation as the years go by.

109.7 The House of Justice hopes that you will make a deeper study of the  
Bahá’í teachings in collaboration with your Bahá’í friends and, even if you  
finally decide that you cannot accept them, that you will be able to collabo-  
rate with Bahá’ís and all others in the building of a better world.

With all good wishes,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

110  
Message to the Pacific Women’s Conference

10 MAY 1991

To the Pacific Women’s Conference, 30 May–7 June 1991

110.1 One of the most encouraging developments, as a new millennium ap-  
proaches, is the speed at which women everywhere are arising to assume  
an equal part with men in the management of the affairs of humankind.  
For the Bahá’í community this fundamental change in the role played by  
women is a harbinger of the approach of global peace. Only as the spiritual  
and intellectual capacities which have found particularly vigorous expres-  
sion in women are able to exert their proper influence in the life of society  
will the conditions for lasting global reconciliation emerge.

110.2 For those who share this perception, no area of the world holds greater  
promise than the nations of the Pacific. Though for the most part small in  
population and widely separated geographically, your island countries have  
demonstrated a steadily increasing capacity for creative response to the chal-  
lenges facing our planet. The Bahá’í communities of this vast region feel a  
deep sense of pride that they have been able to play a part in this spiritual  
adventure.

110.3 Be assured of our heartfelt prayers that the consultations on which you  
are embarked will add another impulse to the irresistible process by which

women the world over are awakening to the role they alone can play in  
building a just and peaceful world.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

111  
Decision of the German  
Federal Constitutional Court

27 MAY 1991

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

111.1 In the Riḍván message of the Universal House of Justice, reference was  
made to an extremely significant decision of the Federal Constitutional  
Court in Germany. Since this decision may be of assistance to National  
Spiritual Assemblies in other countries where difficulties are experienced in  
obtaining recognition for the Faith, or where the Spiritual Assemblies meet  
with complications in acquiring legal incorporation, the House of Justice  
has instructed us to send you the enclosed three documents:

1. The decision of the Federal Constitutional Court, in German

2. A translation of this decision into English

3. An elucidation of the abbreviations used in the above

4. A brief outline of the background to the decision and indications  
of its importance, drawing on an article by Dr. Udo Schaefer pub-  
lished in *Bahá’í Nachrichten* (the newsletter of the German Bahá’í  
community).

111.2 We should mention that it proved very difficult indeed to translate the  
decision into English, since the forms and concepts of German Law dif-  
fer radically from those of English Law. There is often, therefore, no exact  
equivalence of terminology. Nevertheless, the English translation is suffi-  
ciently faithful as to convey a clear impression of the original.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

Guiding Principles

for the decision of the Second Senate of 5th February 1991

[Translation—from German]

2 BvR 263/86

111.3 1. A community’s mere assertion and self-understanding of professing  
a religion and of being a religious community cannot justify refer-  
ence for it and its members to the guarantee of religious freedom of  
Art. 4, par. 1 and 2 GG; rather it must be a religion and a religious  
community in fact, according to spiritual content and outward ap-  
pearance. To examine and determine this in case of dispute is the  
duty of the organs of the State, of the courts in the final analysis, in  
application of the ruling of the State’s legal system.

111.4 2.

a) To the freedom of religion in the meaning of Art. 4, par. 1 and  
2 GG belongs also the freedom of religious association, arising  
from this regulation in connection with the relevant Weimar  
Church Articles included by Art. 140 GG.

b) The guarantee of freedom of religious association contains also  
the freedom to form a religious association and organize accord-  
ing to one’s common faith. This does not mean the right to a  
particular legal form, such as that of an incorporated associa-  
tion or some other form of corporation; what is guaranteed is  
the possibility of legal existence in some form or other, including  
participation in general legal proceedings.

**Federal Constitutional Court**

**In the Name of the People**

**In the Proceedings on the Constitutional Appeal**

[Translation—from German]

2 BvR 263/86

111.5 1. of the “Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of Tübingen, with its seat  
in Tübingen,” represented by the Chairman, Mr. S. …,

111.6 2. of Mr. S. …, 111.6

111.7 3. of Mrs. S. …, 111.7

111.8 3. of Mrs. S. … 111.8

– Represented by: Attorneys Dr. Michael Uechtritz, Dr. Hans  
Schlarmann, Birkenwaldstrasse 149, Stuttgart 1—

against

a) the decision of the High State Court Stuttgart of 27 January  
1986 - 8 W 252/85 -,

b) the decision of the State Court Tübingen of 8 May 1985 - 5 T  
34/84 (FGG) -,

c) the decision of the District Court Tübingen of 8 December  
1983 and of 2 January 1984

- GReg. II 922/83 -

the Federal Constitutional Court - Second Senate - with the participation  
of Judges

Vice-chairman Mahrenholz,

Böckenförde,

Klein,

Grasshof,

Kruis,

Franssen,

Kirchhof,

Winter

decided on 5 February 1991:

The Decisions of the High State Court Stuttgart of 27 January 1986  
- 8 W 252/85 -, of the State Court Tübingen of 8 May 1985 - 5 T  
34/84 (FGG) - and of the District Court Tübingen of 8 December  
1983 and of 2 January 1984 - GReg. II 922/83 - violate the basic  
rights of the appellants accorded by Article 4, paragraphs 1 and 2 of  
the Constitution. They are repealed. The case is referred back to the  
District Court.

The State of Baden-Württemberg has to reimburse the appellants for  
the necessary expenses.

Reasons

**A.**

111.9 Subject of the Constitutional Appeal is the question to what extent Art.  
4, par. 1 and 2 GG requires that the individuality of a religious association,  
considering and organizing itself as part of a religious community, must be  
taken into account in the interpretation and application of regulations of  
corporate law of the Code of Civil Law.

**I.**

111.10 The Religious Community of the Bahá’ís, constituting a religious move-  
ment arisen out of Shí’ih Islam, is represented in a multiplicity of countries.  
It is hierarchically organized and is currently governed by the “Universal  
House of Justice,” consisting of nine elected members, with its seat in Haifa  
(Israel). In countries with a considerable number of local communities, a  
nine-member National Spiritual Assembly is elected annually in an indirect  
election by the totality of its members. In the Federal Republic of Germany  
this is established as a registered association; in other countries it makes use  
of other legal forms of association or incorporation according to the laws  
valid there. As governing bodies on a local level, Local Spiritual Assemblies  
also consisting of nine members are elected by the believers of the local  
community, and are responsible for regulating local affairs.

**II.**

111.11 1. The appellant under 2) is chairman, the appellants under 3) and 4)  
were further elected officers of the appellant under 1). On 14 Febru-  
ary 1983 the appellant under 2) as chairman of the governing body  
applied to the District Court Tübingen for registration of the appel-  
lant under 1) in the Court’s Register of Associations. The By-Laws  
on which this application is based contain the following regulations,  
which are significant here:

Article 2

111.12 *Purpose of the Association*

I. The purpose of the Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of Tübin-  
gen is the administration of all the affairs of the Bahá’í Commu-  
nity in Tübingen according to the teachings and administrative  
principles of the Bahá’í Religion, as they appear in the Appendix  
following the By-Laws ….

II. Accordingly the Spiritual Assembly exclusively and directly pur-  
sues charitable and religious purposes and purposes of public  
benefit in the sense of the paragraph on “Tax-favored purposes”  
in Tax Law.

III. The Spiritual Assembly acts in a disinterested capacity and does  
not pursue purposes for its own economic benefit.

Article 3

111.13 *Establishment of Membership*

I. …

II. The members of the Spiritual Assembly are elected by the voting  
members of the Bahá’í Community from amongst their midst by  
secret ballot with simple plurality vote, for the duration of one  
year, or until the election of their successors. This election takes  
place on 21 April of each year at the Annual Convention of the  
Bahá’í Community. Details are regulated by Article 10.

III. ….

Article 4

111.14 *Termination of membership*

I. Membership is terminated

by the expiration of time and new election of the Spiritual Assembly,

by resignation,

by removal,

by leaving the Bahá’í Community of Tübingen.

II. The removal of a member of the Spiritual Assembly falls within  
the competence of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís  
of Germany.

Article 5

111.15 *By-Election*

I. Vacancies in the membership of the Spiritual Assembly are re-  
placed by election at a special meeting of the Bahá’í Community  
duly called by the Spiritual Assembly for this purpose. As long as  
the number of members of the Spiritual Assembly does not fall  
below 5, its decision-making competence is maintained.

II. If the number of vacancies is higher than four, so that the  
Spiritual Assembly is no longer competent to make decisions,  
the election is carried out under the supervision of the National  
Spiritual Assembly.

Article 9

111.16 *Meeting of the members*

I. …

II. All subsequent meetings are called informally (in writing, by  
telephone or orally) by the Secretary of the Spiritual Assembly at  
the request of the Chairman or, if he is prevented, by the Vice-  
chairman, or at the request of three members of the Assembly or  
by decision of the Assembly in advance ….

III. …

IV. …

Article 11

111.17 *The National Spiritual Assembly*

I. The institution superior to all the Spiritual Assemblies in the Fed-  
eral Republic is the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of  
Germany e.V.

It decides

a) … and b) …,

c) about the area of jurisdiction of the Local Spiritual As-  
sembly;

d) … to f) …

Article 13

111.18 *Amendment of the By-Laws*

I. …

II. Amendments to the By-Laws require the approval of the Nation-  
al Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of Germany. They become  
effective on registration in the Court’s Register of Associations.

Article 14

111.19 *Dissolution*

I. The dissolution of the Spiritual Assembly can result

a) from an absolute majority decision taken by the mem-  
bers of the Assembly in a meeting of the members  
called exclusively for this purpose,

b) from an absolute majority decision of the National  
Spiritual Assembly.

II. In case of the dissolution of the Spiritual Assembly its assets are  
transferred to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís  
in Germany, which must use them directly and exclusively for  
charitable and religious purposes and purposes of public benefit.

111.20 2. The District Court indicated questionable legal points of a formal  
and material kind in the registration procedure and demanded rec-  
tification. The appellant under 1) was stated to lack particularly the  
necessary legal independence, because its existence is dependent on  
the one hand on the local community, and on the other on the Na-  
tional Spiritual Assembly. The appellants counter-claimed that the  
institutional structure of the worldwide Bahá’í Community rests on  
a divine foundation and cannot be changed by them. As, according  
to the Constitutional Law of the Bahá’ís, all power of jurisdiction  
lies with the elected bodies, these should be given legal capacity  
in order to be able to participate in legal proceedings. The District  
Court rejected the application for registration with decision of 8 De-  
cember 1983, and another application of 22.12.1983 with decision  
of 2 January 1984.

111.21 3. The immediate appeal of the appellants under 2) to 4) against the  
decisions of the District Court of 8 December 1983 and 2 January  
1984 was rejected as unjustified by the State Court on 8 May 1985.  
The Association’s By-Laws presented were stated to violate § 37 par.  
1 BGB, as well as the principle of corporate autonomy. Art. 9 par. 2  
of the By-Laws, which gives the provisions for calling a meeting of  
the members, was stated not to do justice to the protection of the  
minority called for in § 37 par. 1 BGB. The legal provision demands  
that the number of members at whose request a meeting of the mem-  
bers is to be called be fixed proportionately, so that allowance will  
be made for future changes in the strength of the Association. The  
membership of the Association could drop to five without resulting  
in legal incapacity to make decisions. In this case the number of  
three members fixed in Art. 9 par. 2 no longer represents a minority.  
Above all it was pointed out that the By-Laws contain regulations  
leading to a legal and organizational dependence of the Association  
on a third party and are thus incompatible with the principle of  
independence and self-administration of associations. On the one  
hand through Art. 4 par. 2, 11 par. 1, 13 par. 2, 14 par. 1 letter  
b, and through further regulations, the National Spiritual Assem-  
bly as a nonmember of the Association is to be given the right of  
decision-making in the removal of members, amendment of the  
By-Laws, dissolution of the Association and other matters concern-

ing the Association; on the other hand the Bahá’í Community is  
to decide through elections on the establishment and the duration  
of the membership, according to Art. 3 par. 2 and 4 par. 1. Such  
wide-ranging influence by a third party in the organization of an  
association is inadmissible.

111.22 4. The High State Court Stuttgart rejected as unjustified the further  
appeal of the appellants under (2) to (4) with decision of 27 January  
1986 (OLGZ 1986, p. 257). It noted that Art. 9 par. 2 of the By-Laws  
violates § 37 par. 2 BGB, because it does not ensure, with a possible  
change in the number of members, that the call for a meeting of the  
members has to follow the request of a minority. The By-Laws are  
furthermore not reconcilable with the principle of independence and  
self-administration of the Association (corporate autonomy). Art. 14  
par. 2 letter b, according to which the National Spiritual Assembly  
can dissolve the Association, violates § 41 BGB. It is inadmissible to  
give the right to an external third party to dissolve the Association  
against the wish of its members. Insofar as jurisprudence had judged  
such regulations in individual cases to be admissible (KG, DJ 1936,  
p. 1948; OLG Karlsruhe, JW 1936, p. 3266; OLG Stuttgart, Das  
Recht [The Law] 1936, col. 151), these decisions had been made  
in the time of National Socialism and their reasoning was not con-  
vincing. The election of the members by the Bahá’í Community, as  
envisaged in Art. 3 par. 2 and Art. 4 par. 1 of the By-Laws, violates  
§§ 38 and 58 No. 1 BGB. The form by which a new member joins  
and the declaration of acceptance could indeed be regulated in the  
By-Laws in any way that is desired, and membership can be tied to  
certain preconditions. But in principle the Association is to be free to  
decide whether to accept someone as a member, as long as it is not, as  
a vitally important Association with monopoly status, exceptionally  
obliged to accept members. Apart from these individual regulations,  
the overall picture of the By-Laws shows such a strong third-party in-  
fluence that there can no longer be a question of autonomous action  
on the part of the Association. Significant hereby are the National  
Spiritual Assembly’s rights of intervention, according to Art. 4 par.  
2 (removal of a member), Art. 11 par. 1 letter c (right of decision-  
making on the area of jurisdiction), Art. 13 par. 2 (reserving approval  
for amendment of the By-Laws), Art. 14 par. 2 (transfer of the assets

to the National Spiritual Assembly in case of the dissolution of the  
Association). The By-Laws contain a renunciation of the autonomy  
of the Association not in accordance with corporate law.

III.

111.23 The Constitutional Appeals are addressed against the decisions of the  
High State Court and of the State Court as well as—in the relevant  
interpretation of the brief of the Constitutional Appeal—against both  
decisions of the District Court. The appellants presented an expert opin-  
ion by Prof. Dr. Friedrich Müller on this and claim essentially:

111.24 1. The Constitutional Appeals are admissible. The required interest for  
legal protection is established. This is not contravened by the fact  
that the rejection of the application to register was based also on an  
objection to Art. 9 par. 2 of the By-Laws, which the appellants had  
agreed to change. Should an application again be made after amend-  
ment of this provision of the By-Laws, it would again be rejected be-  
cause of the other provisions of the By-Laws which were questioned  
by the High State Court, in which case there would probably be no  
reexamination of the case.

111.25 2. The High State Court has interpreted the corporate law of the Code  
of Civil Law incorrectly, and has especially misunderstood the con-  
tent and significance of Art. 4 par. 1 and 2, Art. 144 GG in connec-  
tion with Art. 137 par. 3, 4 WRV.

a) Contrary to the interpretation of the High State Court § 41 par.  
1 BGB does not prevent the transfer to a third party of the right  
to dissolve the Association. This is certainly true when the assem-  
bly of the members has this right as well. The provisions of the  
By-Laws for the election of the members of the Association by  
the Bahá’í Community and the termination of their membership  
due to new elections are in accordance with §§ 38 and 58 BGB.  
As is shown from §§ 25 and 40 BGB, State Law leaves it to the  
Association to make such provisions. No objections can be de-  
rived from the Code of Civil Law either against the competence  
of the National Spiritual Assembly to remove a member of the  
Local Spiritual Assembly (Art. 4 par. 2 of the By-Laws), or to the  
definition of its area of jurisdiction (Art. 11 par. 1 letter c), or to  
the duty of approval for amendment of the By-Laws provided

for in Art. 13 par. 2, or to the transfer of assets of the Spiritual  
Assembly in case of its dissolution to the National Spiritual As-  
sembly (Art. 14 par. 2). Altogether the provisions of the By-Laws  
contested by the High State Court did not grant an inadmis-  
sible outside influence of a third party on the appellant under  
1). Its integration in the hierarchical structure of the Religious  
Community of the Bahá’ís is of necessity given by its rules and  
principles, which are based on divine Revelation.

b) The denial of legal capacity violates the constitutional rights of  
the appellant under 1) as derived from Art. 4 par. 1 and 2 GG  
and violates Art. 140 GG in connection with Art. 137 par. 3  
and 4 WRV. These provisions of the Constitution comprehend  
an organizational structure for a religious community, including  
the right to seek legal capacity for an administrative institution  
of the community. In the understanding of the Bahá’ís, which is  
relevant here, it is an unyieldable principle that the administra-  
tive institutions of the local communities, but not the communi-  
ties themselves, should attain legal capacity. The Constitution in  
Art. 140 GG in connection with Art. 137 par. 2 to 5 WRV gives  
religious communities the basic right of choice as regards their  
legal form. Since the Bahá’ís were denied the status of ‘Körper-  
schaft des Öffentlichen Rechts’ [Corporate Body under Public  
Law] which they sought, the appellant under 1) must be granted  
legal capacity under Civil Law. Even if the High State Court’s in-  
terpretation of corporate law for nonreligious associations should  
be correct, its effect on the appellant under 1) is more serious  
because of his religious aims and the necessity of integration in  
the national and international order of the Bahá’ís which they  
require, and thus it cannot be applied to him.

111.26 The appellants under 2) to 4) as officers of appellant under 1) suffer  
violation of their right, protected by Art. 4 par. 2 GG, to carry out ad-  
ministrative activities for the religious community.

**IV.**

111.27 On the Constitutional Appeal the Federal Minister of Justice and the  
Ministry for Justice, Federal and European Affairs of Baden Württem-  
berg have given their opinion. Both consider the Constitutional Appeal  
unjustified.

111.28 1. The Federal Minister of Justice explains that the right to be granted  
legal capacity for the appellant under 1) cannot directly be derived  
from Art. 4 par. 2 and Art. 140 GG in connection with Art. 137 par.  
3 WRV by referring to the contents of belief of the Bahá’í Religion.  
Art. 4 par. 2 GG obliges the State to respect belief and to protect  
the practice of religion, but not to create legal regulations which  
correspond to the particular contents of belief of individual religious  
communities. It is questionable whether Art. 137 par. 3 WRV covers  
the attainment of legal capacity by the appellant under 1); Art. 137  
par. 4 WRV, which is not directly applicable to the appellant under  
1) as a mere sub-organization of a religious community, gives an ex-  
plicit regulation just for this area. In any case, the Spiritual Assembly  
can attain legal capacity only according to the general prescriptions  
of Civil Law; lesser requirements than those demanded in Art. 137  
par. 4 WRV for the registration of a religious community as an asso-  
ciation, could not apply in this case. The Courts, in their decision on  
the registration of the appellant under 1), have not misunderstood  
the meaning and significance of Art. 140 GG in connection with  
Art. 137 par. 3 and 4 WRV.

111.29 2. According to the view of the Minister of Justice, Federal and Eu-  
ropean Affairs of Baden Württemberg, the By-Laws violate not  
only individual regulations of the compulsory law. They also depart  
significantly in their totality from the type of autonomous associa-  
tion regulated in the Code of Civil Law, and so expose the appellant  
under 1) to dominating third-party influences, that the decision of  
the High State Court cannot be contested in the light of the regula-  
tions of corporate law of the Code of Civil Law. Even when tak-  
ing the relevant Constitutional Law into necessary consideration,  
no other result can obtain. The appellants have not so far proven  
conclusively that the belief of the Bahá’ís demands in particular the  
organizational rules considered irreconcilable with the regulations of  
the Code of Civil Law. It is suggested rather that the teachings of the  
Faith grant a certain flexibility in the arrangement of details of the  
organizational structure.

**B.**

111.30 The Constitutional Appeals are admissible.

111.31 1. The appellant under 1) is entitled to make the Constitutional Appeal.  
As a union of persons he can, independent of given legal capacity,  
claim the possible violation of a constitutional right (cf. BverfGE  
3, 383 <391>). The Constitutional Appeal specifically concerns the  
question whether the appellant under 1) can be denied registration  
as an association and thus the attainment of legal capacity, without  
violation of his constitutional right from Art. 4 par. 2 and 2 GG.

111.32 The appellant under 1) asserts that his freedom of religious practice is  
violated by the fact that with the denial of his registration in the Court’s  
Register of Associations it has been made impossible for him to organize  
in accordance with the internal constitution prescribed essentially and  
imperatively by the belief of the Bahá’ís. Thus the protection of the Con-  
stitutional Law of religious freedom is infringed. The claim of the appel-  
lant under 1) is adequately substantiated; according to his presentation  
the material and vital areas of religious freedom are concerned and there  
appears a possible violation of the guarantee of the Constitutional Law.

111.33 2. The appellants under 2) to 4) claim that the denial of registration  
to the appellant under 1) makes it impossible for them to organize  
themselves in the framework of their religious community accord-  
ing to the binding prescriptions of the Revelation underlying it,  
and thus to practice their religion. With this presentation they have  
sufficiently proven the possibility of a violation of their constitu-  
tional right from Art. 4 par. 1 and 2 GG, which is also an individual  
constitutional right. That the appellants under 3) and 4) no longer  
belong to the Local Spiritual Assembly, has not lessened their origi-  
nal interest in a decision of the case. How a change in the situation  
affects a Constitutional Appeal already made, is to be decided in each  
individual case, taking into consideration the contested act of sover-  
eignty underlying the appeal, the significance of the constitutional  
guarantee appealed to and the purposes of the Constitutional Appeal  
(BverfGE 76, 1 <38>). In the present case the basic significance of  
the Constitutional Question brought up is to be considered, and  
further, that the appellants under 3) and 4) can again become mem-  
bers of the Local Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís in elections, and  
further court proceedings in case of renewed applications for regis-  
tration in the Court’s Register of Associations are possible (cf. also  
BverfGE 21, 139 <143>).

111.34 3. The legitimate interest to take legal action as basis for the Constitu-  
tional Appeal is not vitiated through the High State Court’s having  
based its decision also on the consideration not contested by the  
appellants, namely that Art. 9 par. 2 of the By-Laws does not guar-  
antee, as regards calling a meeting of the members, the protection  
of minorities required in § 37 par. 1 BGB. Thus, this is obviously a  
question which plays only a subordinate role in the court proceed-  
ings. The appellants are ready to amend the By-Laws on this point.  
They cannot be expected to again go through a hopeless application  
after such an amendment.

**C.**

111.35 The Constitutional Appeals are justified.

The decisions of the Courts do not do justice to the significance of the  
constitutional right of freedom of religious association, guaranteed in  
Art. 4 par. 2 and 2 GG in connection with Art. 140 GG/137 par. 2 and  
4 WRV, for the interpretation (and application) of the corporate law of  
the Code of Civil Law, and they thereby violate the constitutional rights  
of the appellants.

**I.**

111.36 The Local Assembly of the Bahá’ís of Tübingen and the believers of the  
Bahá’í Community are entitled to the constitutional right from Art. 4  
par. 1 and 2 GG. A community’s mere assertion and self-understanding  
of professing a religion and of being a religious community cannot jus-  
tify reference for it and its members to the guarantee of religious freedom  
of Art. 4, par. 1 and 2 GG; rather it must be a religion and a religious  
community in fact, according to spiritual content and outward appear-  
ance. To examine and determine this in case of dispute is the duty of the  
organs of the State, of the courts in the final analysis, in application of  
the ruling of the State’s legal system. These cannot decide freely in such a  
case, but must base their decision on the concept of religion to which the  
meaning and purpose of the fundamental guarantee refers, as intended  
or set forth in the Constitution. In the present case it is not necessary to  
go more deeply into this, as the character of the Bahá’í Faith as a religion  
and of the Bahá’í Community as a religious community is evident, in  
actual everyday life, in cultural tradition, and in the understanding of  
the general public as well as of the science of comparative religion.

**II.**

111.37 Religious freedom in the meaning of Art. 4 par. 1 and 2 GG also includes  
freedom of religious association as it follows from this regulation in con-  
nection with the relevant Weimar Church Articles which are included by  
Art. 140 GG.

111.38 1. Freedom of religious association is not expressly mentioned in Art.  
4 par. 1 and 2 GG; specifically guaranteed are freedom of religion,  
conscience, religious and ideological belief, as well as the freedom of  
religious practice. According to the judgments of the Federal Consti-  
tutional Court the freedom of religion guaranteed in Art. 4 GG has  
to be understood in a comprehensive manner (cf. BverfGE 24, 236  
<244 ff.>). The intention of the framer of the Constitution, after the  
experience of religious persecution by the National Socialist regime,  
was aimed at guaranteeing freedom of religion not just as particular  
partial freedoms, but fully. In any case none of the rights to religious  
freedom, which had been recognized in the Weimar Constitution  
as the result of hundreds of years of historical development, should  
now be excluded. A part of these rights to religious freedom was  
freedom of religion and conscience, including freedom of belief,  
freedom of private and public religious practice (freedom of wor-  
ship) and freedom of religious association (cf. Art. 135, 137 par.  
2 WRV and G. Anschütz, Die Religionsfreiheit [The Freedom of  
Religion], in: Anschütz/Thoma (Publ.) HDStR, vol. 2, 1932, § 106,  
p. 681 ff.).

111.39 This is confirmed by the history of its development. In the consultations  
of the Parliamentary Council, what was later to be Art. 4 expressly con-  
tained the guarantee of the freedom of religious association (“The right  
of association for religious and ideological societies is recognized”), from  
its presentation by the Committee of Principles and the first reading in  
the Main Committee as sentence 2 of par. 1. Only in the fourth reading  
in the Main Committee on 4 May 1949—after inclusion of the Weimar  
Church Compromise into the Constitution—this sentence was deleted  
with the reasoning that it is now unnecessary, because Art. 137 par. 2  
WRV is now part of the Constitution (v.Doemming/ Füsslein/Matz,  
Entstehungsgeschichte der Artikel des Grundgesetzes [History of the  
Development of the Articles of the Constitution]: JöR, N.F., vol. 1, p. 73  
foll.; Parl. Council, HA-Prot., 57th meeting on 4.5.1949, p. 745). From  
this it follows, according to the intention of the Parliamentary Council,

that freedom of religious association is, and is to continue to be, guar-  
anteed in Constitutional Law. It would be totally opposed to this ruling  
and to the intention of the framer of the Constitution, if it [freedom of  
religious association] were to be denied merely because of its deletion  
from Art. 4 which was only made in order to avoid a double guarantee,  
since it is part of the freedom of religion guaranteed in Constitutional  
Law. It is rather to be deduced that Art. 4 par. 1 and 2 GG refers for its  
guarantee of the freedom of religious association to Art. 140 GG/137  
par. 2 WRV and includes its normative content.

111.40 2. The guarantee of freedom of religious association includes the free-  
dom to form and organize as a religious association based on a com-  
mon Faith. Even the concept of religious *association* points to the  
fact that a union on the basis of State Law is intended, and not just  
a mere spiritual community of worship. The possibility of forming  
a religious association is to open the way to organizing as a union  
of people for the realization of a common religious purpose, to give  
some legal form, and to participate in general legal proceedings. This  
is not meant as a right to a *particular* legal form, such as that of an  
incorporated association or some other form of legal person; guaran-  
teed is, however, the possibility of a legal existence in some form or  
other, including participation in general legal proceedings.

111.41 It is in conformity with this that Art. 140 GG in connection with Art.  
137 par. 4 WRV opens and guarantees to religious communities the pos-  
sibility of acquiring legal capacity according to the general conditions of  
Civil Law. These conditions have to be observed by everyone on principle,  
including religious communities. Nothing is therefore lost, if a religious  
community or one of its parts cannot acquire a particular legal form it is  
aspiring to, because of a special organization rooted in its belief. Freedom  
of religious association demands, however, that the self-understanding  
of the religious community, insofar as it is rooted in the freedom of  
religious belief and confession guaranteed in Art. 4 par. 1 GG and is  
realized in the practice of the religion protected by Art. 4 par. 2 GG, is  
to be especially considered in the interpretation and application of the  
relevant law, here of corporate law of the Code of Civil Law (cf. BverfGE  
53, 366 <401> m.w.N.). This means not only that the religious com-  
munity is allowed to make full use of the leeway in organization opened  
to it by Dispositive Law [i.e. Law that is amenable to negotiation]. Even  
in the application of compulsory regulations leeways of interpretation

are to be used in favor of the religious community if necessary; this must  
not, however, lead to neglect of imperative consideration of the security  
of legal proceedings or of the rights of others.

111.42 It would be incompatible with the freedom of religious association, if  
a religious community, in view of its internal organization, were to be  
denied participation in general legal proceedings entirely, or this were  
made possible only under unacceptable conditions.

**III.**

111.43 The contested decisions do not satisfy the normative content of the free-  
dom of religious association described. The corporate law of the Code of  
Civil Law admits of taking into account special requirements of internal  
organization resulting from the individuality of religious associations  
which are a part of a religious community or in some special relationship  
to it. Since the legal form of a ‘Körperschaft des Öffentlichen Rechts’  
[Corporate Body under Public Law] is not available to the Bahá’ís (1  
following), this is applicable to the Local Spiritual Assembly, from Art. 4  
par. 1 and 2 GG (2 following).

111.44 1. The Bahá’í Community cannot acquire the character of a Corporate  
Body under Public Law according to Art. 140 GG/Art. 137 par. 5  
WRV. With this form of organization the existing problems would  
be solved, because in the framework of a “Corporate Body under  
Public Law” which in connection with the regulations of Art. 137  
par. 5 WRV functions only as a blanket concept, the inclusion into  
a hierarchical structure, as it appears to be given for the Bahá’ís in  
their belief, could be fully realized organizationally. This is shown,  
for example, in the case of the Roman Catholic Church, for which  
a hierarchical organizational structure is determined which acquires  
validity in State Law without diminution. Thus, church parishes are  
established or dissolved by the local bishop alone, after a hearing in  
the Diocesan Council of Priests, without the advice or the agreement  
of the priest or the congregation of the church or of a body selected  
by the congregation being necessary (Can. 515, § 2 i.V.m. Can. 127,  
§§ 1 and 2 CIC). The appellants have, however, shown that recogni-  
tion as a Corporate Body under Public Law is out of the question for  
the Bahá’í Community, according to the relevant recommendations  
of the Conference of the Ministers of Religion and as the result of  
an enquiry to the Ministry of Religion of Hesse; it had only about

4,000 to 5,000 members in the Federal Republic in the year 1986,  
who moreover were divided among approximately 50 local Bahá’í  
communities. It cannot be said that the denial of recognition as a  
Corporate Body under Public Law is legally incorrect or even wrong  
in view of these circumstances and of the criteria of Art. 137 par. 5  
WRV. Therefore it is uncertain whether the Bahá’í Community, were  
the acquisition of the character of a Corporate Body under Public  
Law possible for it, could be referred to it without losing its right to  
freedom granted in Art. 4 par. 1 and 2 GG, or would have a choice  
of legal form.

111.45 2. It is possible in the framework of the corporate law of the Code  
of Civil Law, and it is demanded by Constitutional Law, that the  
religious requirements for the internal organization of the Local  
Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís as a religious association and as  
part of a religious community be especially considered.

a) The regulations of the By-Laws presented, which were con-  
sidered by the Courts to be incompatible with the principle of  
independence and self-administration (autonomy of the Asso-  
ciation), on the establishment of membership (Art. 4 par. 2),  
removal from membership (Art. 4 par. 2) and the dissolution  
of the Association (Art. 14 par. 1 letter b), the requirements for  
amendment of the By-Laws (Art. 13 par. 2) and the definition  
of the tasks of the Association (Art. 11 par. 1 letter c), do not  
concern those regulations of corporate law which, in the inter-  
est of the security and clarity of legal proceedings, regulate the  
affairs and legal relations with external effects (appointment or  
removal of the officers, their power of representation, liability of  
the assets of the Association, liquidation in case of dissolution of  
the Association etc). They refer solely to the internal organization  
of the Association.

b) The regulations contested are not in contradiction to the wording  
of the regulations of corporate law on the internal organization  
of the Association. The dissolution of the Association regulated  
in § 41 BGB by decision of the general meeting of members is  
not excluded but supplemented by the National Spiritual Assem-  
bly of the Bahá’ís’ right of dissolution; on neither the manner  
of the establishment of membership, nor on the possibilities for  
removal, does § 58 BGB contain any regulation; the regulation

of § 33 BGB on amendment of the By-Laws is dispositive [not  
obligatory] (§ 40 BGB); on the definition of the tasks of the  
Association there is no legal regulation.

c) The courts justify the inadmissibility of the mentioned By-Laws  
merely on the basis of their incompatibility with the principle of  
corporate autonomy characterizing corporate law. This principle  
of corporate autonomy is not expressly laid down in the corpo-  
rate laws of the BGB; rather it is deduced from jurisprudence  
and from the doctrine of the totality of regulations, which trace  
back the bringing into being and organization of an association,  
as well as the conduct of its affairs, to the will of the members of  
the association. Its aim, similar to that of private autonomy, is  
to preserve the character of the association as a union of persons  
carried on mainly by the will and action of its members (KG,  
OLGZ 1974, p. 385 <387>; RGRK-Steffen, 12th ed., marginal  
No. 31 f. before § 21, § 25 marginal No. 1; Staudinger-Coing,  
12th ed., introd. remark to §§ 21–54, marginal No. 38; AK-Ott,  
§ 25 marginal No. 15 f.; cf. also Flume, Allgemeiner Teil des  
Bürgerlichen Rechts [General Part of Civil Law] I/2, 1983, p.  
189 f.). Part of this autonomy is to give institutions which are  
provided with it the right to give themselves the organization  
suitable to their aims, and to freely determine it, as long as there  
are no binding provisions or principles derived from the char-  
acter of the particular institution which are contrary to it. It is  
emphasized in jurisdiction that this autonomy can also be prac-  
ticed in such a way, that the right of self-administration of the  
association is limited by its Constitution; such a limitation also  
represents a practice of autonomy; it is therefore a curtailment  
of autonomy when such regulations are declared inadmissible  
(cf. KG, OLGZ 1974, p. 385 <387>; Dütz, 2. FS for Herschel,  
1982, p. 55 <73 ff.>; a.A. Flume, a.a.O., p. 194 ff.).

111.46 The principle of corporate autonomy, as it is understood in legal judg-  
ments and literature, is thus marked by two tendencies in regard to its  
content, which do not necessarily run parallel: on the one hand it protects  
autonomy in the formation of the organizational structure of the associa-  
tion according to the free self-determination of the members, to which  
can also belong integration in a hierarchically organized community; on  
the other hand it protects the self-determination of the association and

its members from a renunciation which almost totally defeats their own  
self-determination. It does not exclude the possibility, rather it opens up  
the way, to an equalization in the interpretation and application of both  
tendencies, by taking into consideration the concrete case, i.e. in relation  
to the aims and individuality of the Association in question. Thus it  
is considered consistent with corporate autonomy, to create associations  
at different levels, inside which the lower-level associations—be they of  
legal capacity or not—are in a relation of dependency to the superior  
associations, but do not thereby lose their character as associations, as  
long as they also pursue tasks independently (Reichert/ Dannecker/Kühr,  
Handbuch des Vereins- und Verbandsrechts [Handbook of the Law gov-  
erning Associations and Unions], 4th ed. 1987, marginal No. 2098 ff.;  
Soergel-Hadding, marginal No. 53 before § 21; BGHZ 90, p. 331).

d) If, in this connection, one considers the individuality of religious  
associations which are organized as parts of a religious communi-  
ty, it is obvious, in view of the frequently observable hierarchical  
internal organization rooted in the belief of religious communi-  
ties, that associations which are part of religious communities,  
or in a particular relationship to them, wish to be integrated  
into the hierarchy of their religious community. This cannot  
automatically be considered as submission to outside third-party  
influence which threatens the essential independence and self-  
administration of the association.

aa) Autonomy in the formation and organization of a re-  
ligious association can be practiced in such a way, that  
one of the aims of the association is to be part of a re-  
ligious community and to integrate into the structure  
determined by its religious laws. Such self-determined  
aims of integration which, in the case of a religious  
association, may well represent an expression of the  
religious self-determination of the members in their  
common Faith, must not be judged simply as surren-  
der of the self-determination of the association. A limit  
is reached only when the self-determination and self-  
administration of the association is ruled out, not only  
in certain respects as a consequence of the hierarchical  
integration arising from the religious law, but greatly  
beyond that; the association would then no longer

be carried on mainly by the will of its members, but  
would become a mere administrative center or would  
be run for the separate estate of another party (cf. KG,  
OLGZ 1974, p. 385 <390>; BayObLGZ 1979, p. 303  
<308 ff.>).

According to the above, corporate law permits, in the case  
of a religious association constituted as part of a religious  
community, that limitations in the autonomous rights of  
dissolution, removal or activity shall not be considered  
as inadmissible external third-party influence incompat-  
ible with corporate autonomy, as long as they serve, and  
are limited to, safeguarding integration into the greater  
religious community in the framework of existing ties of  
religious law—such as the preservation and identity of  
belief and basic duties of daily living. With such a limi-  
tation to the powers of intervention of a hierarchically  
superior institution, which only claims for itself some kind  
of authority over the teachings and corresponding rights  
of jurisdiction, a sufficient share of self-determination and  
self-administration of the association is preserved.

bb) By considering the influence of the National Spiritual  
Assembly specified in the By-Laws in regard to the  
continuance, membership and activities of the Local  
Spiritual Assembly as constituting in general an inad-  
missible third-party influence over the Association, the  
courts have misunderstood the character of religious  
associations which, as part of their belief, organize  
themselves hierarchically as part of a religious com-  
munity, and thus have misconstrued the significance  
of the Constitutional Law of freedom of religious  
association for the interpretation and application  
of the principle of corporate autonomy. They have  
considered the National Spiritual Assembly to be an  
extraneous organization, characterized by different  
aims and interests, exercising a dominating influence,  
without considering the unity and mutuality linked  
to religious law. It is no different with the conclusion  
concerning the election of the members of the Local

Spiritual Assembly by the believers of the local Bahá’í  
community. These, by virtue of the ties of religious  
law, are not third parties subjecting the Association to  
an alien influence from outside and thereby annulling  
its self-determination; rather, this manner of establish-  
ing membership is in accordance with the purpose of  
the Association to administer the affairs of the local  
Bahá’í Community as a hierarchical governing body  
(Art. 2 par. 2 of the By-Laws and Preamble), and it  
precisely serves its realization.

e) Nor can an inadmissible third-party influence be deduced from  
the fact that, in case of dissolution of the Association by the Na-  
tional Spiritual Assembly, the assets will fall to it (Art. 14 par. 1  
and 2 of the By-Laws). The purpose of this provision of the By-  
Laws is not that of enabling the National Spiritual Assembly, by  
making use of its right of dissolution, to seize another’s assets for  
the purpose of increasing its own assets. This is contradicted by  
the fact that according to the By-Laws no contributions are levied  
with the purpose of accumulating assets; the financing of the  
Association is solely through voluntary donations; moreover, the  
Association has expressly subordinated itself to the legal condi-  
tions of charitable purpose (Art. 2 par. 2 and 3 of the By-Laws).

**IV.**

111.47 The cited decisions therefore violate the appellants’ constitutional right  
from Art. 4 par. 1 and 2 GG in connection with Art. 140 GG/137 par.  
2 and 4 WRV, in that they do not sufficiently consider, in the inter-  
pretation and application of the meaning of corporate autonomy, the  
character of the Local Spiritual Assembly as a religious Association and as  
part of a religious community. They are therefore to be revoked. The case  
is to be referred back to the District Court for renewed consideration. It  
will have to examine, among other things, whether the right of dissolu-  
tion and removal accorded the National Spiritual Assembly, expressed  
without limits in the By-Laws, is sufficiently limited by the purpose of  
the Association and the Preamble to the Constitution, in the sense of the  
explanations under III 2 d) aa), or if an express definition in the By-Laws  
is needed.

111.48 The decision on the costs follows from § 34a par. 2 BverGG.

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**Decision of the German Federal Constitutional Court**

Elucidation of Abbreviations

111.49

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| --- | --- | --- |
| **Abbreviation** | **Elucidation in German** | **Elucidation in English** |
| a.A. | andere Ansicht | Other opinion or view |
| a.a.O. | am angegeben Ort (bereits vorher zitierte Quelle) | idem. (from the source already cited) |
| AK-Ott | Kommentar zum Bürgerlichen Gesetzbuch (Reihe Alternativkommentare), 1. Auflage 1979ff. Ott = Bearbeiter | Commentary in the Code of Civil Law (series of alternative commentaries), 1st edition 1979ff. Ott = name of author |
| BayObLGZ | Bayerisches Oberstes Landesgericht, Entscheidungssammlung in Zivilsachen | Bavarian Supreme State Court, Collection of decisions in civil matters |
| BGB | Bürgerliches Gesetzbuch | Book of the code of civil law |
| BGHZ | Bundesgerichtshof, Entscheidungen in Zivilsachen | Federal Court, decisions in civil matters |
| BverfGE | Bundesverfassungsgericht, Entscheidungen | Federal Constitutional Court, Decisions |
| BverfGG | Gesetz über das Bundesverfassungsgericht in der Fassung vom 3.2.1971 | Law on the Federal Constitutional Court in the draft of 3 February 1971 |
| BvR | Registerzeichen des Bundesverfassungsgerichts für Verfassungsbeschwerden | Registration symbol of the Federal Constitutional Court for constitutional appeals |
| Can. | Canon | Canon (i.e. in relation to the canon Law of the Church) |
| CIC | Codex Iuris Canonici | Codex of Canon Law |
| FGG | Reichsgesetz über die freiwillige Gerichtsbarkeit vom 17.5.1898 | Imperial Law on voluntary jurisdiction of 17 May 1898 |
| FS für Herschel | Festschrift für Herschel | Publication in honour of Herschel |

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| --- | --- | --- |
| GG | Grundgesetz für die Bundesrepublik Deutschland vom 23.5.1949 | Basic Law (Constitution) of the Federal Republic of Germany of 23 May 1949 |
| GReg | Gerichtsregister | Court Register |
| HA-Prot | Protokolle des Hauptausschusses des Parlamentarischen Rates | Minutes of the Main Committee of the Parliamentary Council |
| HDStR | Handbuch des deutschen Staatskirchenrechts | Handbook of German State Church Law |
| i.V.m. | In Verbindung mit | In connection with |
| m.w.N. | Mit weiteren Nachweisen | With further indications |
| OLGZ | Entscheidungen der Oberlandesgerichte in Zivilsachen | Decisions of the High State Courts in civil matters |
| RGRK-Steffen | Das Bürgerliche Gesetzbuch mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der Rechtsprechung, des Reichsgerichts und des Bundesgerichtshofes, Kommentar, 12. Auflage 1974ff. Steffen = Bearbeiter | The Code of Civil Law with special reference to legal pronouncements, to the Imperial Court and to the Federal Court, Commentary, 12th edition 1974íf. Steffen = name of author |
| WRV | Weimarer Verfassung vom 11.8.1919 | Weimar Constitution of 11 August 1919 |

**Decision of the German Federal Constitutional Court**

*Background and significance*

111.50 In a decision handed down on 5 February 1991 the Federal Constitutional  
Court of Germany upheld a constitutional appeal made by the Spiritual  
Assembly of the Bahá’ís of Tübingen. This decision is of such far-reaching  
importance that the Universal House of Justice has asked that the following  
summary of its background and effects be sent to all National Spiritual  
Assemblies. This summary is freely based on an article prepared by Dr. Udo  
Schaefer at the request of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of  
Germany for publication in *Bahá’í Nachrichten*, the newsletter of the Ger-  
man Bahá’í community.

**I.**

111.51 The Bahá’í Administrative Order has so many unique features, and is so  
different from the organizational structure of most other religions, that not  
infrequently difficulties are experienced in conveying to the authorities in  
some countries a clear understanding of the nature of our institutions, and  
thus of obtaining a status that is accorded to other similar bodies under civil  
law.

111.52 In Germany, for example, 95 percent of all associations are recognized  
as being “of public benefit.” This is similar to what is known as “charitable  
status” in other countries, and is the basis for the granting of various tax  
exemptions. Over the years the Spiritual Assemblies in Germany repeatedly  
experienced difficulty with the Inland Revenue offices until the National  
Spiritual Assembly turned to the Federal Minister of Finance, who issued  
a decree on 6 August 1990 clarifying that the Spiritual Assemblies of the  
Bahá’ís “serve the promotion of religious purposes” and thus have public-  
benefit status. Even after this, one of the Revenue Offices continued to  
insist that the By-Laws of a Spiritual Assembly needed to be amended.

111.53 A second problem was that of the form under which Bahá’í Spiritual  
Assemblies could be incorporated. This was the problem that eventually  
came before the Federal Constitutional Court, namely, whether the Local  
Spiritual Assemblies could be incorporated under German Law using the  
By-Laws that are the universal Bahá’í standard. When different legal systems  
collide there are always problems, and this was the case here, where Bahá’í  
constitutional law seemed to be incompatible with German civil law. In  
order to make these problems intelligible and to explain the decision of  
the Federal Constitutional Court, it is necessary to consider the historical  
background.

**II.**

111.54 Firstly, it is necessary to understand that the Bahá’í Community is not only  
a religious community but also a community of law. The believers are linked  
together not only by the tie of belief and love, but also by the legal norms  
with which the Founder of our Faith has endowed His community, legal  
norms which govern the structure of the community, its administrative or-  
gans and its functions. The main sources of these legal norms, which are  
to be found throughout the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, are  
the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, the Kitáb-i-‘Ahd and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Will and Testament,

as well as the works of Shoghi Effendi who, as the Authorized Interpreter,  
expounded and elaborated these norms in his letters (especially in those  
published in *Bahá’í Administration* and *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*).

111.55 The revelation of the laws of the Faith, and their application in practice,  
has been a very gradual process. Bahá’u’lláh had appointed four Hands of  
the Cause of God during His own lifetime, and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had brought  
into being embryonic Local Spiritual Assemblies, but the raising up of the  
institutions of the Administrative Order really started with the ministry of  
Shoghi Effendi.

111.56 In the establishment of the Administrative Order the American Bahá’í  
Community played a leading role. In the twenties, under the unerring guid-  
ance of the Guardian, the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of the  
United States and Canada formulated a constitution for itself, consisting of  
a Declaration of Trust and By-Laws, and one for Local Spiritual Assemblies,  
comprising a set of By-Laws, all based on the laws and principles of the  
Faith, and in a form through which these institutions could incorporate  
(obtain legal capacity) under American law. In doing this the difficulty  
was to mould the non-codified Bahá’í laws and principles into forms made  
available by civil law for the attainment of legal capacity. With the expert  
help of American jurists, constitutions were worked out for the National  
Assembly and the Local Assemblies which were endorsed by Shoghi Effendi  
and prescribed by him as the pattern for the establishment of the Bahá’í  
Administration in other parts of the world.

**III.**

111.57 When, after the Second World War, the Spiritual Assemblies that had been  
dissolved under the Nazi regime were reestablished in Germany, the Na-  
tional Spiritual Assembly adopted the Declaration of Trust and By-Laws  
which formed the national Bahá’í constitution, and the By-Laws of a Local  
Spiritual Assembly which were the standard local Bahá’í constitution, sim-  
ply translating them from English into German. Wherever the Local As-  
semblies attained legal capacity, they were incorporated with these By-Laws.

111.58 As the establishment of the judicial system of the German Federal Re-  
public progressed, the scrutiny of articles of incorporation became increas-  
ingly strict, and Local Spiritual Assemblies which wished to incorporate met  
with more and more difficulties. The standard By-Laws corresponded to  
American legal concepts and were expressed in American legal language.

These were radically at variance with the concepts of German law and thus,  
in many instances barely comprehensible to German lawyers.

111.59 Under the pressure of this experience the German Bahá’í institutions  
acquired the understanding that, while the fundamental structures and  
principles of our law as “Divine Law” are unalterable, they have to be ex-  
pressed in different terminology according to the legal systems of particular  
countries. This experience was shared by other Bahá’í communities around  
the world.

111.60 Thus, in the seventies, with the agreement of the Universal House of  
Justice, new By-Laws, which are faithful to the Bahá’í standard constitution  
and are also in accordance with German Law, were drafted and introduced  
as a pattern for all Local Spiritual Assemblies in Germany. All Spiritual  
Assemblies in the Federal Republic are today incorporated according to  
these sample By-Laws. The National Spiritual Assembly also prepared a  
new constitution for itself, but this has not yet been registered, because the  
Court of Registration concerned was awaiting the decision of the Federal  
Constitutional Court.

111.61 Although this development placed the German Spiritual Assemblies in  
an incomparably better position in relation to the Courts of Registration,  
it soon became clear that the legal construction of the By-Laws was still  
not easily conveyed to the courts concerned. It is not the community (with  
the Assembly as its managing body) which is the association, but the As-  
sembly itself, which is elected by the members of the community; this is  
an unusual construction in Germany. Normally, membership in an associa-  
tion is attained by joining it, but membership in a Spiritual Assembly is  
through election by a “third party,” the community. Normally in Germany,  
an Association has a minimum size (7 members) and has no upper limit.  
As- against that the membership of the Assembly is limited in number: it  
has nine members, no fewer and no more. In spite of these difficulties it  
was usually possible to overcome the Registrar’s objections and obtain legal  
incorporation. Sometimes this required proceedings in the law courts.

**IV.**

111.62 The legal administrator of the District Court of Tübingen was especially  
obstinate. He objected to no less than eight points in the By-Laws and  
finally, on 8 December 1983, refused incorporation. The legal measures  
taken against this decision were unsuccessful. The State Court of Tübingen

rejected the further appeal of 5 May 1985. The High State Court in Stutt-  
gart, to which the case was subsequently appealed, rejected it on 27 January  
1986.

111.63 With that the legal measures were exhausted, and this would have meant  
that the Spiritual Assembly of Tübingen would never be able to incorporate  
with the By-Laws of the standard local Bahá’í constitution. Beyond this,  
when the decision of the High State Court in Stuttgart was published in  
the legal literature, a number of other courts, alerted by this decision, de-  
manded that incorporated Local Assemblies amend their By-Laws or else  
face cancellation of their existing incorporation.

111.64 The decision of the High State Court in Stuttgart was founded on the  
principle of corporate autonomy which applies to associations under Ger-  
man civil incorporation law. According to this, an association is an autono-  
mous body free from third-party influence and is subject only to the law of  
the land. The fact that Local Spiritual Assemblies are linked in a hierarchy  
and that their superior institutions, the National Assembly and the Univer-  
sal House of Justice, have a series of rights of intervention according to the  
By-Laws, is seen to violate this principle of corporate autonomy.

111.65 Thus a critical situation had arisen for the German Bahá’í Community.  
There was a great danger that all incorporated Spiritual Assemblies, including  
the National Spiritual Assembly, would be deprived of their legal capacity.

111.66 The German Constitution provides a possibility for recognized religious  
communities to incorporate, in certain circumstances, under “public law”  
rather than as associations under civil law. But this presupposes a minimum  
number of members which the German Bahá’í community is still far from  
having reached.

111.67 The Spiritual Assemblies of the Bahá’ís must therefore have recourse to  
the corporate law of the German Code of Civil Law to achieve legal capac-  
ity. But, to obtain such registration the Spiritual Assemblies would have had  
to change the basic structures of their By-Laws. Such changes the Bahá’ís  
cannot and will not accept, because the essential structures of the consti-  
tutional law of our community are the Law of God and are therefore not  
open to compromise. These essential structures include the vertical form of  
institutional organization.

111.68 With all other legal means exhausted, the Federal Constitutional Court  
presented the last resort for the German Bahá’í community, but this presup-  
posed that the decisions previously passed by the courts had violated the  
constitutional rights of the Spiritual Assembly of Tübingen. The National

Spiritual Assembly was convinced that this was unmistakably the case. Ar-  
ticle 4 of the German Constitution guarantees not just freedom of religious  
practice, which includes freedom of belief and worship, but also freedom of  
organization. The decisions passed by the courts, and the interpretation of  
civil law underlying them, had led to the result that hierarchical integration  
within the framework of the Bahá’í Administration was made impossible  
for the Bahá’ís. Were these decisions to be enforced, each local Bahá’í com-  
munity would be isolated from the rest of the Administrative Order. The  
community as a whole would no longer exist, it would be only an amor-  
phous collection of autonomous bodies with no links to one another. The  
Bahá’í Community as the “People of God” embodied in a legal structure,  
would no longer exist. In this the National Assembly saw a violation of  
Article 4 of the Federal Constitution and concluded that the submission of  
a Constitutional Appeal was advisable.

111.69 Although, from the outset, this constitutional question had been referred  
to in writing, the courts concerned with the successive appeals on the case  
had not considered them at all.

111.70 After receiving the Constitutional Appeal, which was submitted in  
March 1986, the Federal Constitutional Court considered this extremely  
unusual matter very intensively. It even requested original literature from  
the German Bahá’í Publishing Trust, asked for and examined numerous  
By-Laws of other associations, Christian and Islamic, and solicited views  
from the Federal Minister of Justice and from the Ministry of Justice of  
Baden-Württemberg, the Evangelical Church in Germany and the Institute  
for State Church Law of the Dioceses of Germany (on the question of  
corporate autonomy in the case of church associations). The two Ministries  
of Justice expressed an opinion very unfavorable to the Bahá’ís, concluding  
that the contested decisions had been passed correctly and so the Constitu-  
tional Appeal was unfounded.

111.71 The Federal Constitutional Court took a long time to reach its decision.  
It had to consider the far-reaching consequences which a decision in our  
favor could have. Would it not open wide the floodgates for organizations  
unjustifiably calling themselves “religions” to make use of this decision in  
future?

**V.**

111.72 The decision which the Federal Constitution Court reached, wholly in our  
favor, on 5 February 1991, is a relatively rare decision in the field of State

Church Law in Germany, and for this alone it constitutes a highly signifi-  
cant precedent in the formulation and development of German Law.

111.73 For the German Bahá’í Community this decision, as shown by the above  
explanations, is of far-reaching significance and cannot be overestimated: It  
ensures the legal status of the community and brings to an end all attempts  
by the courts to require the amendment of the basic structures of our By-  
Laws. It confirms once and for all the right of the Bahá’ís to organize as a  
hierarchically structured legal community according to the revealed Law of  
God.

111.74 The decision first of all sets a limit to its application, in a statement that  
is of the greatest importance as a testimony to the widespread recognition  
of the Bahá’í Faith as an independent religious community. It explains that  
the mere assertion of a community that it is a religious community is not  
sufficient for it to submit such a constitutional appeal. The authorities and  
courts have to examine in each specific case whether it is really a religion  
and a religious community, according to spiritual content and external ap-  
pearances. Here the Court states: “In the present case it is not necessary to  
go more deeply into this, as the character of the Bahá’í Faith as a religion  
and the Bahá’í Community as a religious community is evident, in actual  
everyday life, cultural tradition, and in the understanding of the general  
public as well as of the science of comparative religion.”

111.75 In its decision, the Federal Constitutional Court reviewed in detail the  
constitutional right of freedom of religious organization and came to the  
conclusion that the lower courts, in arriving at their decisions, had not done  
justice to this constitutional right; that it is possible, within the framework  
of the German civil law governing incorporations, to give special consid-  
eration to the religious requirements governing the internal organization  
of the Local Spiritual Assembly as a religious association and as part of  
a religious community; and, moreover, that Constitutional Law demands  
that such special consideration be given.

111.76 The Court pointed out that, because associations which are part of reli-  
gious communities wish to be integrated into the hierarchy of their religious  
community, the granting of the right of intervention to superior institutions  
cannot be considered as submission to an external influence which would  
threaten the essential independence of the association or its right to ad-  
minister itself. The Federal Constitutional Court concluded that the courts  
acting in this case had misunderstood the constitutional right of freedom of  
religious organization in the interpretation and application of the principle

of corporate autonomy, in that they had considered the National Spiritual  
Assembly “to be an extraneous organization, characterized by different aims  
and interests, exercising a dominating influence, without considering the  
unity and mutuality linked to religious law.” The same was true, the Court  
explained, for the election of the members of the Local Spiritual Assembly  
by the believers in the local community, who are not “third-parties.”

111.77 From the reasons given for the decision it can be inferred that a posi-  
tive decision was possible only because the Bahá’í Law, which underlies our  
constitutions as revealed Law, is an indispensable part of our Faith.

**VI.**

111.78 The magnitude of the achievement this judgment represents in the efforts to  
preserve and ensure the legal status of the Spiritual Assemblies in Germany  
can be judged from the fact that only 1.5 percent of all Constitutional Ap-  
peals meet with success.

111.79 The National Spiritual Assembly had the wisdom to shrink from no ef-  
fort or cost in order to ensure the best presentation of the case. It engaged a  
renowned Stuttgart firm of attorneys for its legal protection. The presenta-  
tion of the case was in the hands of an expert in the fields of Constitutional  
Law, Administrative Law and State Church Law. Beyond that the National  
Spiritual Assembly solicited an opinion from a highly regarded expert in  
State Church Law at the University of Heidelberg (Professor Friedrich  
Müller). This profound opinion, comprising 115 pages, which clearly and  
convincingly sets forth the legal position of the Bahá’ís, was a great support  
for this Appeal and surely had an effect in helping to bring it to a successful  
conclusion. A gratifying side-effect of the work and funds devoted to this  
Appeal is to be found in the number of highly placed ministerial officials,  
professors and scientific collaborators, who had to concern themselves in-  
tensively with the Faith, not to mention the judges of Germany’s highest  
Court. The decision will be included in the collection of official records and  
will be published in all the legal journals.

111.80 Undoubtedly further fruits will be gathered in the years ahead when this  
landmark decision assists judicial authorities in other lands to appreciate the  
stature of the Bahá’í Faith and the fundamental importance of the laws and  
principles embedded in its Sacred Scriptures.

22 May 1991

112  
The Passing of the Hand of the Cause of God  
John Robarts

19 JUNE 1991

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

112.1 WITH SADDENED HEARTS ANNOUNCE PASSING MUCH-LOVED STAUNCH PROMOTER  
FAITH, KNIGHT BAHÁ’U’LLÁH, HAND CAUSE GOD JOHN ROBARTS. HIS DISTINGUISHED  
ADMINISTRATIVE TEACHING PIONEERING ACTIVITIES IN HIS NATIVE CANADA, IN AF-  
RICA AND EUROPE, DURING MINISTRY BELOVED GUARDIAN AND SUBSEQUENTLY ON  
WORLD SCALE THROUGH HIS INTERNATIONAL TRAVELS WERE SOURCE ABUNDANT  
INSPIRATION COUNTLESS FRIENDS MANY LANDS. HIS RELIANCE AND EMPHASIS ON  
PRAYER IN ALL EFFORTS PROMOTION CAUSE AND HIS SUSTAINED SERVICES PATH  
LOVE FOR BLESSED BEAUTY WERE CHARACTERIZED BY SPIRIT CERTITUDE, SELF-  
EFFACEMENT AND VIGOR WHICH SET A STANDARD OF STEWARDSHIP THAT HIS  
ENRICHED ANNALS FAITH. HE HAS ASSUREDLY EARNED BOUNTIFUL REWARD ABHÁ  
KINGDOM. PRAYING HOLY SHRINES PROGRESS HIS RADIANT SOUL. ADVISE HOLD BE-  
FITTING MEMORIAL GATHERINGS IN HIS HONOR THROUGHOUT WORLD INCLUDING  
ALL HOUSES WORSHIP.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

113  
Commencement of phase two  
of the Mount Carmel projects

20 JUNE 1991

To the Bahá’ís of the World

113.1 FOLLOWING RECEIPT BUILDING PERMITS FOR SECOND PHASE OF TERRACES OF  
THE BÁB’S SHRINE AND FOR EXCAVATION FOR THE FIRST TWO BUILDINGS, AND  
AFTER COMPLETION TENDER FORMALITIES, WE REJOICE ANNOUNCE CONTRACT  
SIGNED SEVENTEENTH JUNE 1991, OFFICIALLY COMMENCING PHASE TWO OF  
MOUNT CARMEL PROJECTS.

113.2 THIS PHASE, WHICH IS EXPECTED TO TAKE APPROXIMATELY SIXTEEN MONTHS,  
WILL INCLUDE EXCAVATION AND ANCHOR WORK FOR CENTER STUDY TEXTS AND  
ARCHIVES EXTENSION AS WELL AS EARTHWORK OF FIVE TERRACES IMMEDIATELY

BELOW HOLY SHRINE AND EXTENSION OF MAIN TERRACE. TOTAL COST THIS PHASE  
ESTIMATED FIVE MILLION DOLLARS.

113.3 APPEAL CONTINUING FLOW FUNDS ENSURE UNINTERRUPTED PROGRESS.

113.4 SUPPLICATING SACRED THRESHOLD DIVINE CONFIRMATION HISTORIC UNDER-  
TAKING.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

114  
Progress of the Mount Carmel projects

11 SEPTEMBER 191

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

114.1 The historic Arc and Terraces projects are now advancing at full speed,  
and the Universal House of Justice has asked us to inform you of the prog-  
ress being made.

114.2 The work is planned to proceed in several distinct phases. Phase One  
involved the strengthening and facing of the two-hundred-meter-long re-  
taining wall supporting the main Terrace of the Shrine of the Báb. This  
work continued in spite of many difficulties during the Gulf crisis and has  
now been completed.

114.3 Phase Two, the contract for which was signed on 17 June 1991, as already  
announced, involves the excavation for the Center for the Study of the Texts  
and the Archives Extension, the extension eastwards of the main Terrace of  
the Shrine of the Báb, and the completion of eight of the Terraces below  
the Shrine. Work is currently in progress in three main areas, as explained  
below.

114.4 On the site of the Center for the Study of the Texts and the Archives  
Extension a security fence has been erected around the work area to separate  
it from the Archives Building and the gardens below the Arc Path. Access  
roads have been opened to permit removal of excavated material. The first  
stage of excavation has been completed and rock bolts have been installed,  
allowing the construction of the first retaining wall to begin.

114.5 The extension of the main Terrace of the Shrine of the Báb eastward to  
make it symmetrical with the western half will provide a large underground  
storage area of great practical use in the care of the gardens. The excavations  
for this extension have now been completed and foundations are being laid.

114.6 On the site of the Terraces from the Shrine of the Báb leading down  
to Abbás Street, over two hundred valuable trees were carefully dug up  
and have been temporarily replanted on the Temple Land until they can  
be returned to the area of the Terraces after regrading of the mountainside.  
Now the remaining trees, undergrowth, topsoil and existing structures have  
been removed. The material from the excavations on the Arc is being moved  
to this area to provide the fill needed for the Terraces.

114.7 Phase Three will involve the construction of the Center for the Study  
of the Texts and the Archives Extension, and is scheduled to begin in July  
1992. It is to be followed by several other phases to complete the projects,  
and announcements about these will be made in due course.

114.8 It can thus be seen that the work is in full flow. The flow of funds to  
finance the work must likewise be uninterrupted. The Universal House of  
Justice is confident that the followers of Bahá’u’lláh will bend every effort  
to bring to speedy completion this stage in the fulfillment of the beloved  
Guardian’s vision of the establishment of the World Administrative Center  
of the Cause of God. It assures the friends in every land of its ardent prayers  
in the Holy Shrines for the successful completion of the great enterprises  
before the Bahá’í world at one of the most critical periods in human history.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

115  
Appointment of new Continental Counselor

7 OCTOBER 1991

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

115.1 We are happy to announce the appointment of Dr. Payman Mohajer as a  
new member of the Continental Board of Counselors in Asia.

115.2 He is replacing Mr. S. Nagaratnam who, due to ill health and personal  
circumstances, found it necessary to resign from the Board of Counselors.  
His resignation was regretfully accepted and his many years of dedicated  
service in his capacity as a Counselor are warmly remembered.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

116  
Message to Bahá’í International  
Women’s Conference, Ile-Ife, Nigeria

9 OCTOBER 1991

Bahá’í International Women’s Conference

Ile-Ife, Nigeria

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

116.1 The contribution of women to social, economic and cultural develop-  
ment is paramount. As the primary educators of children, women must  
themselves be educated and receive literacy training. As wives and mothers,  
as members of the professions, as farmers, as stewards of the health and  
well-being of families, and as members of Bahá’í administrative institutions,  
women must be welcomed into full partnership with men in consultative  
decision-making and in guiding the progress of their communities.

116.2 We are confident of your ability to set in motion processes of devel-  
opment and patterns of living which, emanating from within the Bahá’í  
communities, will exert salutary effects on the destiny of nations. Inspired  
and reinforced by the guidance and life-giving properties of the Word of  
God, the Bahá’ís of Africa can choose to play a leading role in brightening  
the fortunes of their entire continent. Be assured of our heartfelt prayers  
at the Sacred Threshold that this conference will be a center of spiritual  
illumination inspiring the friends to redouble their efforts towards ensuring  
the unhampered, systematic involvement of women in the vital work of the  
Cause.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

117  
Passing of Magdalene Carney, Counselor member  
of the International Teaching Center

10 OCTOBER 1991

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

117.1 DEEPLY GRIEVED SUDDEN PASSING STALWART MAIDSERVANT BAHÁ’U’LLÁH MEM-  
BER INTERNATIONAL TEACHING CENTER MAGDALENE M. CARNEY. HER WELL NIGH

THREE DECADES UNBROKEN SERVICE CAUSE GOD EXERTED IMMENSE INFLUENCE  
TEACHING WORK SOUTHERN REGION UNITED STATES, INVOLVED THIRTEEN YEARS  
MEMBERSHIP NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY THAT COUNTRY UNTIL HER APPOINT-  
MENT IN 1983 TO INTERNATIONAL TEACHING CENTER. INDOMITABLE FAITH, UN-  
SWERVING DEVOTION COVENANT, SELFLESS SPIRIT, OPEN CANDOR, WHOLEHEARTED  
COMMITMENT EDUCATION CHILDREN AND YOUTH ARE AMONG QUALITIES THAT  
WILL EVER BE ASSOCIATED WITH GOLDEN MEMORIES HER HIGHLY ACTIVE LIFE. AR-  
DENTLY PRAYING HOLY THRESHOLD PROGRESS HER STERLING SOUL THROUGHOUT  
DIVINE WORLDS.

117.2 ADVISE HOLD MEMORIAL SERVICES HER HONOR ALL HOUSES WORSHIP AND IN  
BAHÁ’Í COMMUNITIES THROUGHOUT WORLD.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

118  
The need for prepublication review

28 OCTOBER 1991

To an individual Bahá’í

Dear Bahá’í Friend,

118.1 … The House of Justice was deeply touched by the spirit of your letter,  
warmly congratulates you on the status you have attained as an academic,  
and appreciates your efforts to make use of your scholarly training in lend-  
ing expression to the Faith in academic circles.

118.2 The requirement that materials about the Faith authored by Bahá’ís  
must be reviewed by Bahá’í institutions before publication is imbedded in  
a Bahá’í administrative policy which originated with the explicit instruc-  
tion of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Shoghi Effendi included this instruction in his outline  
of the duties of National Spiritual Assemblies, and the duty of reviewing  
Bahá’í material is included in the constitution of these institutions with  
his approval. The requirement is temporary and is meant to protect the  
interests of the Faith at the early stages of its development.

118.3 You are, of course, entirely correct that only the Guardian had the pre-  
rogative of interpretation; it is not a prerogative that he could have devolved  
on other institutions. Yet in a number of letters written on his behalf, the  
importance of reviewing manuscripts about the Faith was repeatedly em-  
phasized, such as in a letter dated 15 November 1956 written to an indi-  
vidual, in which the following is stated:

118.3a Any Bahá’í book presenting the Faith should be reviewed by a compe-  
tent body. This only means that they should ascertain whether there  
is any misrepresentation of the Teachings in it. Sometimes the friends  
think they have to go into literary reviews and interfere with the au-  
thor’s style etc., which of course is wholly unnecessary ….[[121]](#footnote-121)118-1

Clearly, then, there is a distinction between the function of interpretation  
for which Shoghi Effendi was solely responsible and the function of Bahá’í  
review, which is essentially a matter of judgment. Literary review is, of  
course, a separate matter.

118.4 The House of Justice feels certain that it is possible for scholars to abide  
by this requirement without undermining the academic standard of their  
work, since the purpose of review is not inimical to academic excellence.  
Your concerns as an academic certainly deserve careful attention. But the  
Bahá’í community also has immense concerns about the consequences of  
dispensing too quickly with this requirement. The Bahá’í Faith makes very  
serious claims and has a rich and complex history, but it is as yet a young  
religion whose precepts are not widely understood. It has been undergoing  
severe persecution in the land of its birth and is experiencing serious op-  
position in other places where its detractors have no compunction in mis-  
representing its purposes. Until its history, teachings and practices are well  
known throughout the world, it will be necessary for the Bahá’í community  
to make efforts within itself to present correct information about the Faith  
in published material. This can and must be done without violating the  
principle of freedom of expression, which, according to the teachings of the  
Faith, is a vital right of all persons.

118.5 Even in the world of journalism where the most libertine excesses of  
expression are stoutly defended on the grounds of constitutional protection,  
as is the case in the United States, serious questions are being raised about  
the accuracy of non-fiction books being published these days. An article in a  
recent issue of *Columbia Journalism Review* (July/August 1991), that bastion  
of freedom of expression, devoted attention to such questions, querying the  
responsibility of publishers and editors and commenting on the sloppiness  
of some writers. It encourages reviewers of inaccurate books to take the  
publishers to task and to expose the authors’ transgressions, pointing out,

by quoting one such reviewer, that: “A newspaper can report one thing one  
day and revise or revoke the report the next day; a book makes a promise of  
much longer duration and far greater authority. The scale and presentation  
make a vital difference.” But this has to do with review after publication.  
Among its suggestions for prepublication solutions to inaccuracy, the article  
offers the following thought to publishers: “They could pay in-house or  
outside researchers to request documentation from the author, then judge  
its worthiness. At the very least, they could pay for a spot check, then decide  
whether a full-scale review is necessary.”

118.6 The positions you have taken in the third paragraph of your letter indi-  
cate an overreaction and a misconception of the real purpose of Bahá’í re-  
view. Is it not possible for Bahá’í academics to acknowledge the merit of the  
intention of this temporary requirement and, recognizing the sensitivity of  
the matter in view of the attitudes of the academic community, assist them-  
selves and the Bahá’í institutions to find a balance between both academic  
and Bahá’í expectations? Bahá’í review is not an exercise in censorship; it is  
in large measure a benefit offered to an author by the Bahá’í institutions,  
which are, in fact, the major repositories of the source materials that ordi-  
narily constitute the wellspring of the author’s work and are for other reasons  
the channels of elucidation for a wide range of obscure questions relating  
to the Faith. Certainly, a dispassionate exploration by Bahá’í scholars of the  
issues concerning both the academic community and the Bahá’í institutions  
in this matter could result in the formulation of a rationale appropriate to  
aiding understanding in academic circles as to the nature and necessity of  
Bahá’í review. Bahá’í academics, after all, are, first and foremost, believers in  
the Cause of God and upholders of divine law.

118.7 The House of Justice has acknowledged in the past that the process of  
review is often irksome, frequently takes far too long and is subject to many  
problems in implementation. Nevertheless, it is convinced that this is not  
the time to remove this temporary procedure. National Spiritual Assemblies  
responsible for administering the reviewing procedure have ‘been urged to  
do all they can to improve and expedite its operation, and efforts are con-  
tinually being made to this end. The House of Justice looks forward to the  
day when this requirement will be definitely removed; in the meantime it  
may well be modified as conditions change.

118.8 With regard to your particular concerns, there is nothing in the current  
regulations that would prevent a scholar who has written a work to recom-  
mend to the National Spiritual Assembly one or more individuals whom he

would like to see included among the reviewers selected by the Assembly.  
This approach offers the author a way of satisfying himself that he has had  
a direct part in the arrangement for review, and he can take confidence that  
some measure of peer review has been invested in the procedure.

118.9 The House of Justice trusts that this procedure will reduce your concerns  
and assures you of its prayers on your behalf in the Holy Shrines.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

119  
Selecting reviewers for Bahá’í manuscripts

30 OCTOBER 1991

To selected National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

119.1 The Universal House of Justice has requested us to send you the enclosed  
copy of a letter dated 28 October 1991 which we have written at its instruc-  
tion to a believer who is an academic and who requested that consideration  
be given to changing the Bahá’í administrative policy requiring prepublica-  
tion review of manuscripts authored by Bahá’ís.[[122]](#footnote-122)119-1 The concern expressed  
is that this policy contradicts values of free inquiry as perceived in academic  
circles and that submission to it could undermine scholarly credibility. As  
you will see from the enclosure, the House of Justice does not agree with  
this perception of Bahá’í review, but it sympathizes with the difficulties  
faced by Bahá’í academics in upholding and defending Bahá’í policy. Your  
attention is called particularly to the penultimate paragraph of the letter  
which mentions an approach intended to ease these difficulties and which  
can readily be accommodated by the current regulations on Bahá’í review.

119.2 The scholar who has authored a manuscript on a Bahá’í subject may rec-  
ommend to the National Spiritual Assembly one or more individuals for in-  
clusion among the reviewers selected by the Assembly. If for some particular  
reason the Assembly finds his nominees unacceptable, it may ask the author  
to submit other names for its consideration. While the National Assem-  
bly must retain control of the reviewing process and operate its reviewing

mechanism as it sees fit, it must at the same time exercise a flexibility which  
will allow it to accommodate such a procedure. As in any other instance of  
review, the Assembly should exercise independent judgment as to the merits  
of the recommendations it receives from its appointed reviewers.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

120  
The need for an increase in contributions to the Fund

18 NOVEMBER 1991

To the Followers of Bahá’u’lláh in Every Land

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

120.1 A time of challenge for the stalwart upholders of the Cause of God has  
now come upon us at the very moment when the world is grappling with  
tremendous problems, moral, social, economic and ecological. The Bahá’í  
community has grown in size and influence to the point where it is put to  
the test on all sides and at all levels. The opportunities are immense but we  
now face the question of whether to push forward with all speed, or to hold  
back because the resources available to us are inadequate for the purpose.

120.2 In lands where people have accepted the Faith in large numbers, the  
process of economic and social development, linked with the establish-  
ment, consolidation and strong functioning of Local Spiritual Assemblies,  
is attaining ever greater importance and is placing upon the international  
resources of the Faith a heavy demand for manpower and finance. In the  
countries of the former Eastern Bloc the need for assistance in the form  
of Bahá’í literature, pioneers, traveling teachers, the establishment of local  
centers, is made the more urgent by the extraordinary receptivity to the  
Message of Bahá’u’lláh shown by the spiritually thirsty populations. The  
opportunities for the promotion of the Cause of God in these areas cannot  
be allowed to go unheeded.

120.3 At the national level, the structure of Bahá’í communities is growing in  
complexity as the number of believers rises, and National Spiritual Assem-  
blies are being increasingly invited by national governments and non-gov-  
ernmental organizations to offer advice and assistance in upholding human  
rights, in safeguarding the environment, in promoting moral education,  
and in overcoming the ravages of prejudice and the rising tide of lawless-

ness which are undermining the social structure. Internationally a parallel  
process is taking place.

120.4 At the World Center itself, the construction work on the Mount Carmel  
Projects has begun, preparing facilities befitting the central institutions of  
the Administrative Order of Bahá’u’lláh for that time when they will have  
to shoulder the tremendous responsibilities that will be thrust upon them as  
the Lesser Peace begins to be established in the world.

120.5 Over the past four years there was a steady increase in the contributions  
of the friends worldwide to the international funds of the Faith, and it had  
been our hope and expectation that this rise would continue and even be  
accelerated in the current year. But since last Riḍván, on the contrary, there  
has been a sudden drop in contributions both to the international funds  
as a whole and to the Arc Projects Fund, creating a crisis which must be  
promptly overcome. In response to the growing needs of the teaching work  
and the Arc Projects, we have for several years been drastically cutting the  
expenditure of the World Center, canceling or postponing many activities  
which, although valuable, cannot be pursued under the present condition  
of shortage of funds. This process cannot be taken much further without  
seriously hampering the ability of the World Center to function at the level  
which the interests of the Faith require.

120.6 If the financial needs of this year and those immediately ahead are to be  
met, the contributions to the international funds of the Cause must, far  
from decreasing, be substantially increased.

120.7 Such an effort will call for sacrifice on the part of individual believers and  
also for the diversion of funds from those local and national projects which  
are not essential. We are confident that the friends will respond to this call, as  
they did to the crisis precipitated by the Iranian Revolution in 1979 when, at  
one moment, 61 % of the income of the international funds was cut off.

120.8 This is the immediate need. Beyond this there is, we believe, a worldwide  
need for appreciation of this basic principle of our Faith: that contributing  
to the Fund should constitute an integral part of the spiritual life of every  
Bahá’í and be regarded as the fulfillment of a fundamental spiritual obliga-  
tion. In too many countries we have encountered a reluctance among the  
teachers of the Cause to include, in their presentation of the Teachings,  
support of the Fund as a natural part of Bahá’í life. In the Kitáb-i-Aqdas,  
Bahá’u’lláh more than once refers to the necessity for combining spiritual  
and material means in achieving the purposes of the Faith. Shoghi Effendi,  
for his part, referred to the Fund as the life-blood of the Cause.

120.9 We urge all the friends to give deep thought to the importance of sup-  
porting the Cause financially and to the effect that Bahá’í activities have on  
the condition of the entire human race.

120.10 It is our fervent prayer at the Sacred Threshold that Bahá’u’lláh will in-  
spire His devoted followers in every land to arise unitedly in the service of  
His Cause and will reward their sacrifices with an outpouring of heavenly  
bounties.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

121  
Message on the Day of the Covenant

26 NOVEMBER 191

To the Followers of Bahá’u’lláh throughout the World

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

121.1 On the occasion of the Day of the Covenant, amidst the dramatic events  
within and without the Faith which evince an accelerating momentum in  
the concluding months of the Six Year Plan, and less than half a year from  
the beginning of the long-anticipated Holy Year, we rejoice in conveying  
this triple announcement to the entire Bahá’í world.

121.1a Seven new National Spiritual Assemblies will be formed at Riḍván  
1992: Angola in Africa; Greenland in the Americas; and Albania,  
the Baltic States, Bulgaria, Hungary and Poland in Europe. The  
emergence of the latter five will set a befitting seal on the victorious  
supplementary Two Year Plan launched at Riḍván 1990. In addi-  
tion, the National Spiritual Assembly of the Congo Republic, after  
a lapse of more than a decade due to political conditions, will be  
reestablished.

121.1b The Office of Ḥuqúqu’lláh has been established in the Holy Land  
under the direction of the Chief Trustee of Ḥuqúqu’lláh, the Hand  
of the Cause of God ‘Alí-Muḥammad Varqá, in anticipation of  
the worldwide application of the Law of Ḥuqúqu’lláh next Riḍván.  
Concurrent with this development are the steps being taken by  
Dr. Varqá to organize regional and national Boards of Trustees of

Ḥuqúqu’lláh, following the example of the Board already function-  
ing in the United States.

121.1c At Riḍván 1993, immediately following the Holy Year and during a  
period which will witness the holding of the Seventh Bahá’í Inter-  
national Convention at the World Center, a Three Year Plan will be  
launched. The national goals of this global Plan will be set through  
consultations between the Continental Counselors and National  
Spiritual Assemblies. The unusual character and rapidity of devel-  
opments both inside and outside the Faith signify the necessity for  
a short, flexible plan attuned to the dynamic nature of the times.

121.2 This momentous announcement, coinciding significantly with the open-  
ing of a new term for members of the Auxiliary Boards on all continents, is  
indicative of the fresh flood of divine confirmations pouring upon the cur-  
rent efforts of the Community of the Most Great Name in all parts of the  
planet. The coincidence demonstrates anew the existence of tremendous  
challenges and opportunities which must be met, and it calls attention to  
the vital role to be played by these distinguished servants of the Faith in  
aiding the believers everywhere to attain further heights in the unfolding  
glory of our great Cause.

121.3 We are moved to appeal to the followers of Bahá’u’lláh in every land,  
at this critical moment in the destiny of the Cause and of humankind,  
to make a supreme effort to gather the as yet unharvested victories in the  
fast-fleeting days remaining to the Six Year Plan. Let them do this that they  
may enter, with a fit sense of triumph, the impending Holy Year—a period  
charged with untold significance and pregnant with possibilities for major  
advances of the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh, possibilities which can only faintly be  
imagined as the Centenary of His Ascension draws closer.

121.4 Our ardent hopes for you all are intermingled with our supplications  
at the Holy Threshold that the Blessed Beauty may, to an unprecedented  
degree, rain down upon His loved ones His invigorating, victory-inducing  
confirmations.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

122  
The role of Assemblies  
in dealing with violations of Bahá’í law

9 DECEMBER 1991

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’í of Australia

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

122.1 The Universal House of Justice has received your letter of 26 September  
1991 which raises a number of questions concerning the exercise of your  
functions in situations where the Bahá’í laws are being violated. We have  
been asked to provide the following response.

122.2 Before commenting on your specific questions, the House of Justice feels  
it would be useful to review some aspects of the role of the Local and Na-  
tional Assemblies in regulating the behavior of the members of the Bahá’í  
community.

122.3 The aim of any Spiritual Assembly should be to develop a warm and  
loving relationship with the believers in its community, so that it can most  
effectively nurture and encourage them in the acquisition of a deeper  
understanding of the teachings, and can assist them to follow the Bahá’í  
principles in their personal conduct. The Assembly should aspire to being  
regarded by the members of the community as a loving parent, wise in its  
understanding of the varying degrees of maturity of those entrusted to its  
care, compassionate in dealing with the problems which arise as a result  
of any shortcomings, ever prepared to guide them to the correct path, and  
very patient as they strive to effect the necessary changes in their behavior.  
Such an approach is far removed from the harshly judgmental and punitive  
approach which so often characterizes the administration of law in the wider  
society. The Bahá’í application of justice, firmly rooted in spiritual principle  
and animated by the desire to foster the spiritual development of the mem-  
bers of the community, will increasingly be seen as a distinctive and highly  
attractive feature of the Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh.

122.4 Such an attitude of forbearance, restraint, and patience toward believ-  
ers who are striving to change practices and attitudes acquired in the years  
before they entered the sanctuary of the Cause of God should not blind a  
National Assembly to the fact that, at this stage in the development of the  
Faith, there may well be some believers in the community whose behavior  
necessitates that they be treated in a firm and uncompromising manner.

The following passage from a letter written on behalf of the Guardian is of  
broad applicability:

122.4a He feels that your Assembly must keep before its eyes the balance  
specified by Bahá’u’lláh, Himself, in other words, justice, reward and  
retribution. Although the Cause is still young and tender, and many  
of the believers inexperienced, and therefore loving forbearance is of-  
ten called for in the place of harsh measures, this does not mean that  
a National Spiritual Assembly can under any circumstances tolerate  
disgraceful conduct, flagrantly contrary to our Teachings, on the part  
of any of its members, whoever they may be and from wherever they  
may come ….

122.4b The National Assembly is the guardian of the welfare of the Faith,  
a most sacred and heavy responsibility and one which is inescapable.  
They must be ever vigilant, ever on the look-out, ever ready to take  
action, and, on all matters of fundamental principle, refuse to com-  
promise for an instant. Only in this way can the body of the Faith be  
free of disease.

122.4c … we should not confuse the true believers with those who are  
not quickened with the spirit of faith, have some ulterior motive, or  
are indifferent to the reputation they have personally, and the damage  
they may do the Cause in the eyes of the public. There is all the dif-  
ference in the world between these two categories, and your Assembly  
must be ever watchful and ready to take action when necessary.[[123]](#footnote-123)122-1

122.5 A survey of the letters written on behalf of the Guardian shows that  
he advised the National Spiritual Assemblies that they should resort to the  
severe sanction of deprivation of a believer’s administrative rights only for  
such matters as “disgraceful conduct, flagrantly contrary to our Teachings,”  
“seriously injuring the Faith in the eyes of the public through his conduct or  
flagrantly breaking the laws of God,” “gross immorality and open opposi-  
tion to the administrative functions of the Faith, and disregard for the laws  
of personal status,” “conduct which is disgracing the Cause,” and “breaking  
of laws, such as the consent of parents to marriage,” or “acts of such an  
immoral character as to damage the good name of the Faith.”[[124]](#footnote-124)122-2

122.6 It is clear that the removal of voting rights is a serious action which an  
Assembly should take reluctantly when the circumstances require that the  
Bahá’í community or its reputation in the eyes of the public must be pro-  
tected from the effects of an individual’s behavior, and where the authority  
of the laws of the Faith must be upheld. It should be the hope and prayer of  
the Assembly that the believer who has been administratively expelled from  
membership in the Bahá’í community will come to see that his behavior is  
in violation of the teachings, will endeavor to rectify his conduct, and will  
thus open the way to being welcomed back into the community so that he  
can lend his support to the vital and glorious task of establishing the World  
Order of Bahá’u’lláh.

122.7 Turning now to your questions: you have enquired about believers con-  
victed of an offense in the civil courts. As you know, the Bahá’í institutions  
do not have a responsibility to enforce the criminal laws of a nation, although  
they do quite properly exhort the believers to obedience to government,  
which includes obedience to its laws. Violations of criminal law are handled  
by the civil courts of a country and enforced by its civil administration. The  
fact that a believer has been charged with a criminal offense, or is suspected  
of having committed such an offense, or is convicted by the court, should  
not automatically result in the application of Bahá’í sanctions. Each case is  
to be considered on its own merits, and in the light of the aforementioned  
considerations pertaining to the effect on the Bahá’í community and its  
reputation. For example, an Assembly would be most unlikely to consider  
imposition of sanctions on a Bahá’í convicted of violating the laws regulat-  
ing automobile traffic flow, but it might well consider that a person known  
to be a Bahá’í convicted of selling narcotic drugs had brought disgrace to the  
name of the Faith and damaged its reputation before the public.

122.8 When an Assembly is aware that a believer is charged with a criminal  
offense, normally it should not pass judgment on the matter until a decision  
has been given in the courts, at which time it would consider whether it  
should impose administrative sanctions. There may be cases, however, when  
an Assembly is justified in taking certain actions to protect the interests of  
the Cause. Generally, the Assembly would regard the decision of the court  
as being valid in determining whether or not the Bahá’í was guilty of the  
stated offense, and would not undertake its own independent investigation.  
However, there may be special circumstances associated with a particular  
case, or with the reputation of the civil judicial system, which would incline  
an Assembly to decide that the verdict of the court should not be accepted

as a basis for Bahá’í administrative action without further investigation by  
the Assembly; it is left to the Assembly to make that determination.

122.9 When an allegation is made that a believer has violated Bahá’í law, irre-  
spective of the consequence in civil law, the process of investigation calls for  
a diligent and persistent effort by the Assembly to ascertain the facts, and for  
wholehearted cooperation of all concerned in the search for truth. Believers  
called upon to provide information should, if necessary, be reminded of the  
responsibility they bear to speak the truth and of the spiritual consequences  
of a failure to do so. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá asserts:

122.9a Truthfulness is the foundation of all human virtues. Without truth-  
fulness, progress and success, in all the worlds of God, are impossible  
for any soul. When this holy attribute is established in man, all the  
divine qualities will also be acquired.[[125]](#footnote-125)122-3

If this “holy attribute” should adorn the behavior of believers toward others,  
how much more should it characterize the statements which a Bahá’í makes  
to a divinely ordained institution.

122.10 The prospect of a believer’s displaying an attitude of hostility, when be-  
ing interviewed by a Spiritual Assembly or its representatives who are seek-  
ing to determine the facts of a matter, is abhorrent. All believers are strongly  
enjoined to have the utmost respect for the Assemblies, to cooperate fully  
with them, and to support their decisions. An Assembly enquiring into a  
matter should not allow itself to be deterred by the hostility of a believer  
who is withholding relevant information; it should appeal to him for coop-  
eration, remind him forcefully of his responsibilities and, in extreme cases  
such as threats made to the investigators, warn him of the administrative  
consequences of the persistence of his deplorable conduct.

122.11 When an Assembly comes to the point where it must make a decision in  
the face of conflicting assertions and insistent denials, it might well recall  
the advice of the Guardian:

122.11a … when they are called upon to arrive at a certain decision, they  
should, after dispassionate, anxious, and cordial consultation, turn

to God in prayer, and with earnestness and conviction and courage  
record their vote ….[[126]](#footnote-126)122-4

122.12 A believer who is distressed by the decision reached by an Assembly as  
a result of its investigation may well find comfort and reassurance in the  
following passage from a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi:

122.12a The Assembly may make a mistake, but, as the Master pointed out,  
if the Community does not abide by its decisions, or the individual  
Bahá’í, the result is worse, as it undermines the very institution which  
must be strengthened in order to uphold the principles and laws of  
the Faith. He tells us God will right the wrongs done. We must have  
confidence in this and obey our Assemblies ….[[127]](#footnote-127)122-5

As regards the need to warn an individual before his voting rights are re-  
moved, the basic principle is expressed in the following passage written on  
behalf of the Guardian:

122.12b … before anyone is deprived of their voting rights, they should  
be consulted with and lovingly admonished at first, given repeated  
warnings if they do not mend their immoral ways, or whatever other  
extremely serious misdemeanor they are committing, and finally, after  
these repeated warnings, be deprived of their voting rights.[[128]](#footnote-128)122-6

There are, however, many different ways in which this is applied, depending  
upon the nature of the offense and the situation in each case.

122.13 For example, when there is an isolated but serious offense, such as that of  
a Bahá’í woman who indulges in one act of immorality as a result of which  
she gives birth to a child out of wedlock, this is no grounds for the removal  
of administrative rights. But the Assembly, when it learns of the situation,  
should certainly arrange for the believer to be met and consulted with, to  
assist her in her difficulties, to ascertain her attitude to the situation. If she

has no regret for the offense and indicates that she feels free to repeat it in  
future, she will need to be educated in the teachings, counseled and, if she  
does not change her attitude, to be warned that a continuation of such  
actions would cause forfeiture of her administrative rights. If, however, she  
is contrite and is determined to lead a moral life henceforth, there would be  
no question of sanctions. The same course would be followed with the man  
involved, if he were a Bahá’í.

122.14 Another example would involve, not a single offense, but a continuing  
course of behavior, such as flagrant and continuing violation of the law  
prohibiting the consumption of alcoholic beverages. In such a situation the  
Assembly should explain the law to the believer, urge him to obey it, encour-  
age and assist him and warn him if necessary. If the response is favorable  
there would, again, be no need to deprive him of his administrative rights,  
but, if the believer is obdurate or continues in his course of misbehavior, he  
should, according to the circumstances of each case, be warned and warned  
again, with increasing severity and a time set for him to rectify his conduct.  
If this produces no amelioration, he would have to lose his administrative  
rights.

122.15 A third example involves the taking of a definite step which violates a  
clear law with which the believer is familiar. In this instance, the Assembly  
may conclude that the believer has been warned repeatedly of the conse-  
quences of such behavior through statements in widely circulated Bahá’í  
publications or in the deepening which a member of the community might  
reasonably be expected to have received. Into this category would fall the  
offenses against the Bahá’í requirement of parental consent to marriage, and  
the violations of law about which general warnings have been given in your  
newsletter.

122.16 Circumstances may arise where the offense is so serious that immediate  
action is required by the National Assembly to protect the Faith. In this  
connection, it is stated in a letter written on behalf of the Guardian:

122.16a You should vigilantly watch over and protect the interests of the Bahá’í  
Community, and the moment you see that any of the … Bahá’ís  
… are acting in a way to bring disgrace upon the name of the Faith,  
warn them, and, if necessary, deprive them immediately of their vot-  
ing rights if they refuse to change their ways. Only in this way can the  
purity of the Faith be preserved. Compromise and weak measures will

obscure the vision of its followers, sap its strength, lower it in the eyes  
of the public and prevent it from making any progress.[[129]](#footnote-129)122-7

122.17 The Universal House of Justice has stated that, in matters concerning  
the deprivation of voting rights, an Assembly should bear in mind that,  
at the present time, when Bahá’í laws are being progressively applied and  
a sizeable proportion of a community consists of newly declared believers,  
an Assembly may accept ignorance of the Bahá’í law as a valid excuse when  
it is convinced that such ignorance existed; great wisdom is required in the  
application of this provision, since it is not unknown for a believer guilty of  
flagrant misconduct to attempt to escape the administrative consequence of  
his behavior through a fervent but spurious claim of ignorance of the law.

122.18 In deciding whether or not to remove voting rights, every case should be  
considered on its merits and in light of the particular circumstances. The  
purpose of the administrative sanction should be borne clearly in mind in  
deciding how much weight to give to factors such as the passage of time,  
the extent to which the individual concerned has experienced an adverse  
reaction in the Bahá’í community, the degree of suffering and contrition  
exhibited by the believer whose status is being questioned, his stature in the  
Bahá’í community or the wider society, and media publicity of his delin-  
quent behavior. While there is room for compassion, this should not deflect  
you from giving due consideration to the responsibility you bear to protect  
the community and its good name, and to uphold the authority of Bahá’í  
law.

122.19 It is within the discretion of a National Spiritual Assembly to decide  
whether to notify the community when a believer has been deprived of his  
administrative rights; the Assembly is also free to decide how such a notifi-  
cation is to be made, and whether or not the reasons for the deprivation are  
to be disclosed. Such decisions might be made with regard to the purposes  
which would be served by such an announcement, and the benefit to the  
community of this knowledge. If a believer advises you of an appeal to the  
Universal House of Justice against your decision to withdraw his voting  
rights, he remains without these rights while the merit of his appeal is being  
assessed by the House of Justice; it would generally be preferable not to

make an announcement to the community about his loss of voting rights  
while the appeal is being considered, but special circumstances, such as the  
imperative need to protect the Bahá’í community from his actions, could  
compel you to do otherwise.

122.20 When a believer is deprived of his administrative rights, he is entitled  
to clear information on the requirements to be fulfilled in order that his  
rights may be restored; these may include the passage of a prescribed period  
of time, the performance of certain remedial actions, or the alteration of  
an attitude or pattern of behavior which is considered unworthy or harm-  
ful. A condition for the restoration of voting rights is that the believer be  
repentant, as evidenced by his statement to that effect or by his demeanor  
and conduct. A believer should not feel compelled to admit his past errors  
in order to be regarded as repentant; you can infer repentance from his be-  
havior, his manifest spirit of cooperation with the Assembly, and his evident  
desire to scrupulously adhere to the teachings. Should he display a rebellious  
or resentful attitude, or be contemptuous of Bahá’í law and the consequence  
of violation of its provisions, you would be justified in denying him the  
right to reenter the Bahá’í community.

122.21 The Universal House of Justice is fully cognizant of the difficulties en-  
countered by National Spiritual Assemblies in administering Bahá’í law at  
this period in history when the world is afflicted with lawlessness, moral  
decadence, and confusion. The institutions of the Cause are called upon  
to guide and regulate the conduct of the believers so that the Bahá’í com-  
munity may offer, to both seeker and skeptic, a compelling proof of the  
transforming power of the Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh. By this means will  
humankind be led to accept the truth of His claim, and will thereby be  
enabled to find that unity and harmony for which it is so desperately yearn-  
ing. Upon this foundation will be constructed the future world civilization  
which humanity is destined to attain.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

123  
Formation of three new Spiritual Assemblies

7 JANUARY 1992

To the Bahá’ís of the World

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

123.1 We take great joy in announcing, consequent upon the changed situation  
in the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, and further to our mes-  
sage of 26 November 1991, the formation next Riḍván of three additional  
Spiritual Assemblies in that vast area, as follows:

123.1a The Regional Spiritual Assembly of Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova  
with its seat in Kiev.

123.1b The Regional Spiritual Assembly of Central Asia with its seat in  
‘Ishqábád, comprising the republics of Kazakhstan, Kirgizia, Tad-  
zhikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

123.1c The National Spiritual Assembly of Azerbaijan with its seat in Baku.

123.2 In accordance with these changes, the former Spiritual Assembly of the  
USSR with its seat in Moscow will become the Regional Spiritual Assembly  
of Russia, Georgia and Armenia.

123.3 Furthermore, with the recent official recognition of the Faith in Niger,  
the National Spiritual Assembly of that country will also be re-established,  
with its seat in Niamey.

123.4 Together with those recently announced, the number of Regional and  
National Spiritual Assemblies to be newly formed or re-established at Riḍván  
1992 amount to 12.

123.5 We are thrilled by such evidences of the extension of the institutions of  
Bahá’u’lláh’s administrative order at this crucial, concluding stage in the Six  
Year Plan. May the friends throughout the world, and particularly in the  
countries directly affected, derive fresh impetus from these developments,  
confident that every effort exerted to expand the base supporting the struc-  
ture of these prospective institutions will bring untold victories at this fate-  
laden period in the life of the Bahá’í world community.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

124  
Responding to homosexuality

1 MARCH 1992

To an individual Bahá’í

Dear Bahá’í Friend,

124.1 Your letter of 22 January 1992 has been received by the Universal House  
of Justice, and we are to provide the following response.

124.2 The House of Justice was sorry to learn from your letter that your son has  
recently informed you that he is a homosexual. It commends your attitude  
of compassion and your efforts to both maintain harmony in your marriage  
and to keep open the lines of communication to your son. In answer to  
your specific question, there is little in the Bahá’í writings that specifically  
points to the causes of homosexuality itself, but as the House of Justice  
has emphasized in past letters to individuals who sought its advice on this  
question, there is much that concerns the nature of man, his inner life and  
growth, and the way to a true Bahá’í life. In a letter to an individual believer,  
the beloved Guardian, Shoghi Effendi, gave the following advice:

124.2a No matter how devoted and fine the love may be between people  
of the same sex, to let it find expression in sexual acts is wrong. To say  
that it is ideal is no excuse. Immorality of every sort is really forbidden  
by Bahá’u’lláh, and homosexual relationships He looks upon as such,  
besides being against nature.

124.2b To be afflicted this way is a great burden to a conscientious soul. But  
through the advice and help of doctors, through a strong and deter-  
mined effort, and through prayer, a soul can overcome this handicap.

124.2c God judges each soul on its own merits. The Guardian cannot tell  
you what the attitude of God would be towards a person who lives a  
good life in most ways, but not in this way. All he can tell you is that  
it is forbidden by Bahá’u’lláh, and that one so afflicted should struggle  
and struggle again to overcome it. We must be hopeful of God’s mercy  
but not impose upon it.[[130]](#footnote-130)124-1

124.3 … In general, the House of Justice urges you to avoid dwelling on  
thoughts of guilt which you, as a parent, would likely experience, and to  
continue to demonstrate love and acceptance toward your son; such an  
attitude, however, should imply no agreement with his attitude towards  
homosexuality. You will, no doubt, want to urge your son to seek appropri-  
ate counseling; in this connection you are encouraged to seek the assistance  
of your National Spiritual Assembly, which has often dealt with such cases,  
and can most probably assist you in identifying individuals who are experi-  
enced in this area and whose views on homosexuality are basically compat-  
ible with those of the Bahá’í Faith.

124.4 Regarding your husband’s refusal to permit your son to return home,  
it is understandable that a parent might feel deeply confused and angry  
when confronted with such questions which go to the very root of what it  
means to be a human being and what it means to educate and raise a child.  
Prayer, faith in God, loving consultation and patience will aid you to deal  
with this difficulty. As for your family members who are causing you further  
anguish, it is perhaps also to be expected that reactions to such inherently  
perplexing questions, nowadays compounded more than ever by the general  
disarray in moral thinking, tend toward extremes, either of resignation or  
condemnation. You are obliged to hew your own course, as illuminated by  
the teachings of Bahá’u’lláh. Whether you can persuade anyone of the cor-  
rectness of your responses, which seek to preserve your relationship to your  
son and also to avoid alienating your husband, is secondary; the main thing  
is that you strive to deal with these difficulties in a manner consistent with  
the spirit of the Cause of God, which is neither harsh and maledictory nor  
excessively liberal and forbearing.

124.5 Be assured of the ardent prayers of the House of Justice at the Sacred  
Threshold that your marriage may be fortified and that your son may be  
divinely guided and assisted to overcome the problem which has beset him.  
It will also offer prayers that you may have the strength and wisdom to deal  
with this problem.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

125  
Commemoration of certain Bahá’í Holy Days

15 MARCH 1992

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

125.1 A number of questions have been asked concerning the exact times at  
which certain Bahá’í Holy Days should, if possible, be observed in view of  
the different times of sunset in various localities and also the use by some  
countries of such devices as daylight saving time. Since this matter will be  
of particular importance to the friends during the Holy Year, the Universal  
House of Justice has asked us to share the following advice with you.

125.2 As the Guardian indicated, the commemoration of the Ascension of  
Bahá’u’lláh should be held, if feasible, at 3 a.m. on 29 May, and that of the  
Ascension of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá at 1 a.m. on 28 November. These times should  
be measured according to standard time in each area. If daylight saving time  
is being used in the country, the commemorations should continue to be  
observed according to standard time.

125.3 It will be noted that, in accordance with this schedule, the observances  
held on each Holy Day succeed one another for an entire twenty-four hours,  
as the earth turns on its axis.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

126  
Passing of the Hand of the Cause of God  
William Sears

26 MARCH 1992

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

126.1 OUR HEARTS DEEPLY SADDENED, BAHÁ’Í WORLD GREATLY DEPRIVED, BY PASS-  
ING HAND CAUSE GOD WILLIAM SEARS, VIBRANT, CONSECRATED, STOUT-HEARTED  
STANDARD-BEARER FAITH BAHÁ’U’LLÁH. HIS MORE THAN HALF CENTURY UNBRO-  
KEN SERVICE MARKED BY UNFLINCHING DEVOTION TO BELOVED GUARDIAN, IN-  
FECTIOUS ENTHUSIASM FOR TEACHING, GALVANIZING SENSE DRAMA, DISARMING  
HUMOR, SPECIAL LOVE FOR CHILDREN, UNFLAGGING DETERMINATION IN FACE

DIFFICULTIES. HE WILL EVER BE REMEMBERED FOR DEDICATING FULL RANGE HIS  
CREATIVE AND ENERGETIC CAPACITIES AS WRITER, EDITOR, LECTURER, RADIO AND  
TELEVISION PROGRAM DIRECTOR, TO HIS VARIED SERVICES AS TRAVELING TEACHER  
TO NUMEROUS COUNTRIES, PARTICULARLY IN THE AMERICAS, AND AS PIONEER TO  
AFRICA WHERE HE WAS MEMBER OF AUXILIARY BOARD AND OF NATIONAL SPIRI-  
TUAL ASSEMBLY SOUTH AND WEST AFRICA WHEN IN 1957 HE WAS ELEVATED RANK  
HAND CAUSE. HE LATER SERVED AS MEMBER BODY HANDS HOLY LAND. HIS LOSS  
ACUTELY FELT IN NORTH AMERICA WHERE HE EXPENDED LAST MEASURE HIS EBB-  
ING STRENGTH PROMOTION TEACHING ACTIVITIES. DYNAMIC EFFECTS HIS WORK  
WILL ENDURE THROUGH HIS MANY BOOKS AND RECORDINGS. GENERATIONS TO  
COME WILL REJOICE IN RICH LEGACY LEFT THEM THROUGH HIS HISTORIC ACCOM-  
PLISHMENTS. FERVENTLY PRAYING HOLY SHRINES PROGRESS HIS ILLUSTRIOUS SOUL  
ABHÁ KINGDOM.

126.2 ADVISE FRIENDS THROUGHOUT WORLD COMMEMORATE HIS PASSING. REQUEST  
BEFITTING MEMORIAL SERVICES IN HIS HONOR ALL HOUSES WORSHIP.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

127  
Execution of a Bahá’í in Tehran

5 APRIL 1992

To selected National Spiritual Assemblies

127.1 It is with deep distress that we inform you that news has reached us to-  
day of the execution of Mr. Bahman Samandarí at Evin Prison in Tehran  
probably shortly before Naw-Rúz. He was among the four friends arrested  
for meeting in his home about four years ago but who were released from  
several months of imprisonment following a global campaign in protest.  
Details concerning the execution are being sought ….

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

128  
Confirmation of execution of a Bahá’í in Tehran

8 APRIL 1992

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

128.1 With sorrowful hearts we have received confirmation of the execution  
in Evin Prison in Tehran on 18 March 1992 of Mr. Bahman Samandarí,  
member of a distinguished Bahá’í family who had been active in the affairs  
of the Bahá’í community. No reason for his execution has been given by  
the judicial or prison authorities, nor have they disclosed the location of his  
grave.

128.2 This tragic surprise is the more shocking for the fact that the whole mat-  
ter has been shrouded in secrecy. The execution was kept quiet for more  
than two weeks; no advance information was given to the family; no subse-  
quent announcement about it was made; the news of it was broken to Mr.  
Samandarí’s widow only when she attempted to visit him on 5 April, the  
date given her by the authorities after they had denied her permission to see  
him despite her several previous attempts since his arrest on 17 March. The  
manner of informing her of his death was to hand her her husband’s will,  
which had been written on 18 March. No death certificate was issued, al-  
though inquiries by the Samandarí family at the office of the Tehran general  
cemetery brought the response that, the name of Bahman Samandarí had  
been entered into its records.

128.3 No official charge or verdict was announced, assiduous inquiries by the  
family members producing only a vague indication that Mr. Samandarí’s  
execution had to do with his previous arrest four years ago when he and  
four other Bahá’ís were arrested for meeting in his home. At that time, 21  
October 1987, charges were leveled against him because of his membership  
in the Bahá’í community. He and his fellow prisoners were released on 18  
December 1987, after the title to Mr. Samandarí’s home had been turned  
over to the authorities along with a large sum of money as bail.

128.4 The timing and suddenness of the matter and the duplicity on the  
part of the authorities are also a cause of bafflement. Mr. Samandarí was  
summoned by the authorities on 17 March ostensibly to receive a docu-  
ment from them. On 18 March, the date of his will which was handed to  
Mrs. Samandarí by the Evin Prison authorities, he was killed. On 20 March

he was buried. These events took place at the time of the approach of the  
long public holiday associated with the Iranian new year, an obviously in-  
convenient time for inquiries.

128.5 It is a source of outrage to the international Bahá’í community that after  
a cessation of executions of Bahá’ís for a period of three and a half years,  
such a brutal act could again be perpetrated against an innocent commu-  
nity. It belies the position publicly and repeatedly affirmed by the Iranian  
Government that Bahá’ís are not being persecuted for their religious beliefs.

128.6 As further details become known, they will be sent to you ….

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

1992–1993

The Holy Year  
Commemorating the 100th anniversary  
of the Ascension of Bahá’u’lláh  
and the inauguration of His Covenant

129  
Riḍván Message 1992

RIḌVÁN 1992

To the Bahá’ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

129.1 At this Riḍván season, with its inherent splendors and its initiation of  
unusual, eventful days, our hearts throb in wonderment, we kneel in hom-  
age to the King of Glory by Whose grace we have arrived at an auspicious  
juncture in the history of His Cause.

129.2 From the peak of triumph of the Six Year Plan now ended, we come to  
the threshold of the Holy Year, now begun, awestruck at the very thought of  
the unique significances associated with the commemoration of that sancti-  
fied occasion one hundred years ago when Bahá’u’lláh, the Promised One  
of all ages, took His leave of this earthly life. The Sun of Truth, however,  
was to set only to shine everlastingly from the “Kingdom of fadeless glory,”  
thenceforward to shed the radiance of its regenerative power on the entire  
world. Gone from this plane was He Who is the Author of a Revelation of  
“inconceivable greatness” in which “all the Dispensations of the past have  
attained their highest, their final consummation”; the Originator of a new  
Universal Cycle “that must extend over a period of at least five hundred  
thousand years”; the Founder of a World Order, a “System the like of  
which mortal eyes have never witnessed.” Moreover, He was the Dawning  
Point of the Day of God, the “Day in which God’s most excellent favors  
have been poured out upon men.”[[131]](#footnote-131)129-1 Such are the superlative realities upon  
which our contemplations are focused during this special anniversary occur-  
ring at this crucial moment in the affairs of humankind.

129.3 So imbued are we by the sacred remembrances evoked by this Holy Year,  
that we can do no less than invite you all to take pause to enter into this  
period of reflection, this time of reconsecration, this stage of preparation for  
tasks yet to be done, heights yet to be attained, splendors yet to be unveiled.  
For if we look back at one hundred years of an unexampled history of un-  
remitting progress, we also look forward to many centuries of unfolding  
fulfillment of divine purpose—fulfillment, which as experience has shown,

is incrementally realized through the systematic advances of Plans and the  
wondrous leaps and thrusts of epochs.

129.4 Indeed, the immediate portal to this propitious Holy Year is the vista of  
new horizons opened by the triumph of the Six Year Plan, which coincided  
with the initial phase of the fourth epoch of the Formative Age of our Faith.  
Overall it is not so much a triumph in numerical achievements, though in  
many places and at particular moments the scope of expansion was extraor-  
dinary. It is a triumph that has been manifested in a new variety of victories,  
in new beginnings, fresh initiatives and mature institutional developments,  
such as to stamp the seal of success on the Plan’s seven major objectives.  
Impossible as it is to enumerate in these few pages the results of the Plan,  
the main aspects of the developments in this remarkably dynamic period  
deserve, nonetheless, to be highlighted. The Bahá’í community changed  
markedly over the last six years. The major indicators are, no doubt, discern-  
ible to the friends everywhere and may be summed up thus:

129.5 One: The Faith of Bahá’u’lláh is represented in every country on earth.  
The sudden change in the political climate, no doubt by intervention of  
God’s Major Plan, opened vast regions to the penetration of the divine  
teachings, primarily in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Bloc coun-  
tries. The opportunities created by this change made possible the settle-  
ment of Knights of Bahá’u’lláh in the last virgin territories that remained  
from Shoghi Effendi’s Ten Year World Crusade. They also impelled the  
launching at Riḍván 1990 of the subsidiary Two Year Plan for those regions.  
This supplementary Plan was a spectacular success, not only in terms of  
expansion in the many countries involved, but also in the diversity of the  
strata represented by the new believers in these countries, in the volume and  
variety of Bahá’í literature published and in the array of Bahá’í institutions  
established during that short time. The Bahá’í world was highly stimulated  
by these developments, and a number of countries elsewhere recorded  
significant successes in the teaching work. Figures already available to the  
World Center indicate that more than one and a half million souls entered  
the Cause during the Six Year Plan. Of particular interest was the three-year  
special teaching project in Guyana which resulted in an increase of the size  
of the Bahá’í community to some six percent of the country’s population.

129.6 Two: The proclamation of the Faith throughout the world attained  
an entirely new stage. The campaign of proclamation launched in 1967  
through the inspiration of the centennial anniversary of Bahá’u’lláh’s Proc-  
lamation to the kings and rulers of mankind, and which gathered added

momentum in 1979 with the surge of the persecution of the Iranian Bahá’í  
community, now covered a greatly expanded range with the distribution  
of *The Promise of World Peace*. Kings, queens, presidents, prime ministers,  
legislators, jurists, academics, diverse institutions and organizations became  
aware of Bahá’u’lláh’s Message. The creative energies by which communities  
everywhere were exercised in broadcasting the Cause became one of the  
driving forces of the Plan and in no small way stimulated the interest of  
organizations, leaders of thought and the media in the solutions which the  
Faith has to offer to a strangely disordered world. Inspired by the impact of  
the measures they adopted for proclamation of the Faith, and also by that of  
their continuing efforts to defend the sorely persecuted Iranian Bahá’í com-  
munity, National and Local Spiritual Assemblies displayed and continue to  
display a striking audacity and originality in dealing with the public. This  
is evident in their innumerable contacts with officials at all levels of govern-  
ment, in their association with a widening spectrum of organizations, and  
in the increasing facility of their contacts with the media.

129.7 Three: The dedication in December 1986 of the Mother Temple of the  
Indian Subcontinent to public worship introduced a new force to the teach-  
ing and proclamation activities of the Faith. As an edifice of rare beauty  
and excellence, the “Lotus Temple” has won wide acclaim, while at the same  
time exerting an extraordinary appeal to great numbers of visitors. Its fame  
as an architectural wonder spread with speed as did its spiritual influence.  
It is no exaggeration to say that of all the Bahá’í Houses of Worship, this  
Temple is today the single most effective silent teacher of the Faith, annu-  
ally attracting more visitors, at the average rate of 20,000 daily, than all  
the other Bahá’í Temples combined. Among its visitors from many lands  
are some of the most prominent persons in the world. A source of great  
interest to the media, the Temple has been featured in television programs,  
even in Russia and China. The influence of its success in these respects has  
contributed immeasurably to the widespread public awareness of the Faith.

129.8 Four: The further emergence of the Faith from obscurity is reflected in  
distinctive ways. In learned circles, in reference works and in the media,  
the Faith is increasingly being referred to as a “principal” or “major” world  
religion. Media coverage of the Faith’s activities has increased voluminously  
by the intensified efforts of the friends in proclamation activities, but more  
important is the fact that the media are showing an independent interest in  
the Bahá’í community and are initiating contacts with it in various parts of  
the world. The exposure of influential segments of the public to Bahá’í ideas

in such areas as peace, the environment, status of women, education and  
literacy, has induced a response which increasingly calls upon the Bahá’ís to  
participate with others in a range of projects associated with governments or  
with non-governmental organizations.

129.9 Moreover, such exposure is creating in the public mind the realization  
that the Faith has answers to current problems and thus the expectation that  
the Bahá’í community should take a more active part in public affairs. The  
notable success of the activities of the Bahá’í International Community’s  
Office of the Environment, established during the Plan, amply illustrates the  
nature of these developments. Furthermore, the formal relationship which  
the Bahá’í International Community established with the Conservation and  
Religion Network of the World Wide Fund for Nature and with the World  
Conference on Religion and Peace, in conjunction with the numerous such  
relationships established by National and Local Spiritual Assemblies in their  
respective jurisdictions, reflects a trend in the Faith’s emergence as an entity  
to be reckoned with. Altogether, the drive of the ramified proclamation  
campaign has produced a public resonance about the Faith, which can be  
said to be known to the most significant public institutions and prominent  
persons on earth.

129.10 Five: Bahá’í projects of social and economic development have greatly  
multiplied and brought much credit to the community in the examples of  
the power of group initiative and voluntary consultative action that have  
been set in numerous places. Activities in this respect involved more than  
one thousand projects in the areas of education, agriculture, health, literacy,  
the environment and improvement of the status of women. In a number of  
instances the projects benefited from collaboration with or assistance from  
governments and international non-governmental organizations, as, for ex-  
ample, the projects for the improvement of the status of women undertaken  
by five National Spiritual Assemblies with the financial assistance of the  
United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), and those  
projects in other fields receiving assistance from the Canadian, Indian, Ger-  
man and Norwegian governments. Some projects have been so distinguished  
in their achievements as to be given public notice through the citations and  
awards of governments and international non-governmental agencies.

129.11 Six: Youth activities took on a special character shaped by the idea of a  
youth year of service. The involvement of the youth in the Six Year Plan  
as short-term pioneers, traveling teachers and projecteers had a profound  
effect on the teaching work overall and in bolstering the efforts at social

and economic development attempted by growing numbers of national and  
local communities. They had much to do with the many victories in the  
former communist countries. Their work in social and economic develop-  
ment projects attracted, in some cases, the attention of governments and  
development organizations. Creation of the European Bahá’í Youth Council  
galvanized the activities of the youth which powerfully reinforced the teach-  
ing thrust on that continent during the final years of the Plan. A significant  
feature of the youth’s activities has been their involvement, as short-term  
volunteers from all parts of the planet, in the work of the World Center  
where their services have been of inestimable value.

129.12 Seven: The advances in the consolidation of the Bahá’í administrative  
system are evident from the marked improvement in the internal develop-  
ment and collaborative efforts of its two arms. The cherished and intrepid  
Hands of the Cause of God, true to the allegiance they bear to their beloved  
Guardian, persevere in their unique services, astonishing the community  
with their resilient powers. The growth in confidence and strength of the  
Boards of Counselors and their auxiliaries, backed by a reinforced and vig-  
orous International Teaching Center, assured to the Spiritual Assemblies,  
whom they are charged to stimulate and advise, a buttressing indispensable  
to the welfare of the entire system; while the extension of the span of ac-  
tivities of the National and Local Spiritual Assemblies, themselves charged  
with guiding the destinies of their communities, significantly broadened  
the base of that system. Collaterally, the work of these institutions has fa-  
cilitated and boosted the evolution of the Administrative Order. Even more:  
they have demonstrated a creative energy that bodes well for their continued  
maturation.

129.13 Eight: The great building projects on the Mountain of God, anticipated  
by Bahá’u’lláh in the Tablet of Carmel, inaugurated by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá with  
the construction of the Tomb of the Báb and carried forward in the plans  
of Shoghi Effendi, entered a new stage. Work commenced in May 1990 on  
reinforcing and extending the main terrace of the Shrine of the Báb as the  
initial step towards realizing the architectural concept for fulfilling ‘Abdu’l-  
Bahá’s vision of the Terraces that will extend from the foot to the ridge of  
the mountain. By September of the next year, ground was broken for the  
construction of the Center for the Study of the Texts and for the Extension  
to the International Archives Building, to be followed by the construction  
of other edifices on the Arc, namely: the buildings for the International  
Teaching Center and, in due course, the International Bahá’í Library.

129.14 All these developments have made it evident that the accumulated po-  
tential for further progress of the Bahá’í community is incalculable. The  
changed situation within and among nations and the many problems af-  
flicting society amplify this potential. The impression produced by such  
change is of the near approach of the Lesser Peace. But there has been a  
simultaneous recrudescence of countervailing forces. With the fresh tide of  
political freedom resulting from the collapse of the strongholds of commu-  
nism has come an explosion of nationalism. The concomitant rise of racism  
in many regions has become a matter of serious global concern. These are  
compounded by an upsurge in religious fundamentalism which is poisoning  
the wells of tolerance. Terrorism is rife. Widespread uncertainty about the  
condition of the economy indicates a deep disorder in the management of  
the material affairs of the planet, a condition which can only exacerbate the  
sense of frustration and futility affecting the political realm. The worsen-  
ing state of the environment and of the health of huge populations is a  
source of alarm. And yet an element of this change is the amazing advances  
in communications technology making possible the rapid transmission of  
information and ideas from one part of the world to the other. It is against  
such “simultaneous processes of rise and of fall, of integration and of disinte-  
gration, of order and chaos, with their continuous and reciprocal reactions  
on each other”, that a myriad new opportunities for the next stage in the  
unfoldment of the beloved Master’s Divine Plan present themselves.[[132]](#footnote-132)129-2

129.15 The burgeoning influence of Bahá’u’lláh’s Revelation seemed, with the  
imminence of the Holy Year, to have assumed the character of an onrushing  
wind blowing through the archaic structures of the old order, felling mighty  
pillars and clearing the ground for new conceptions of social organization.  
The call for unity, for a new world order, is audible from many directions.  
The change in world society is characterized by a phenomenal speed. A  
feature of this change is a suddenness, or precipitateness, which appears  
to be the consequence of some mysterious, rampant force. The positive  
aspects of this change reveal an unaccustomed openness to global concepts,  
movement towards international and regional collaboration, an inclination  
of warring parties to opt for peaceful solutions, a search for spiritual values.  
Even the Community of the Most Great Name itself is experiencing the  
rigorous effects of this quickening wind as it ventilates the modes of thought

of us all, renewing, clarifying and amplifying our perspectives as to the  
purpose of the Order of Bahá’u’lláh in the wake of humanity’s suffering  
and turmoil.

129.16 The situation in the world, while presenting us with an acute challenge of  
the utmost urgency, calls to mind the encouraging global vision of Shoghi  
Effendi for the prospects of the Administrative Order during the second  
century of the Bahá’í Era, whose midpoint we are rapidly approaching. In  
1946, he wrote: “The second century is destined to witness a tremendous  
deployment and a notable consolidation of the forces working towards the  
worldwide development of that Order, as well as the first stirrings of that  
World Order, of which the present Administrative System is at once the  
precursor, the nucleus and pattern an Order which, as it slowly crystal-  
lizes and radiates its benign influence over the entire planet, will proclaim at  
once the coming of age of the whole human race, as well as the maturity of  
the Faith itself, the progenitor of that Order.”[[133]](#footnote-133)129-3

129.17 Attention to the special occasions of the Holy Year will surely equip us to  
undertake the urgent tasks of the next stage in the evolution of the Divine  
Plan. This commemorative period provides a befitting demarcation between  
the glories and triumphs of the last one hundred years and the lustrous priz-  
es yet to be garnered. At the outset, we welcome with joyous and grateful  
hearts the further expansion and consolidation of the Administrative Order  
which will accrue from the formation this Riḍván of twelve National and  
Regional Spiritual Assemblies. How striking it is that the number of these  
Assemblies is the same as the total number of National Spiritual Assemblies  
which existed at the launching of the Ten Year World Crusade in 1953! This  
is gratifying evidence of the rapidity of the expansion of the Administrative  
Order in less than forty years. With these new Assemblies, and making  
allowance for the absorption of Sikkim into India and the disruption of the  
Bahá’í Administration by the unsettled situation in Liberia, the number of  
National Spiritual Assemblies which will take part in the seventh Interna-  
tional Bahá’í Convention next Riḍván will reach 165.

129.18 We are pleased to announce that the following Hands of the Cause of  
God will attend, as our representatives, six of the founding Conventions.  
Amatu’l-Bahá Rúḥíyyih Khánum will attend the Conventions of Bulgaria  
and of Poland; Mr. ‘Alí Akbar Furútan will attend those of the Baltic

States and of Hungary; and Dr. ‘Alí-Muḥammad Varqá will attend those  
of Greenland and of the Ukraine, Belarus, and Moldova. At the remaining  
Conventions our representatives will be Counselors: Mr. George Allen, the  
Congo Republic; Dr. Farzam Arbab, Central Asia; Mr. Rolf von Czékus,  
Angola; Mrs. Parvin Djoneidi, Niger; Mr. Hartmut Grossmann, Albania;  
and Mr. Mas‘úd Khamsí, Azerbaijan.

129.19 Only a few weeks from now, in the sacred precincts of the Shrine of  
Bahá’u’lláh, a gathering of solemn purpose will take place to mark the one  
hundredth anniversary of the Ascension of the Desire of the Nations. The  
scroll bearing the Roll of Honor of the Knights of Bahá’u’lláh will, on the  
previous morning, 28 May, have been deposited, as indicated by our be-  
loved Guardian, at the entrance door of the inner Sanctuary of the Most  
Holy Shrine, there to remain a symbol of the historic victory that rewarded  
the unswerving determination of the lovers of the Blessed Beauty who, in  
response to the call of the mighty Ten Year Crusade, planted the banner of  
His Faith in virgin territories throughout the world.

129.20 Subsequently, in November, at the second Bahá’í World Congress,  
the hosts of Bahá will gather in New York in their thousands to register,  
in a highly symbolic gesture on behalf of their brethren throughout the  
world, their regard for the Covenant which Bahá’u’lláh bequeathed, and  
to evoke the memory of Him Who was appointed its Center and Who  
exalted that metropolis by bestowing upon it the designation “City of the  
Covenant.”[[134]](#footnote-134)129-4 There they will also demonstrate the power of the unity that  
the Covenant is meant to ensure to all the peoples of the world. It will be a  
moment of capital importance to the Bahá’í community in the gaze of the  
world at large.

129.21 These two international events are pivotal to the gatherings of similar  
intent in which the friends in every corner of the world will take part. The  
spiritual character and dignified manner of their participation will surely  
draw down confirmations from on high and profoundly influence the con-  
structive forces at work throughout the earth.

129.22 Another source of blessings to which we have long directed our hopes  
will also become manifest. Bahá’u’lláh has written: “While in prison We  
have revealed a Book which We have entitled ‘The Most Holy Book.’ We  
have enacted laws therein and adorned it with the commandments of thy

Lord, Who exerciseth authority over all that are in the heavens and on the  
earth.”[[135]](#footnote-135)129-5 Hence, it is with full cognizance of its world-shaking significance  
that we inform you of the forthcoming publication during the course of this  
year of the annotated English translation of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, the Charter  
of the future world civilization which Bahá’u’lláh revealed in the House of  
‘Údí Khammár in ‘Akká some six score years ago.

129.23 And now, amid the eager anticipations occasioned by the two major com-  
memorative events and by the imminent publication of the Mother Book  
of the Bahá’í Revelation, the Law of Ḥuqúqu’lláh takes effect as part of the  
constant practice of the members of our entire world community. May the  
promised divine bounties associated with the activation of this holy law be  
showered upon the beloved of the Lord in every land.

129.24 A year charged with happenings of such sacred import is bound to yield  
consequences of unimaginable potency. The immediate outcome is, how-  
ever, impossible to predict, nor can it be fruitfully speculated about. Rather  
should we direct our thoughts to the meaning of the solemn occasions  
which this year is set apart to memorialize. For the purpose of the Holy Year  
is not fulfilled by public memorials alone, befitting as they will be. Essential  
to its purpose is the opportunity it offers for inner reflection on the part of  
every Bahá’í individual. Indeed, this is a special time for a rendezvous of the  
soul with the Source of its light and guidance, a time to turn to Bahá’u’lláh,  
to seek to obtain a deeper appreciation of His purpose, to renew allegiance  
to Him. This is a time of retreat to one’s innermost being, to the dwelling-  
place of the Spirit of Bahá, that interior to which He summons us when He  
says: “Turn thy sight unto thyself, that thou mayest find Me standing within  
thee, mighty, powerful and self-subsisting.”[[136]](#footnote-136)129-6 This is a time for recommit-  
ment to the Covenant, for rededication to duty, for revitalizing the energy  
for teaching, the “most meritorious of all deeds.”[[137]](#footnote-137)129-7

129.25 As the foremost aid to your reflections and actions, you will doubtless  
draw upon the insight and inspiration of such of His words as these: “I am  
the Sun of Wisdom and the Ocean of Knowledge. I cheer the faint and  
revive the dead. I am the guiding Light that illumineth the way.” “By My  
Life! Not of Mine own volition have I revealed Myself, but God, of His own  
choosing, hath manifested Me.” “I have come in the shadows of the clouds

of glory, and am invested by God with invincible sovereignty.” “He that  
hath Me not is bereft of all things. Turn ye away from all that is on earth and  
seek none else but Me.” “Love Me, that I may love thee. If thou lovest Me  
not, My love can in no wise reach thee. Know this, O servant.” “The An-  
cient Beauty hath consented to be bound with chains that mankind may be  
released from its bondage, and hath accepted to be made a prisoner within  
this most mighty Stronghold that the whole world may attain unto true  
liberty. He hath drained to its dregs the cup of sorrow, that all the peoples  
of the earth may attain unto abiding joy, and be filled with gladness.”[[138]](#footnote-138)129-8

129.26 Whatever our private reflections or response to duty may lead us to do,  
of one thing we must be sure: that the Name of Him Who is the Lifegiver  
of the World becomes known throughout the earth among high and low  
alike. Considering that it is already a whole century since the Blessed Beauty  
ascended, and given the crushing weight of the ills burdening the peoples of  
the world, and seeing that a veritable cry of anguish is issuing more loudly  
from the hearts of those who long for some hope of relief, we, His avowed  
servants, can neither falter nor fail in this primary and urgent duty. For He,  
Bahá’u’lláh, is the Supreme Manifestation, the Unifier and Redeemer of all  
mankind, the Fountainhead of Justice, the immortal Beloved; for, accord-  
ing to His own unerring proclamation, “He Who is the Unconditioned is  
come, in the clouds of light, that He may quicken all created things with the  
breezes of His Name, the Most Merciful, and unify the world, and gather  
all men around this Table which hath been sent down from heaven.”[[139]](#footnote-139)129-9  
Let us bear His Name with dignity to those who must hear It, offer It as a  
treasure to those who must receive It, speak It with love to those who must  
embrace It.

129.27 How laudable it would be if, imbued by this desire to blazon abroad  
His Name, and as a demonstration of our special love for the Abhá Beauty,  
we could each of us mount a personal campaign of teaching, such that  
the collective force and results of it throughout the world would bring to  
a resounding conclusion the sacred exercises of this Holy Year and set the  
stage for the launching of the impending Three Year Plan at Riḍván 1993!

129.28 Finally, it is highly fitting at this time to recall Bahá’u’lláh’s expression in  
the Most Holy Book of His will for us with regard to the nature of our reac-

tions to His passing: “Be not dismayed, O peoples of the world,” He wrote,  
“when the day-star of My beauty is set, and the heaven of My tabernacle  
is concealed from your eyes. Arise to further My Cause, and to exalt My  
Word amongst men. We are with you at all times, and shall strengthen you  
through the power of truth. We are truly almighty. Whoso hath recognized  
Me, will arise and serve Me with such determination that the powers of  
earth and heaven shall be unable to defeat his purpose.”[[140]](#footnote-140)129-10

129.29 Beloved friends, we shall not forget to supplicate at the Holy Threshold  
that from His retreat of deathless splendor the Blessed Beauty may fill the  
souls of each and all of you with the revivifying breath of His celestial  
power.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

130  
Release of a compilation on proclaiming the Faith  
through mass media

3 JUNE 1992

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

130.1 A few months ago, the World Congress Media Task Force, which is  
charged with organizing media activities in connection with the World  
Congress, requested the World Center to prepare a compilation of extracts  
from the Writings on proclaiming the Faith through mass media. When the  
Task Force received and studied the compilation that was prepared, they  
indicated that they had found it helpful and suggested that a copy be sent  
to National Spiritual Assemblies, as it might be equally useful to them.[[141]](#footnote-141)130-1

130.2 The Universal House of Justice has approved this suggestion, and it is  
hoped that the enclosed copy will perhaps prove to be of assistance to you,  
or to the national committees appointed by you, in promoting your procla-  
mation work through the mass media.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

131  
Centenary of the Ascension of Bahá’u’lláh

7 JUNE 1992

To the Bahá’ís of the World

131.1 As we reflect on the events which a few days ago marked the commemora-  
tion in the Holy Land of the Centenary of the Ascension of Bahá’u’lláh, we  
feel impelled to express to the Bahá’í world our sense of wonderment at the  
exalted character of what transpired. The nature of the Anniversary was in  
itself awe-inspiring and evocative of profound emotion. But the gathering  
of some 3,000 Bahá’ís, including 113 Knights of Bahá’u’lláh, representing  
no less than 200 countries and dependent territories—the widest diversity  
of human beings ever to have assembled on a Bahá’í occasion—filled the  
eyes with the vision of a garden of humanity that overwhelmed the senses,  
inducing a spirit of beauty, joy and splendor. Bahjí was never more resplen-  
dent. And we offer prayers of thanksgiving to our beloved Lord that so  
fitting an assemblage could have been realized on this special Anniversary,  
indicating the amazing extent to which the pervasive power of His influence  
has triumphed throughout the world.

131.2 May the evident blessings flowing from this heavenly experience infuse  
the dear friends everywhere with new strength and fresh encouragement,  
emboldening their efforts and enlarging their capacity to proclaim the  
Name and promote the Cause of Bahá’u’lláh during the course of the Holy  
Year so auspiciously begun.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

**On the Occasion of the Centenary Commemoration at Bahjí  
of the Ascension of Bahá’u’lláh**

A Tribute by the Universal House of Justice[[142]](#footnote-142)131-1

131.3 With soul-stirring emotion we gather in the hallowed environs of His  
resting place to honor the memory of the Supreme Manifestation of God,  
Bahá’u’lláh, on the solemn, historic occasion of the centenary of His  
ascension.

131.4 We lift our voices at the prompting of our hearts’ desire to pay tribute to  
a life infinitely beyond compare. But how shall we realize such a wish when  
it is evident that no mind can attain the comprehension which would make  
possible the vocabulary worthy of His celestial court? In very truth, our  
tongues falter in their impotence to describe, let alone extol, the prodigies  
of a prophetic career which was framed in superlatives. For here at Bahjí, one  
hundred years ago, was drawn the last breath on earth of the world’s greatest  
Luminary, Founder of the Dispensation marking the culmination of the  
six-thousand-year-old Adamic Cycle, and Inaugurator of the five-thousand-  
century Bahá’í Cycle. He, the Most Great Manifestation, appeared in the  
Most Great Name and endured the greatest suffering in authoring the Most  
Great Revelation, which is the wellspring of the Most Great Peace. In our at-  
tempt to appreciate these matchless bounties, we recite the gem-like names  
of the Adored One, picked out as pearls from the veritable ocean of His  
Revelation, bestrewing them throughout our testimonial that they may lend  
an acceptable gleam to our expression of His glory and majesty.

131.5 King of Kings, Lord of Lords, Supreme Mediator, Most Ancient Beauty:  
He is the Well-Beloved of all worlds. We hail Him as the long-awaited  
Promised One, the Object of the adoration of the world. And we exclaim:  
“Hallowed be the Lord in Whose hand is the source of dominion!”[[143]](#footnote-143)131-2

131.6 How grievously Bahá’u’lláh suffered to regenerate the world! Wrongly  
accused, imprisoned, beaten, chained, banished from country to country,  
betrayed, poisoned, stripped of material possessions, and “at every moment  
tormented with a fresh torment”: such was the cruel reception that greeted  
the Everlasting Father, Him Who is the Possessor of all Names and Attri-  
butes. For two score years, until the end of His earthly days, He remained a  
prisoner and exile—persecuted unceasingly by the rulers of Persia and the  
Ottoman Empire, opposed relentlessly by a vicious and scheming clergy,  
neglected abjectly by other sovereigns to whom He addressed potent letters  
imparting to them that which, in His truth-bearing words, “is the cause of  
the well-being, the unity, the harmony, and the reconstruction of the world,  
and of the tranquility of the nations.” “My grief,” He once lamented, “ex-  
ceedeth all the woes to which Jacob gave vent, and all the afflictions of Job  
are but a part of My sorrows.”[[144]](#footnote-144)131-3

131.7 The voice halts for shame from continuing so deplorable a recitation,  
the heart is torn by mere thought of the Divine Target of such grief—grief  
no ordinary mortal could endure. But lest we give way to feelings of gloom  
and distress, we take recourse in the tranquil calm He induces with such  
meaningful words as these: “We have borne it all with the utmost willing-  
ness and resignation, so that the souls of men may be edified, and the Word  
of God be exalted.”[[145]](#footnote-145)131-4 Thus, the Wronged One, patient beyond measure,  
preserved a majestic composure, revealing His true Self as the Merciful,  
the Loving, the Incomparable Friend. Concentrating His energies on the  
pivotal purpose of His Revelation, He transmuted His tribulations into in-  
struments of redemption and summoned all peoples to the banner of unity.

131.8 No worldly power could thwart the purpose of the Most Exalted Pen.  
Through the copiousness of His writings, He poured upon the planet the  
healing waters of the Word of God renewed. Descending upon Him like  
a spring rain, His Revelation comprises some one hundred volumes—  
“volumes replete with unnumbered exhortations, revolutionizing prin-  
ciples, world-shaping laws and ordinances, dire warnings and portentous  
prophecies, with soul-uplifting prayers and meditations, illuminating com-  
mentaries and interpretations, impassioned discourses and homilies, all  
interspersed with either addresses or references to kings, to emperors and  
to ministers, of both the East and the West, to ecclesiastics of divers de-  
nominations, and to leaders in the intellectual, political, literary, mystical,  
commercial and humanitarian spheres of human activity.” Foremost among  
His Books is His Kitáb-i-Aqdas, the charter of the future world civilization  
in which He has announced the Laws of God for this age. Our hearts thrill  
to the prospect that during the course of this centennial year, the annotated  
English translation of this Mother Book of Bahá’u’lláh’s Revelation is to be  
published. We acknowledge with astonished joy the prolific legacy of this  
divine outpouring. And we exclaim: “Praised be Thou, Who art the Desire  
of the world, and thanks be to Thee, O Well-Beloved of the hearts of such  
as are devoted to Thee!”[[146]](#footnote-146)131-5

131.9 Today, we bear witness to the further abundance of a peerless heritage.  
With the setting of the Sun of Bahá, the Moon of His Covenant rose in  
reflected glory, lifting the darkness of a night of despair, and lighting the

path to the unity of all humankind. In the fullness of its radiance stands  
the magnetic Figure of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, the beloved Son Whom Bahá’u’lláh  
designated as the Interpreter of His Word and Executive of His authority,  
and Whom He appointed the Center of His Covenant, an office without  
parallel in all religious history.

131.10 We acknowledge the mysterious power of His wisdom, the illuminating  
potency of His words, the immortal example and unific character of His  
deeds. By His untiring exertions the fame of the infant Cause was spread  
abroad, the design of its Administrative Order was completed, the World  
Center of the Faith emerged into clear visibility, and the splendors of the  
Mountain of God, as alluded to in Bahá’u’lláh’s Tablet of Carmel, began to  
be manifested. With profound gratitude for such evident blessings we reaf-  
firm our loyalty to the Covenant of Bahá’u’lláh. And we exclaim: “Glorified  
be the All-Merciful, the Lord of Grace abounding!”[[147]](#footnote-147)131-6

131.11 As a result of the phenomenal effects of His Covenant, a world commu-  
nity has been raised up on an “unassailable foundation.”[[148]](#footnote-148)131-7 The entire sys-  
tem of the Administrative Order originated by Bahá’u’lláh in His Most Holy  
Book has been erected. A vigorous network of local, national, continental  
and international institutions functions in exemplary harmony throughout  
the planet. Vitalized and nurtured by His stupendous Revelation, watered  
by the precious blood of countless martyrs, and tended by the loving care of  
unnumbered, devoted servants, the Tree of the Cause has, in these hundred  
years, grown mightily, has put forth its far-stretching branches and borne its  
first and plentiful fruit.

131.12 Bahá’u’lláh found the world in a “strange sleep.”[[149]](#footnote-149)131-8 But what a distur-  
bance His coming has unloosed! The peoples of the earth had been separat-  
ed, many parts of the human race socially and spiritually isolated. But the  
world of humanity today bears little resemblance to that which Bahá’u’lláh  
left a century ago. Unbeknownst to the great majority, His influence per-  
meates all living beings. Indeed, no domain of life remains unaffected. In  
the burgeoning energy, the magnified perspectives, the heightened global  
consciousness; in the social and political turbulence, the fall of kingdoms,  
the emancipation of nations, the intermixture of cultures, the clamor for  
development; in the agitation over the extremes of wealth and poverty, the

acute concern over the abuse of the environment, the leap of consciousness  
regarding the rights of women; in the growing tendency towards ecumen-  
ism, the increasing call for a new world order; in the astounding advances  
in the realms of science, technology, literature and the arts—in all this tu-  
mult, with its paradoxical manifestations of chaos and order, integration  
and disintegration, are the signs of His power as World Reformer, the proof  
of His claim as Divine Physician, the truth of His Word as the All-Knowing  
Counselor.

131.13 Bahá’u’lláh wrote voluminously about the purpose of this mysterious  
force and its transformative effects, but the essence can be drawn from these  
few perspicuous words: “Through the movement of Our Pen of Glory We  
have, at the bidding of the Omnipotent Ordainer, breathed a new life into  
every human frame, and instilled into every word a fresh potency. All cre-  
ated things proclaim the evidences of this worldwide regeneration.” And  
again: “A new life is, in this age, stirring within all the peoples of the earth;  
and yet none hath discovered its cause or perceived its motive.” And yet  
again: “He Who is the Unconditioned is come, in the clouds of light, that  
He may quicken all created things with the breezes of His Name, the Most  
Merciful, and unify the world, and gather all men around this Table which  
hath been sent down from heaven.”[[150]](#footnote-150)131-9

131.14 Let the denizens of the earth wake from their slumber at the resonances  
of His Name and arise from their confused dreams to embrace the clarity  
of the new Day: For “This is the King of Days, the Day that hath seen the  
coming of the Best-beloved, Him Who through all eternity hath been ac-  
claimed the Desire of the World.”[[151]](#footnote-151)131-10

131.15 Our thoughts turn back to the mourning time in 1892 when a vast num-  
ber of residents from the surrounding area came to join His bereaved fol-  
lowers in lamenting the departure of the immortal Beloved. These were not  
adherents of His Cause and had no real understanding of His station, but  
the effect of His presence among them was such as to fill them with a grave  
sense of loss. Today, a century later, it is we, who identify ourselves with His  
community, who have come in multitudinous array from the far corners of  
the earth to pay homage to the King of Glory. With us in spirit are the mil-  
lions of His lovers scattered among tens of thousands of villages, towns and

cities, themselves observing in their own localities this solemn anniversary,  
their hearts focused on the Primal Spot here at Bahjí.

131.16 And among us at this Point of Adoration are a number of the heroic souls  
from the celebrated company who earned the accolade Knight of Bahá’u’lláh  
conferred upon them by Shoghi Effendi, Guardian of the Cause—this to  
signify their acts of daring and devotion as teachers of the Faith. It is they  
who were in the vanguard during the triumphant Ten Year World Crusade.  
Their exploits, built upon the dramatic feats of the Heroic Age and the  
sacrifices of countless martyrs and heroes of the past, and following the trail  
blazed by earlier teachers of the Faith, realized the actual establishment of  
the Cause of Bahá’u’lláh as a world religion.

131.17 Now, on this commemorative occasion, the Roll of Honor on which the  
names of the Knights have been inscribed is being deposited by Amatu’l-  
Bahá Rúḥíyyih Khánum at the entrance door of the Most Holy Shrine in  
the spot designated by our beloved Guardian. This is both a symbol and a  
promise—a symbol registering the reality of a clear response, at a critical  
time, to the duty laid upon us by the Lord of Hosts to diffuse His teachings  
among all peoples; a promise that the commitment so dazzlingly displayed  
by these intrepid pioneers will be reaffirmed by generations of their succes-  
sors, ensuring that the light of Bahá’u’lláh’s Revelation, “shining in all its  
power and glory, will have suffused and enveloped the entire planet.”[[152]](#footnote-152)131-11

131.18 This is also a mark of recognition of the power of the Hand of Omnipo-  
tence to turn gnats into eagles. His bounties embolden us. Broken-winged  
birds are we; yet, with His assurances resounding in our souls, we soar to  
ever greater heights in His service. “I am the royal Falcon on the arm of the  
Almighty!” He declares, benevolently adding: “I unfold the drooping wings  
of every broken bird and start it on its flight.”[[153]](#footnote-153)131-12 How then can we fail?

131.19 We here make this vow: With a stirring history of divine support be-  
hind us and a clear vision of unfolding destiny before us, we move onward,  
renewed, reconsecrated, resolute, until the consciousness of every human  
being has been touched by the knowledge of God’s triumphant Faith. And,  
intoning the expectant words of His Martyr-Herald, we exclaim: “Exalted  
be His glory, and magnified be His might, and sanctified be His holiness,  
and glorified be His grandeur, and lauded be His ways!”[[154]](#footnote-154)131-13

132  
Passing of Isobel Sabri, Counselor member of the  
International Teaching Center

18 JUNE 192

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

132.1 HEARTS PROFOUNDLY SADDENED LOSS GREATLY LOVED OUTSTANDING PROMOTER  
CAUSE GOD, MEMBER INTERNATIONAL TEACHING CENTER ISOBEL SABRI. HER STER-  
LING INDEFATIGABLE PIONEERING AND ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES OVER SEVERAL  
DECADES FIRST BRITISH ISLES AND THEN AFRICA CROWNED BY UNFORGETTABLE  
HIGHLY VALUED CONTRIBUTIONS WORLD CENTER SINCE 1983. INTEGRITY HER  
EXEMPLARY LIFE POWERFULLY REINFORCED HER FEARLESS VALIANT UNFLAGGING  
EFFORTS CHAMPION TRUTHS AND DEFEND INTERESTS FAITH SHE DEARLY CHER-  
ISHED. PRAYING HOLY SHRINES CONTINUED PROGRESS HER LUMINOUS SOUL ABHÁ  
KINGDOM WHERE RICH REWARD ASSUREDLY AWAITS HER. ADVISE HOLD MEMORIAL  
SERVICES HER HONOR HOUSES OF WORSHIP AND COMMUNITIES THROUGHOUT  
BAHÁ’Í WORLD.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

133  
Desecration of Bahá’í sites in Tehran

24 JUNE 1992,

To selected National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

133.1 As you are already aware from previous communications, the Bahá’í Holy  
Places and other properties and endowments belonging to the Bahá’í com-  
munity of Iran are still under government control. Many have been desecrat-  
ed or demolished and the sites used for constructing roads or other buildings.

133.2 Among these confiscated properties was the once beautiful and well-kept  
Bahá’í cemetery in Tehran. It has been desecrated and the headstones and  
marble coverings of the graves were removed and later sold in auctions.  
All identification marks on the graves were obliterated, and a school and  
playground are being built on this site.

133.3 The Bahá’í community had owned a large piece of property to the south  
of Tehran which was intended for use as the future cemetery of the Tehran

Bahá’í community. This was also confiscated and all petitions to regain it  
have been fruitless. Instead, a small, barren piece of land without any public  
service or utilities was assigned to the Bahá’ís of Tehran by the Iranian Gov-  
ernment for use as a burial site for their dead. However, neither headstones  
nor any identification of the individual graves are permitted on that site.  
A Bahá’í friend living in the United States, who visited Iran in October  
1991, has described it as very depressing. The bodies of the dead have to be  
prepared for burial at home or water has to be fetched for that purpose from  
a Christian cemetery in the neighborhood ….

133.4 It should be recalled that most of the Bahá’í cemeteries in Iran have been  
desecrated or demolished and that thousands of Bahá’ís who wish to visit  
these cemeteries in order to pray for their departed relatives are either denied  
access, or they return with grieved hearts after witnessing the deplorable  
condition of the graves of their loved ones. Moreover, many of the Bahá’í  
martyrs executed in prison have been buried in areas not even known to  
their relatives.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

134  
Murder of a Bahá’í in Iran

25 JUNE 1992

To selected National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

134.1 The Universal House of Justice deeply regrets to inform you that, follow-  
ing earlier reports received from members of the Ghedami family residing  
in Canada and the United States, the friends in Iran have now confirmed  
that Mr. Rúḥu’lláh Ghedami, a staunch member of their community, has  
become the victim of a brutal murder at the hands of two members of the  
Iranian Disciplinary Forces.

134.2 The following details are reported by the friends in Iran:

134.2a Mr. Rúḥu’lláh Ghedami was 65 years of age. He used to be employed  
by the Iranian Railway Company and was dismissed from work. He  
was a farmer in the village of Muẓaffaríyyih near Islám-Shahr for about  
20 years. His wife and five of his children are living outside of Iran.

134.26 Mr. Ghedami had a great love for the Faith and would often talk  
about it to non-Bahá’ís. Towards the end of 1370 (1991), he started  
associating with a member of the Disciplinary Forces of the Govern-  
ment of Iran and began talking to him about the Faith. These conver-  
sations continued for a while until he was officially asked, in that same  
year, to report to one of the police stations in the town of Rayy. He  
was then given a questionnaire with 40 items which were all answered  
by him. Mr. Ghedami later explained to one of his friends that all the  
questions related to Bahá’í subjects.

134.2c On 25/3/71 (15 June 1992), at 11:00 p.m., a man in uniform came  
to Mr. Ghedami’s house in a car without a license plate, and told  
Mr. Ghedami that he had come to arrest him. The neighbors insisted  
that the uniformed man should come back on the following day, but  
he paid no attention and took Mr. Ghedami with him. There were  
two other individuals sitting in the car. Following this event, there was  
no news of Mr. Ghedami for several days and all the police stations  
claimed that they knew nothing about him.

134.2d On 27/3/71 (17 June 1992), a man by the name of Sulaymán  
‘Aynu’lláhí, who used to live in Muẓaffaríyyih a few years ago, entered  
Mr. Ghedami’s house with a key that he had in his possession. He  
claimed that he had purchased the house from Mr. Ghedami and told  
the tenant to vacate it.

134.2e The tenant reported the matter to the police who then summoned  
Sulaymán ‘Aynu’lláhí and his brother, Raḥmán ‘Aynu’lláhí, both  
guards in the Disciplinary Forces. After the interrogations and inves-  
tigations carried out by the Office of Criminal Investigation, it was  
determined that these two brothers had forced Mr. Ghedami to give  
them a letter attesting to the sale of his property, following which they  
strangled him, and then drove the body 60 kilometers outside Tehran  
on the Qum Highway, where they set fire to it, using gasoline.

134.2f The body was found several days later by the Ḥasanábád Police  
Station and was transferred to the coroner’s office to be examined by  
a doctor. It was identified with great difficulty because it was so badly  
burnt. The body is still in the coroner’s office and is supposed to be  
transferred to the Bahá’í Cemetery on 4/4/71 (25 June 1992).

134.3 The friends in Iran conclude by reporting that the murderers are now in  
custody, but that the facts about this case have been only partially registered

in the official records. They are certain that the murder took place as a re-  
sult of religious prejudice and because of Mr. Ghedami’s teaching activities.  
Whether the authorities had any previous knowledge of this murder is not  
known ….

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

135  
Two Bahá’ís sentenced to death in Iran

3 SEPTEMBER 1992

To selected National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

135.1 The Universal House of Justice has instructed us to inform you of the  
following disturbing news just received from the Bahá’í friends in Iran ….

135.2 Messrs. Bihnám Mítháqí and Kayván Khalajábádí, two active Iranian  
Bahá’ís who were arrested three years ago and are still being held at the  
Gohardasht Prison in Karaj near Tehran, have recently been called to the  
prison authorities where they were orally informed that an Islamic Revolu-  
tionary Court has issued a verdict condemning them to death.

135.3 The friends in Iran had earlier reported that, as an unprecedented ges-  
ture, the Iranian authorities had instructed these two Bahá’í prisoners to  
choose Muslim lawyers to defend them. Presumably, this was an exercise  
designed to impress Mr. Reynaldo Galindo Pohl, the Special Rapporteur of  
the United Nations Human Rights Commission, who was due to visit Iran  
at that time. Such lawyers were eventually engaged by the Bahá’ís, but, hav-  
ing taken some initial steps regarding the two defendants, they found them-  
selves unable to continue and resigned. Therefore, the trial which resulted  
in the death sentences for the two Bahá’ís took place without any lawyers  
defending them. Messrs. Mítháqí and Khalajábádí have appealed against  
these verdicts to a higher court in Iran, but the outcome is uncertain ….

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

136  
Further information on Bahá’í prisoners in Iran

7 SEPTEMBER 1992

To selected National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

136.1 The Universal House of Justice was pleased to receive replies from a  
number of National Spiritual Assemblies in response to our communication  
of 3 September 1992, reporting the actions they have taken in regard to two  
Bahá’í prisoners in Iran, Messrs. Bihnám Mítháqí and Kayván Khalajábádí.  
Although it is not possible at present to answer all the questions raised con-  
cerning these two friends, we have been asked to share with you the follow-  
ing background information gleaned from the records thus far available.

136.2 Messrs. Mítháqí and Khalajábádí were members of a group of three well-  
known Bahá’ís of Karaj who were assisting the Bahá’ís in that community.  
At the time of their arrest they were also helping Bahá’í children in their  
studies. Mr. Mítháqí is 30 years of age and married. Mr. Khalajábádí is of  
similar age, but his marital status is not known.

136.3 Following their arrest on 29 April 1989, they were taken together to  
the Gohardasht Prison in Karaj for interrogation. Although their cases are  
similar in many ways, they do differ in some details and it is assumed,  
therefore, that they are being dealt with separately by the authorities.  
Both prisoners had been seen by Mr. Reynaldo Galindo Pohl, Special  
Rapporteur of the United Nations Human Rights Commission, in Evin  
Prison on his last visit to Iran in December 1991, and he later reported  
that they appeared to be in bad health. Further information about each  
of these cases is set forth below.

136.3a **Bihnám Mítháqí**—After being arrested on 29 April 1989, he was  
taken to the Gohardasht Prison and put into solitary confinement for  
an unspecified period. On 19 June 1989, the Islamic Court in Karaj  
condemned him to eight years’ imprisonment on charges of “spying  
for the Bahá’í organization.” He appealed this verdict to the Islamic  
Court at Evin Prison, and a second verdict issued on 12 May 1990 by  
that Court sentenced him to three years’ imprisonment and 15 lashes.  
The time already served in prison was not counted against this new  
term.

136.3b Following this, there was a further appeal by Mr. Mítháqí’s wife,  
Maryam, resulting in another judgment, and later still he had a fourth  
trial. All charges and sentences were communicated to him verbally  
and not in writing.

136.3c When Mr. Galindo Pohl asked him why he had not taken a lawyer  
for his defense, he replied that he did not have the means and, in any  
case, this would not be useful as a Government lawyer, instead of  
defending him, would only advise him to admit to the accusations  
made against him in order to obtain a reduction of his sentence. As  
you have already been informed, he was recently condemned to death.

136.3d **Kayván Khalajábádí**—Having been arrested at his home three years  
ago by the Revolutionary Guards, he was taken to Gohardasht Prison  
in Karaj, where he was interrogated about not being in the army and  
trying to go abroad. After five days of interrogation all his Bahá’í  
books were confiscated and he was put into solitary confinement for  
30 days. After a second interrogation he was put in a very small cell for  
51 days. The interrogators and judges were Muslim clerics and they all  
asked him the same questions. At one stage, he was pressured to sign  
a paper that he was not allowed to read and when he refused to sign  
it he was insulted and sentenced to eight years’ imprisonment on the  
charge of “spying for the Bahá’í party.”

136.3e Mr. Khalajábádí objected to this sentence and appealed to a higher  
court. Later, the deputy director of the prison asked him if he was still  
a Bahá’í. When he responded in the affirmative, he was put in solitary  
confinement for six months and condemned to receive 50 lashes. In a  
third sentencing he was condemned to death on charges of “spying for  
the government occupying Jerusalem.” He appealed again and, as of  
December 1991, was awaiting his fourth trial.

136.3f All charges and sentences were conveyed to him orally only. On  
several occasions pressure was brought to bear on him in an unsuc-  
cessful attempt to force him to admit that he had been engaged in the  
activities defined in the charges against him.

136.4 … Additional information will be shared with you if and when it be-  
comes available.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

137  
Details concerning the Bahá’í prisoners in Iran

10 SEPTEMBER 1992

To selected National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

137.1 Further to our communication dated 7 September 1992 concerning the  
two condemned Bahá’í prisoners in Iran, Messrs. Bihnám Mítháqí and Kay-  
ván Khalajábádí, the Bahá’ís in Iran have reported that the relatives of these  
two prisoners have submitted their complaints against the death sentences  
in writing to the Iranian Supreme Court, the Public Prosecutor’s Office and  
to the Office of General Investigation ….

137.2 The following details which have been provided by the believers in Iran  
may be shared only with your government contacts at present:

Personal information about the prisoners:

137.2a Mr. Bihnám Mítháqí was born in 1962, is married and has a six-  
year-old daughter.

137.2b Mr. Kayván Khalajábádí was born in 1960 and is single.

Arrest and sentencing:

137.2c Both men were arrested by the Islamic Revolutionary Committee  
of Rajá‘í on 29 April 1989 in Gohardasht and were held at Gohar-  
dasht Prison for a period of time. Later they were transferred to Evin  
Prison.

137.2d Their first trial took place at Branch Number 1 of the Office of the  
Islamic Revolutionary Court in Karaj and, according to Court Order  
Number 1/209/78 dated 19 June 1989, they were sentenced to eight  
years’ correctional imprisonment on the charge of “Spying activities  
of the Espionage Sect of Bahá’ísm.” The sentences were effective as  
of 19 June 1989. Both prisoners appealed their sentences under File  
Number 13815/68 V-1.

137.2e Following the appeal of the above sentences, a second verdict  
was issued on 12 May 1990 at Branch Number 4 of the Islamic  
Revolutionary Court of Tehran, at Evin, in which they are accused  
of “Administrative activities within the Bahá’ísm Group.” Both were  
sentenced to three years’ imprisonment effective as of 12 May 1990,

plus 50 lashes. Both prisoners protested against this sentence as well  
and appealed it.

137.2f A third sentence was issued on 30 April 1991 by Branch Number  
3 of the Revolutionary Court which stated the following: “On the  
charges of involvement in administrative activities of Zionist Bahá’ísm  
and continued spying activities for the Espionage Sect of Bahá’ísm,  
and spying for the Zionist Regime of Iraq, and for the usurping Re-  
gime of Israel, the accused are sentenced to death.” Both prisoners  
again protested against and appealed their sentences.

137.2g On 29 October 1991, the Iranian authorities orally informed  
Messrs. Mítháqí and Khalajábádí of their right to hire a lawyer. After  
necessary investigations, two Muslim lawyers were requested to take  
on their cases. One of them visited the Office of the Revolutionary  
Court in order to file, as is customary, in the presence of the accused,  
a letter of appointment to act as their lawyer, but he was threatened by  
the officials of that Office who warned him about the consequences of  
his involvement in these cases. Hence, on returning from that Office  
he refused to accept the position. The second lawyer, being aware of  
the situation, refused to even visit the Office of the Revolutionary  
Court to file the appointment letter. All of this took place prior to Mr.  
Galindo Pohl’s arrival in Iran.

137.2h On 24 August 1992, another sentence was issued by Branch Num-  
ber 2 of the Revolutionary Court in Tehran, which was conveyed to the  
prisoners by Branch Number 6, Department of Law Enforcement of  
the Revolutionary Court of Tehran, under Reference Number 2149/J-  
A. The text of this sentence states the following: “On the charges of  
membership in the administration of Zionist Bahá’ísm and continued  
activities for the realization of its goals and also for spying for the  
regime occupying Jerusalem, in accordance with the verse number 38  
of the Súrih of Má‘idih of the Holy Qur’án, and Article Number 198  
of the Islamic Penal Code, they are sentenced to death.” (File Number  
15733/68/B/2/1) After orally conveying the sentence to the prisoners,  
the authorities informed them that they should prepare themselves for  
their execution. Both prisoners again protested against this verdict.

Manner of trials held and informing the prisoners of the verdicts, and the  
filing of their appeals:

137.21 During the trials only the presiding judge, a Court secretary and  
the accused were allowed to be present. These Court cases and verdicts  
have not been publicized in the media at all.

137.2j When the prisoners protested against their sentences orally and  
demanded to have something in writing, the law enforcement offi-  
cer copied by hand on a letterhead of the Prosecutor of the Islamic  
Revolution what appeared to be the text of the original verdict, but  
without any signature. He then instructed the prisoners to sign that  
copy which would be used by him as evidence that the Court sentence  
was communicated to them. At the same time, he informed the pris-  
oners that in case they wished to appeal their sentences, they could do  
so on the same piece of paper. This the prisoners have done. However,  
the original verdict, which was in the possession of the officer, was not  
shown to the prisoners at all.

137.2k At no time in the above-mentioned stages of sentencing did the  
accused receive any official verdict themselves. In one case only an  
unsigned copy was provided to them.

137.3 The friends in Iran commented that the above-mentioned method of re-  
peated appeals is quite unusual as normally after a second appeal, the Court  
sentences are carried out without any possibility of further appeal and that  
the cases of these two prisoners are, therefore, quite unprecedented.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

138  
Formulating goals for the Three Year Plan

30 SEPTEMBER 1992

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

138.1 The Holy Year is approaching its midway point and the time is ripe for all  
National Spiritual Assemblies to consult with the Counselors to formulate  
national goals for the Three Year Plan which will be launched next Riḍván.

138.2 The experience you gained in formulating and then carrying out the goals  
of the Six Year Plan can now enable you to refine the process in relation to

the Three Year Plan. The main theme for the Bahá’í community during the  
Three Year Plan will be to pursue three closely related developments which  
can be summarized as enhancing the vitality of the faith of individual be-  
lievers, greatly developing the human resources of the Cause, and fostering  
the proper functioning of its local and national institutions.

1383 We are asking the Counselors to make a special point of consulting with  
each National Spiritual Assembly on how this challenge can best be met  
through the instrumentality of goals based on the seven major objectives  
set forth in 1986, which still provide a valid framework for your planning,  
and to ensure that no essential element of your community’s development  
is overlooked.

138.4 Each National Spiritual Assembly is to formulate specific goals towards  
the attainment of the objectives in light of the present conditions and op-  
portunities in each country goals that match the urgent needs and that  
can be achieved in the short space of three years. No doubt each country  
will require its specific emphasis among these objectives, and your consulta-  
tions with the Counselors will be invaluable in assisting you to focus the  
endeavors of the friends in each of your communities.

138.5 For ease of reference, we repeat the objectives as originally stated:

1. Carrying the healing Message of Bahá’u’lláh to the generality of  
mankind

2. Greater involvement of the Faith in the life of human society

3. A worldwide increase in the translation, production, distribution  
and use of Bahá’í literature

4. Further acceleration in the process of the maturation of local and  
national Bahá’í communities

5. Greater attention to universal participation and the spiritual enrich-  
ment of individual believers

6. A wider extension of Bahá’í education to children and youth, and  
the strengthening of Bahá’í family life

7. The pursuit of projects of social and economic development in well-  
established Bahá’í communities.

138.6 As a further element in the responsibility conferred upon National Spiri-  
tual Assemblies for the formulation of goals, each National Assembly able  
to do so is encouraged, in addition to setting goals for its homefront, to

propose to the World Center those goals and activities which it judges its  
community can undertake in assisting other national Bahá’í communities.  
These proposals for international collaboration goals will then be considered  
at the World Center before they are finally approved.

138.7 During the course of the Six Year Plan we have seen a notable evolution  
of the capacity of National Spiritual Assemblies as well as a marked increase  
in their number. The believers throughout the world have paid special at-  
tention to deepening their understanding of and loyalty to the Covenant,  
and they have now been blessed by the worldwide application of the law of  
Ḥuqúqu’lláh.

138.8 The Holy Year has already raised high the call of Bahá’u’lláh to mankind  
and has been a source of infinite bounty to those who are enlisted under  
His Banner. By its close, the World Congress will have been held and the  
English translation of the Most Holy Book will have been published to the  
community of the Most Great Name and to all the world.

138.9 It is yet too soon to evaluate the effect of these momentous events, but  
under the driving power of God’s Great Plan the world is passing through  
a period of rapid change. The Bahá’í community alone knows clearly the  
direction that this is taking and it must now, as never before, demonstrate  
in its community life and the lives of its individual members the reality of  
the transformation that Bahá’u’lláh intends for all humankind. To achieve  
this we must know well His Teachings and put them into practice with  
ardor and conviction in every aspect of our behavior. It is our fervent prayer  
that the Three Year Plan will effect a transformation in the character of the  
worldwide Bahá’í community that will inspire admiration and emulation on  
every side and greatly increase the number of those who acclaim the coming  
and follow the Teachings of Bahá’u’lláh.

138.10 We eagerly look forward to receiving a report of your goals as soon as you  
have set them down following consultation with the Counselors.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

139  
Confiscation of Bahá’í properties in Iran

30 SEPTEMBER 1992

To selected National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

139.1 We are instructed to convey to you the following disturbing news which  
was just received from the friends in Iran.

139.2 During the past few weeks, Iranian Islamic revolutionary institutions in  
Yazd, Tehran, and Isfahan have confiscated a considerable number of pri-  
vate homes and other property belonging to Bahá’ís. The Bahá’ís concerned  
are neither prominent believers nor were they engaged in Bahá’í administra-  
tive activities.

139.3 The friends in Iran explained that, in Yazd, these confiscations are based  
on a religious edict issued to the Judiciary by the late Áyatu’lláh Ṣadúqí,  
former Imam of Yazd, on the strength of which the members of the Imam  
Khomeini Foundation are seizing the homes of Bahá’ís and are harassing  
the occupants. The late Áyatu’lláh, in turn, had taken this action on the  
instigation of a certain Mr. Kashmírí, who had played an active role in the  
oppression of the Bahá’ís in Yazd and was keenly interested in their proper-  
ties. The details are as follows.

Yazd

139.4 In Yazd, 11 families are presently affected by such confiscations.  
Mr. Dáryúsh Dahmúbidí’s family, residing in Taft, was already forcefully  
evicted and their house with all its furnishings was taken over by the Imam  
Khomeini Foundation.

139.5 The families of 10 other Bahá’ís named below were served notice by the  
Islamic revolutionary institutions to vacate their homes and hand them over  
to the Government. Although, due to their protestations and appeals to  
higher authorities, their evacuation has not yet taken place, they are under  
severe pressure to relinquish their homes.

Mr. ‘Aṭá’u’lláh Lur

Mr. Khudáyár Akhtarkhávarí

Mrs. Írándukht Ḥakhámanishí

Mr. Jamshíd Lur

Mr. Ghulám-Ḥusayn Shádpúr

Mr. Panj‘alí A‘rábí

Mr. Rúḥu’lláh Rustamí

Mr. Ḥabíbu’lláh Tafakkurí

Mr. ‘Aṭá’u’lláh Rustamí

Mr. Adíb Dánishníyá

Tehran

139.6 In Tehran, three cases were reported, as follows:

139.6a Mrs. Mihrángíz Rawḥání, who had been dismissed from her posi-  
tion as midwife at the Public Health Department, was served an order  
by the Islamic Revolutionary Court that her house was confiscated. As  
a result of her appeals, no action has been taken yet by the Court, but  
the case is not resolved.

139.6b A complex consisting of a large shop and 10 apartments, as well  
as a two-storey residential building, belonging to Mr. Qudratu’lláh  
Ḥishmatí were occupied by members of the Imam Khomeini Founda-  
tion against the will of the owner, in this case without any official  
order from the judicial authorities. Unfortunately, his appeals and  
complaints to the authorities have not succeeded in restoring the  
property to him so far.

139.6c Mrs. Mawhibatí was forcefully evicted from her home after being  
served an order by the Attorney-General that her house was confiscated.

Isfahan

139.7 In Isfahan, the following cases were reported:

139.7a Mrs. Bádkúbi’í had donated a two-storey building to a Bahá’í insti-  
tution before the Islamic Revolution, retaining tenancy for life in one  
apartment while renting out the other as her only source of income.  
Although, according to Islamic and civil law, she is entitled to oc-  
cupy the building for life and no one has the right to eject her from  
it, she has been pressured to vacate the house, and the authorities  
have already compelled the tenant of the other apartment to leave the  
premises as well.

139.7b Perhaps the most tragic case is that of Mr. Aḥmad Ishráqí, resi-  
dent of Isfahan, who is over 80 years of age. In mid-September 1992,  
several Government officers invaded his home and took away all his  
books, numbering several thousand volumes. They ejected him from  
his home and took possession of the building. Mr. Ishráqí was not able  
to take anything with him and is now dependent on his friends. No  
appeal or complaint has been entertained by the authorities concern-  
ing his case.

139.7c Furthermore, officers of the Attorney-General of Isfahan have  
entered eight Bahá’í homes during the past two weeks, taking away  
books, household items, radios, television sets, recorders, cameras,  
and cash. The Bahá’í owners have lodged complaints with the judicial  
authorities, but without any result so far.

139.8 The Universal House of Justice is concerned that this sudden intensifica-  
tion of actions against the Bahá’ís, taken almost simultaneously in different  
centers in Iran, may signal the beginning of a new phase in the persecution  
of the sorely tried friends in the Cradle of the Faith ….

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

140  
The Station of Bahá’u’lláh

15 OCTOBER 1992

To an individual Bahá’í  
Dear Bahá’í Friend,

140.1 The Universal House of Justice has received your letter of 3 Septem-  
ber 1992 and is very glad that you have raised this matter. It has recently  
been disturbed at the degree to which these issues seem to have been giv-  
ing concern to Bahá’ís in different parts of the world. It may, indeed, be  
providential for the matter to be brought to the fore now, before the English  
translation of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas is published. We have been asked to convey  
to you the following comments.

140.2 As you know, the human soul is “a heavenly gem … whose mystery no  
mind, however acute, can ever hope to unravel,” “one of the signs of God,

a mystery among His mysteries.”[[155]](#footnote-155)140-1 If even the soul of man is so ineffable  
a reality, how can a human being claim to understand or to set forth the  
nature of the Manifestations of God, of the relationships between Them, or  
of Their relationship to God, let alone to grasp the nature. of God Himself?

140.3 Bahá’u’lláh has explained these mysteries to a degree never before ap-  
proached, but we must accept that they are realities that cannot be defined  
in a rigorous manner, as one would attempt to define the terms of mathe-  
matics or even of philosophy. This is a realm of knowledge in which poetry,  
analogy, hyperbole and paradox are to be expected; a realm in which the  
Manifestations Themselves speak with many voices. Undoubtedly you are  
familiar with the passage in the Kitáb-i-Íqán in which Bahá’u’lláh elaborates  
this theme, commenting on Muḥammad’s statement: “Some of the Apostles  
We have caused to excel the others. To some God hath spoken, some He  
hath raised and exalted. And to Jesus, Son of Mary, We gave manifest signs,  
and We strengthened Him with the Holy Spirit.”[[156]](#footnote-156)140-2

140.3a By virtue of this station, they have claimed for themselves the Voice  
of Divinity and the like, whilst by virtue of their station of Messeng-  
ership, they have declared themselves the Messengers of God. In every  
instance they have voiced an utterance that would conform to the  
requirements of the occasion, and have ascribed all these declarations  
to Themselves, declarations ranging from the realm of divine Revela-  
tion to the realm of creation, and from the domain of Divinity even  
unto the domain of earthly existence. Thus it is that whatsoever be  
their utterance, whether it pertain to the realm of Divinity, Lordship,  
Prophethood, Messengership, Guardianship, Apostleship or Ser-  
vitude, all is true, beyond the shadow of a doubt. Therefore, these  
sayings which We have quoted in support of Our argument must be  
attentively considered, that the divergent utterances of the Manifesta-  
tions of the Unseen and Daysprings of Holiness may cease to agitate  
the soul and perplex the mind.[[157]](#footnote-157)140-3

140.4 The Bahá’ís must study the Kitáb-i-Íqán and the explanations given by  
‘Abdu’l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi and not be misled into thinking that any  
statement made in the Sacred Texts, in the writings of Shoghi Effendi, or in  
the letters of the Universal House of Justice is made in ignorance of these  
fundamental clarifications.

140.5 In the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, Bahá’u’lláh again and again speaks with the Voice  
of God, a station that He affirms in this passage from the Súriy-i-Haykal:

140.5a Naught is seen in My temple but the Temple of God, and in My  
beauty but His Beauty, and in My being but His Being, and in My  
self but His Self, and in My movement but His Movement, and in  
My acquiescence but His Acquiescence, and in My pen but His Pen,  
the Mighty, the All-Praised. There hath not been in My soul but the  
Truth, and in Myself naught could be seen but God …. The Holy  
Spirit Itself hath been generated through the agency of a single let-  
ter revealed by this Most Great Spirit, if ye be of them that compre-  
hend.[[158]](#footnote-158)140-4

At another time, as published in *Gleanings* I., He wrote:

140.5b And whenever I chose to hold my peace and be still, lo, the voice of  
the Holy Ghost, standing on my right hand, aroused me, and the  
Supreme Spirit appeared before my face, and Gabriel overshadowed  
me, and the Spirit of Glory stirred within my bosom, bidding me  
arise and break my silence. If your hearing be purged and your ears  
be attentive, ye will assuredly perceive that every limb of my body,  
nay all the atoms of my being, proclaim and bear witness to this call:  
“God, besides Whom is none other God, and He, Whose beauty is  
now manifest, is the reflection of His glory unto all that are in heaven  
and on earth.”

In *Messages to America*, on p. 100, we find this illuminating statement:

140.5c It was in such dramatic circumstances, recalling the experience of  
Moses when face to face with the Burning Bush in the wilderness of

Sinai, the successive visions of Zoroaster, the opening of the heavens  
and the descent of the Dove upon Christ in the Jordan, the cry of  
Gabriel heard by Muḥammad in the Cave of Hira, and the dream of  
the Báb, in which the blood of the Imam Ḥusayn touched and sancti-  
fied His lips, that Bahá’u’lláh, He “around Whom the Point of the  
Bayán hath revolved,” and the Vehicle of the greatest Revelation the  
world has yet seen, received the first intimation of His sublime Mis-  
sion, and that a ministry which, alike in its duration and fecundity,  
is unsurpassed in the religious history of mankind, was inaugurated.  
It was on that occasion that the “Most Great Spirit,” as designated by  
Bahá’u’lláh Himself, revealed itself to Him, in the form of a “Maiden,”  
and bade Him “lift up” His “voice between earth and heaven”—that  
same Spirit which, in the Zoroastrian, the Mosaic, the Christian, and  
Muhammadan Dispensations, had been respectively symbolized by  
the “Sacred Fire,” the “Burning Bush,” the “Dove,” and the “Angel  
Gabriel.”[[159]](#footnote-159)140-5

140.6 On a related subject, the following reply to a question from an individual  
believer was written on behalf of the Guardian 19 October 1947:

140.6a Bahá’u’lláh is not the Intermediary between other Manifestations and  
God. Each has His own relation to the Primal Source. But in the sense  
that Bahá’u’lláh is the greatest Manifestation to yet appear, the One  
Who consummates the Revelation of Moses, He was the One Moses  
conversed with in the Burning Bush. In other words Bahá’u’lláh iden-  
tifies the Glory of the Godhead on that occasion with Himself. No  
distinction can be made amongst the Prophets in the sense that They  
all proceed from one source, and are of one essence. But Their stations  
and functions in this world are different.[[160]](#footnote-160)140-6

140.7 It was with the magnitude of Bahá’u’lláh’s Revelation in mind that the  
Universal House of Justice referred to Him as “the most precious Being ever  
to have drawn breath on this planet.”[[161]](#footnote-161)140-7 This is analogous to Bahá’u’lláh’s

own statement in relation to the Báb: “Behold how great and lofty is His  
station! His rank excelleth that of all the Prophets and His Revelation  
transcendeth the comprehension and understanding of all their chosen  
ones.”[[162]](#footnote-162)140-8 These are both allusions to that “distinction” which in no way  
contradicts the essential “unity” of the Manifestations of God, as referred to  
by Bahá’u’lláh in the Kitáb-i-Íqán:

140.7a Conceive accordingly the distinction, variation, and unity character-  
istic of the various Manifestations of holiness, that thou mayest com-  
prehend the allusions made by the creator of all names and attributes  
to the mysteries of distinction and unity, and discover the answer to  
thy question as to why that everlasting Beauty should have, at sundry  
times, called Himself by different names and titles.[[163]](#footnote-163)140-9

140.8 You may be quite confident that no “new theology” is being created—  
such a development would be entirely impossible in the Bahá’í Faith. All  
that is happening is that, in the year of the Centenary of Bahá’u’lláh’s Ascen-  
sion, the Bahá’í world is proclaiming more clearly than ever before the great-  
ness of the event of His appearance in this world, and what it really means  
to say that we are witnessing the coming of the Kingdom of God on earth.

140.9 It is likely that in dealing with such matters individual friends will go  
beyond what the teachings of the Faith justify, but such errors will in due  
course be rectified and should not be permitted to give rise to disputations.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

141  
Responsibilities of youth in the Bahá’í community

28 OCTOBER 1992

To two individual Bahá’ís

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

141.1 The Universal House of Justice has considered the concerns expressed  
in your letter of 15 September 1992 regarding the manner of appealing  
to the youth and of involving them in Bahá’í activities, particularly with  
respect to the youth year of service, and we have been directed to convey  
the following.

141.2 The House of Justice sympathizes with your view that undue pressure  
should not be put on the youth to induce them to engage in activities of  
a youth year of service, and it certainly would not be in accord with the  
purposes of the Faith to require youth to abandon their academic training  
so as to teach or otherwise serve the Faith. Many factors bear on the various  
points you have raised; these must be understood by both youth and par-  
ents, and of course by members of Bahá’í institutions. For example, every  
Bahá’í, whether youth or adult, has spiritual duties and obligations in com-  
mon; among these is the duty prescribed by Bahá’u’lláh to the individual to  
teach His Faith, a duty which He describes as the “most meritorious of all  
deeds” and in which He urges us to be “unrestrained as the wind.”[[164]](#footnote-164)141-1 Even  
so, the youth must be knowledgeable of the emphasis which Bahá’u’lláh  
places on education and the acquisition of skills, and they should regard the  
pursuit of these objectives as a service to God.

141.3 Particular challenges must be met by the youth, parents, and the Bahá’í  
institutions in relation to their respective responsibilities. For instance:

141.3a – The youth face the pressing obligation of completing their educa-  
tion so as to acquire a profession or trade while at the same time  
observing their other spiritual obligations and duties to God.

141.3b – Parents have the responsibility of ensuring that their children are  
educated and, to the extent possible, must provide the material  
support for their academic or vocational training up through their  
youthful years; parents also continue during this period to offer

them moral and practical guidance as befits their parental duties  
and with respect to the spiritual obligations which they share in  
common with their Bahá’í children.

141.3c – The Bahá’í institutions have not only to administer the affairs of  
the community and protect its interests but also to stimulate and  
exhort the friends to fulfill their spiritual duties and obligations.  
These same institutions, while encouraging the friends to teach the  
Cause of God and to make sacrifices in so doing, also have the clear  
responsibility laid upon them by Bahá’u’lláh to promote education  
of the human race, both spiritual and academic.

141.4 So fundamental are these duties and obligations that to some degree  
all entities youth, parents, Bahá’í institutions share in them, acting in  
accordance with their respective functions and responsibilities. There is a  
sphere in which each must make independent judgments and take indepen-  
dent action. A youth must decide on what professional training to pursue  
and keep a balance between such pursuit and his spiritual obligations; the  
parents must assist the youth, through material support and moral guid-  
ance, to achieve his goal, and must also encourage the youth in the obser-  
vance of his spiritual obligations; the institutions must promote the Cause  
of God, endeavor to stimulate action on the part of individual believers in  
the teaching and consolidation of the Faith, with the full realization that if  
such action is neglected there can be no hope for the peace of mankind and  
the future growth of civilization. The institutions cannot, therefore, fail to  
urge the friends to service and to call their attention to the critical situation  
of the times and to point out the crucial importance of the action of the  
individual to the fortunes of the Faith and humanity as a whole.

141.5 Along with all these considerations is the factor of the special role which  
the youth, with their particular qualities of enthusiasm and idealism, play  
in the development of the Cause. This has been evident from the earliest  
days of the Faith and is indispensable to its ultimate triumph. A cursory  
review of Bahá’í history provides many examples of the heroic deeds of  
youth, and today’s Bahá’í youth cannot help but be inspired by such hero-  
ism to also play their part in their own time before they become burdened  
with the cares of adult life.

141.6 In some circumstances, however much a youth may wish to respond to  
a call to Bahá’í service of a particular kind, he may not be able to do so  
because he may be in the midst of important academic training that cannot

and should not be postponed, he may be dependent on parents who cannot  
afford to assist him materially both to take time out to engage in a year of  
service and to return to his academic pursuits later on, or there may be other  
obstacles. Then there are circumstances in which a youth may find that by  
postponing his academic training for a time, he is better able to determine  
exactly what to do with his life, if during this time he can make some useful  
contribution to the Faith or to society. There are numerous examples of  
such circumstances among Bahá’í youth who have found that by engaging  
in activities of the youth year of service, they were able not only to make  
valuable contributions to the teaching of the Faith or to development proj-  
ects, but were also able to make up their minds about their life’s work. There  
are also many youth who prefer to complete their education before offering  
special services to the Faith, and this is entirely in order.

141.7 The preeminent point drawn from your letter is the importance of bal-  
ance in judgment and action. The members of the Bahá’í institutions can-  
not escape their duty to urge and stimulate the friends, adult and youth,  
to serve the Cause, especially in the field of teaching, and in this they are  
inevitably enthusiastic. Of course, individuals differ in their approach and  
may in some cases be injudicious in their speech; this is to be regretted and  
dealt with as instances arise. But those who hear such persons, however  
much they may be stimulated by them, do also have the individual obliga-  
tion to make judgments based upon their understanding of the Teachings,  
of the particular challenge at the moment, and of their circumstances, and  
should make their decisions accordingly.

141.8 As important as it is for parents to exercise their moral authority in as-  
sisting the youth not to make unwise decisions, it is also incumbent on the  
parents as Bahá’ís to give due consideration to the significance of the spiri-  
tual impact of the Faith upon the youth and recognize that the youth must  
have some latitude to respond to the stirrings of their hearts and souls, since  
they, beginning at the age of 15, must assume serious spiritual obligations  
and duties and are themselves alone ultimately responsible to God for the  
progress of their own souls. The capacity for mature thinking on the part of  
youth differs from one to the other and according to age; some attain this  
ability earlier than others; for some it is delayed. Parents are generally in a  
position to judge these matters more acutely than others and must consider  
them in their attempts to guide the youth in their families, but the parents  
must strive to do so in such a way as not to stifle their children’s sense of  
spiritual responsibility.

141.9 The House of Justice has written numerous letters to the youth which  
aim at guiding them to achieve a proper balance in their plans and activities.  
One of these, which was addressed to the Bahá’í youth in every land on 10  
June 1966, may be of particular interest to you and is enclosed herewith.[[165]](#footnote-165)141-2

141.10 With deep empathy for you as parents challenged with the onerous task  
of raising your children in a world beset with unprecedented problems and  
difficulties, the House of Justice assures you of its ardent prayers in the Holy  
Shrines on your behalf.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

142  
Resignation of two members  
of the Universal House of Justice

11 NOVEMBER 1992

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Beloved Friends,

142.1 Conscious of the increasing burden of advancing years and the effect of  
this on the services they can render, Mr. Hugh E. Chance and Dr. David S.  
Ruhe have, after prayerful consideration of the best interests of the Cause of  
God, requested permission to relinquish their membership on the Universal  
House of Justice, in accordance with Article V.2. (c) of its Constitution.

142.2 The House of Justice has regretfully accepted the resignation of these be-  
loved members, who have rendered highly valued services in the Holy Land,  
since 1963 in Mr. Chance’s case, and since 1968 in that of Dr. Ruhe. They  
will thus be able to continue their services to the Cause of God free from  
the inexorable pressure of work at the World Center. In view, however, of  
the imminence of the next international election, we have requested them  
to remain in office until that time, and to this they have readily agreed.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

143  
Message to the participants of the first National  
Congress of the Bahá’ís of Bangladesh

19 NOVEMBER 1992

143.1 At this auspicious time, when Bahá’ís throughout the world are celebrat-  
ing the Day of the Covenant of Bahá’u’lláh, we hail the participants in the  
first National Congress of the Bahá’ís of Bangladesh, who have gathered to  
pay tribute to the life-giving Teachings of our Faith and to enhance their role  
in the service of their country and the promotion of the unity of mankind.

143.2 The wonderful achievements of your community in recent years have  
demonstrated that the people of Bangladesh are endowed with great spiri-  
tual capacity enabling them to recognize divine truth when it is presented  
to them. Once enlisted under the banner of the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh, they  
become highly motivated and arise in the promotion of the Word of God  
and the cause of peace in this world. This augurs well for the progress and  
future prosperity of that nation.

143.3 The Bahá’í community of Bangladesh has already established itself in the  
annals of the Formative Age of our Faith as a staunch pillar of devotion and  
selfless endeavor in the service of the Cause, and this has been an inspiration  
to many. The freedom they enjoy in pursuing their beneficial activities is a  
credit to the farsightedness of the leaders of that country who are seeking to  
guide that nation into a brighter future.

143.4 One of the great challenges before the people of Bangladesh, and the  
Bahá’í community in particular, is to foster better understanding and amity  
between the various sectors of the population and to promote its social and  
economic development. The Bahá’ís must show by their actions that the  
Teachings of Bahá’u’lláh not only create harmony and convey deep spiritual  
insights, but they also offer practical solutions to many problems of this age  
and are able to effect the much needed spiritual transformation, beginning  
at the grassroots level and embracing all strata of society.

143.5 You may be assured that prayers will be offered at the Sacred Threshold  
for the success of this historic gathering, and that we will beseech Bahá’u’lláh  
to grant success to the people of your country in their struggle for spiritual  
and material progress.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

144  
Message to the second Bahá’í World Congress

23 NOVEMBER 1992[[166]](#footnote-166)

To the followers of Bahá’u’lláh attending the second Bahá’í World Congress  
Dearly loved Friends,

144.1 With eager hopes and thankful hearts, we acclaim the convocation in  
New York of the second Bahá’í World Congress on the occasion of the  
worldwide celebration of the centenary of the inauguration of the Covenant  
of Bahá’u’lláh. That so wide a diversity of the human race as you represent  
has assembled at this commemorative event is in itself history-making and  
is, indeed, an impressive demonstration of the potency and potential of  
the Covenant as the instrument designed by the Lord of the Age for the  
unification and pacification of the nations and peoples of the earth. We  
rejoice with exceeding gladness, for your coming together in such variegated  
array is an affirmation of the efficacy of this sacred legacy—a fresh assur-  
ance that, despite recurrent trials and turmoil, its world-redeeming, world-  
revolutionizing purpose will ultimately be entirely realized.

144.2 Our emotions are deeply stirred as we reflect on the remarkable circum-  
stances which heralded the birth of Bahá’u’lláh’s Covenant. Melancholy  
and hopeful images alternatingly flash upon our mental screen: the tragic  
May night a century ago of the passing of Bahá’u’lláh, the Supreme Mani-  
festation of God; the soul-crushing scenes of the grief-stricken many who  
converged on Bahjí to pay their respects to His memory; the atmosphere  
of abject desolation caused by the loss of One Who had been Father and  
incomparable Friend to all. But the setting of the Sun of Bahá gave rise  
to the appearance of the Orb of the Covenant. Thus the majestic Figure  
of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá came to impress itself indelibly upon the consciousness of  
the faithful, consoling their spirits and brightening their outlook, because  
in Bahá’u’lláh’s Book of the Covenant, the Kitáb-i-‘Ahd, this beloved Son  
was appointed His Successor and the Center of the Covenant. Thus was set  
in motion on the morrow of Bahá’u’lláh’s ascension the divine process that  
will, during the course of the Bahá’í Dispensation, guarantee the fulfill-

ment of His principal purpose for humankind, namely, the realization of its  
oneness.

144.3 The initial momentum of this process was to gather particular force in  
the West as the acts of the beloved Master dramatically revealed. It was dur-  
ing His epic journey to North America that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, recently released  
from imprisonment, impressed upon the early occidental believers the piv-  
otal importance of the new Covenant; and it was in New York City that He  
chose to disclose to His disciples the special characteristics of that Covenant  
and His true station as its appointed Center. The occasion won for this  
leading city of the western hemisphere the surname, City of the Covenant.  
Where else, then, but this signally blessed metropolis could serve as the  
fitting venue for the commemoration which has so marvelously brought you  
together?

144.4 This Congress is the major occasion during the Holy Year for the evoca-  
tion of a memory which enables us all to appreciate how, through the dy-  
namic person and peerless office of the Center of the Covenant, the will of  
both the Abhá Beauty and His Herald has been translated into viable means  
for actualizing the unity of mankind and building a world civilization. Con-  
sider, for instance, how on the very night in May 1844 when He declared  
His prophetic mission, the Báb addressed a summons to the peoples of  
the West that they issue forth from their cities to teach the Cause of God.  
Has that summons not thoroughly been fused with the world-embracing  
purpose of Bahá’u’lláh, becoming a shining reality within the framework of  
the Administrative Order, the child of the Covenant an Order which the  
Báb anticipated and extolled in His Writings? You have come to New York  
to reflect on such triumphant realities with due solemnity and spiritual joy.

144.5 How heartwarming and noteworthy that the proceedings of this momen-  
tous gathering will be enhanced by the presence of the three Hands of the  
Cause of God, tried and true upholders of the Covenant chosen by Shoghi  
Effendi under his authority as the Guardian of the Faith appointed in the  
Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá! We can never forget that by their self-  
less adherence to duty during the period of their custodianship following  
the sudden passing of Shoghi Effendi, the Hands of the Cause preserved the  
wholeness of the Community of Bahá, while at the same time guiding the  
members of that expanding community to the victorious conclusion of the  
Guardian’s Ten Year Global Plan. Nor can we cease to appreciate their con-  
tinuing, tireless services in the propagation and protection of our glorious  
Faith. We are particularly pleased that our representative to the Congress is

one of these high-ranking officers, the consort and helpmate of our beloved  
Guardian who herself attained the presence of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.

144.6 It was Shoghi Effendi who called for the first World Congress which jubi-  
lantly marked the one hundredth anniversary of Bahá’u’lláh’s declaration of  
His divine mission. With admirable resourcefulness the Hands of the Cause  
planned and executed it. That unforgettable occasion in London some three  
decades ago, coming at the end of the Ten Year Crusade, affirmed for the  
Bahá’ís themselves that the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh had truly emerged as a  
world religion with a world community. Now at this moment, throughout  
the Bahá’í world, we are engaged in another centennial observance for the  
purpose not only of celebrating the unique history of the Covenant, but  
also of proclaiming abroad its aims and unifying power. The second World  
Congress now convened is the mainspring in the launching of worldwide  
commemorative activities which will promulgate the Covenant as the axis  
of unity for all humankind and broadcast its qualities for reforming human  
society. Moreover, through these activities and other extended measures, the  
community at all levels local, national, continental and international  
will exert immense effort to spread across the planet the Name of the World  
Reformer, Bahá’u’lláh, that hearts may be attracted and minds illumined.

144.7 But we speak of a proclamation which has more to do with deeds than  
words; and in this regard, we must, everywhere in our world community,  
attain a new awareness of the urgency of the times and of our sacred duties  
toward the Promised One of All Ages. A special expectation is therefore in-  
vested in you who are attending this focal event in the City of the Covenant.  
For these four special days of commemoration, may you all strive as never  
before to appreciate more adequately the life-transforming character and  
unific spirit of the Covenant, and to immediately demonstrate this height-  
ened appreciation in the spiritual attitude you show among yourselves. May  
you do this with the resolve that what you practice towards each other dur-  
ing these few days will henceforth be sustained in your relations with all oth-  
ers elsewhere. Such active resolution will endow the second World Congress  
with the radiant power to impress upon the public the incontrovertible fact  
that the Bahá’í Faith is a world religion worthy of its claims and, hence, of  
public recognition.

144.8 In a Tablet to the Bahá’ís in New York, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá expressed a hope  
which it is propitious to recall on this opportune occasion: “I eagerly antici-  
pate the day,” He wrote, “when New York will become a blessed spot from  
which the call to steadfastness in the Covenant and Testament of God will

go forth to every part of the world ….” Surely, through the auspicious cir-  
cumstances afforded by this Congress, you will attempt thus to gratify His  
Spirit in the Abhá Realm, so that from His retreats on high you may receive  
the benediction of His abiding good pleasure and strengthening grace.

144.9 In our supplications at His blessed Shrine we shall entreat Him gracious-  
ly to secure and in abundance vouchsafe to the entire community of His  
dedicated lovers the favors and confirmations of the Lord of the Covenant.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

145  
Message on the centennial of the Day of the Covenant

26 NOVEMBER 1992

To the Bahá’ís of the World

145.1 A full century has gone by since the Covenant of Bahá’u’lláh was estab-  
lished and set in motion. And we extend to the members of His community  
our loving greetings as they are assembled today at the World Congress in  
New York and at auxiliary conferences on all continents, or as they other-  
wise participate in the observance of this centennial occasion.

145.2 We are particularly pleased that we have been afforded a special opportu-  
nity to pause for a moment, together with our fellow-believers, to gather our  
thoughts, to see how we have fared since 1892, and to consider where we are  
now headed. This enables us to engage in a symbolic act which by its very  
nature exemplifies the purpose of the Covenant—a Covenant intended by  
its divine Author to unite the races and nations of the earth.

145.3 Sublime emotions surge in our hearts as we survey the dramatic history  
and amazing progress of these one hundred years. At the time of the passing  
of Bahá’u’lláh, the Bahá’í community was contained within the borders of  
no more than fifteen countries, the vast majority of its members living in  
His native Iran. The community now embraces the entire planet. We rejoice  
at the spirit of unity which is evident in its steady consolidation through  
the workings of the Administrative Order to which the Covenant has given  
birth. Our cumulated experience has clearly demonstrated the efficacy of  
the Covenant. The genuine unity it induces greatly encourages our expecta-  
tion that all of humanity can and will be united.

145.4 We have toiled to build a community at a period when the world has  
witnessed startling changes which have profoundly altered the character of  
society and plunged it into an unprecedented state of worry and confusion.  
Indeed, the world in its current condition has lost its bearings through the  
operation of forces it neither understands nor can control. It is a period  
in which great dynasties and empires have collapsed in rapid succession,  
in which powerful ideologies have captured the hearts of millions only to  
expire in infamy, in which two world wars wreaked havoc on civilized life as  
it was known at the beginning of the twentieth century.

145.5 In the wake of such horrendous disruptions, there have been unexampled  
advances in the realms of science, technology and social organization; a  
veritable explosion of knowledge; and an even more remarkable burgeoning  
in the awakening and rise of masses of humanity which were previously  
presumed to be dormant. These masses are claiming their rightful places  
within the community of nations which has greatly expanded. With the  
simultaneous development of communications at the speed of light and  
transportation at the speed of sound, the world has contracted into a mere  
neighborhood in which people are instantly aware of each other’s affairs and  
have immediate access to each other. And yet, even with such miraculous  
advances, with the emergence of international organizations, and with val-  
iant attempts and brilliant successes at international cooperation, nations  
are at woeful odds with one another, people are convulsed by economic  
upheavals, races feel more alienated than before and are filled with mistrust,  
humiliation and fear.

145.6 Collateral with these changes has been the breakdown of institutions,  
religious and political, which traditionally functioned as the guideposts for  
the stability of society. Even the most resilient of these seem to be losing  
their credibility as they have become preoccupied with their own internal  
disorder. This calls attention to the emptiness of the moral landscape and  
the feeling of futility deranging personal life. Thoughtful commentators  
write apprehensively about the fall of culture and the consequent disap-  
pearance of values, the loss of the fullness of the inner life, a technological  
civilization facing an increasingly serious crisis. They write, moreover, of  
the human species as being at the end with its wisdom and being unable  
to control itself, of the need for divine wisdom and foresight, and of the  
human psyche as being far removed from recognizing this need.

145.7 These ominous comments reflect the universal consequences of a failed  
understanding as to the purpose of God for humankind. It is in this par-

ticular respect that the Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh sheds new light; it refreshes  
our thoughts; it clarifies and expands our conceptions. His Teachings imbue  
us with the abundance of God’s love for His creatures; they impress upon  
us the indispensability of justice in human relations and emphasize the im-  
portance of adhering to principle in all matters; they inform us that human  
beings have been created “to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization”  
and that the virtues that befit the dignity of every person are: “forbear-  
ance, mercy, compassion and loving-kindness towards all the peoples and  
kindreds of the earth.”[[167]](#footnote-167)145-1

145.8 As the members of our community have pursued their plan for teaching  
His Faith, they have grown to appreciate more adequately the purpose of the  
multifarious processes of change which have been at work during the course  
of the century. “Such simultaneous processes of rise and fall, of integra-  
tion and of disintegration, of order and chaos, with their continuous and  
reciprocal reactions on each other, are,” our Teachings tell us, “but aspects  
of a greater Plan, one and indivisible, whose Source is God, whose author is  
Bahá’u’lláh, the theatre of whose operations is the entire planet, and whose  
ultimate objectives are the unity of the human race and the peace of all  
mankind.”[[168]](#footnote-168)145-2

145.9 Disunity is the crux of the problems which so severely afflict the planet.  
It permeates attitudes in all departments of life. It is at the heart of all major  
conflicts between nations and peoples. More serious still, disunity is com-  
mon in the relations between religions and within religions, vitiating the  
very spiritual and moral influence which it is their primary purpose to exert.  
“Should the lamp of religion be obscured,” Bahá’u’lláh asserts, “chaos and  
confusion will ensue, and the lights of fairness, of justice, of tranquility and  
peace cease to shine.”[[169]](#footnote-169)145-3

145.10 In an elaboration of these dreadful consequences, our Teachings state  
that “when, as a result of human perversity, the light of religion is quenched  
in men’s hearts … a deplorable decline in the fortunes of humanity im-  
mediately sets in, bringing in its wake all the evils which a wayward soul  
is capable of revealing. The perversion of human nature, the degradation  
of human conduct, the corruption and dissolution of human institutions,

reveal themselves, under such circumstances, in their worst and most revolt-  
ing aspects. Human character is debased, confidence is shaken, the nerves  
of discipline are relaxed, the voice of human conscience is stilled, the sense  
of decency and shame is obscured, conceptions of duty, of solidarity, of  
reciprocity and loyalty are distorted, and the very feeling of peacefulness, of  
joy and of hope is gradually extinguished.”[[170]](#footnote-170)145-4

145.11 Such, unfortunately, is the state to which institutions and individuals  
have come in our time. Against this background the requirements of the  
Covenant assume even more critical importance than before. There can be  
no doubt that if our community is to cope with the situation, it must ad-  
vance rapidly towards the next phase in its evolution. It will be a phase in  
which the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh must of necessity anticipate a deep encounter  
with the forces operating with such bewildering ferocity throughout the  
world. Let us, therefore, take this propitious occasion to review the cov-  
enantal arrangement which generates and sustains our actions.

145.12 The foundation of our belief rests on our recognition of the sovereignty  
of God, the Unknowable Essence, the Supreme Creator, and on our sub-  
mission to His will as revealed for this age by Bahá’u’lláh. To accept the  
Messenger of God in His Day and to abide by His bidding are the two  
essential, inseparable duties which each soul was created to fulfill. One ex-  
ercises these twin duties by one’s own choice, and by so doing performs an  
act which may be regarded as the highest expression of free will with which  
every human being is endowed by an all-loving Creator. The vehicle in this  
resplendent age for the practical fulfillment of these duties is the Covenant  
of Bahá’u’lláh. It is the instrument by which belief in Him is translated into  
constructive deeds.

145.13 The oneness of humankind is the pivotal principle and ultimate goal of  
His mission. This principle means far more than the reawakening of the  
spirit of brotherhood and goodwill among people: “It implies an organic  
change in the structure of present-day society, a change such as the world  
has not yet experienced.”[[171]](#footnote-171)145-5 The Covenant of Bahá’u’lláh embodies the  
spirit, instrumentality and method to attain this essential goal. In addi-  
tion to laying down, in His Book of Laws, the fundamentals for a new  
World Order, Bahá’u’lláh, in the Book of His Covenant, confirmed the  
appointment of His Son ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as the interpreter of His Word and

the Center of His Covenant. As the interpreter, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá became the  
living mouth of the Book, the expounder of the Word; as the Center of the  
Covenant, He became the incorruptible medium for applying the Word to  
practical measures for the raising up of a new civilization. The Covenant is,  
therefore, unique as a divine phenomenon, in that Bahá’u’lláh, further to  
conferring upon ‘Abdu’l-Bahá the necessary authority to fulfill the require-  
ments of His singular office, vested in Him the virtues of perfection in  
personal and social behavior, that humanity may have. an enduring model  
to emulate. In no annals of the past is there recorded such an arrangement  
for ensuring the realization of the purpose of the Manifestation of God.

145.14 This Covenant is the guarantee against schism; that is why those who  
occasionally attempt to create a cleavage in the community utterly fail in  
the long run. Similarly, the incessant persecution the community has been  
forced to endure for more than a century in the land of Bahá’u’lláh’s birth  
has not succeeded in destroying its identity or undermining its organic  
unity. The glorious, ultimate effect of this arrangement will be to ensure the  
establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth, as promised in the Holy  
Books of old and as proclaimed by Bahá’u’lláh Himself.

145.15 “The Day of the Promise is come,” He clearly announces, “and He Who  
is the Promised One loudly proclaimeth before all who are in heaven and all  
who are on earth: ‘Verily there is none other God but He, the Help in Peril,  
the Self-Subsisting!’ I swear by God! That which had been enshrined from  
eternity in the knowledge of God, the Knower of the seen and unseen, is  
revealed. Happy is the eye that seeth, and the face that turneth towards, the  
Countenance of God, the Lord of all being.”[[172]](#footnote-172)145-6

145.16 Indeed, the coming of Bahá’u’lláh ushered the world into a new age,  
making possible the beginning of a wholly new relationship between hu-  
manity and its Supreme Creator. The characteristics of this relationship are  
summed up in the Covenant inaugurated upon His passing a century ago.  
Its spiritual dynamic and cohesive power, its unifying principles and practi-  
cal institutional provisions are a pattern for the healing of the ills afflict-  
ing our fractured societies and defective social systems. The Covenant of  
Bahá’u’lláh gives new meaning to humanity’s checkered history; it imparts a  
fresh impulse to human striving. “Like unto the artery,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá states,  
it “beats and pulsates in the body of the world.” The pervasive influence it

exerts is at the heart of the derangement of human affairs; it drives the ac-  
celerating transition from the old order to the new World Order envisaged  
by Bahá’u’lláh. “Soon,” He writes, “will the present day Order be rolled  
up, and a new one spread out in its stead.” And He explains: “The world’s  
equilibrium hath been upset through the vibrating influence of this Most  
Great, this new World Order. Mankind’s ordered life hath been revolution-  
ized through the agency of this unique, this wondrous System, the like of  
which mortal eyes have never witnessed.”[[173]](#footnote-173)145-7

145.17 Let those seriously concerned about the state and fate of the world give  
due attention to the claims of Bahá’u’lláh. Let them realize that the storms  
battering at the foundations of society will not be stilled unless and until  
spiritual principles are actively engaged in the search for solutions to social  
problems. Let us, the followers of Bahá’u’lláh, redouble our effort in the  
exercise of our sacred duty to acquaint all humanity with the animating  
purpose of the worldwide Law of Bahá’u’lláh. Let them discover that, “Far  
from aiming at the subversion of the existing foundations of society, it seeks  
to broaden its basis, to remold its institutions in a manner consonant with  
the needs of an ever-changing world.” Let us, with patience and humility,  
respond to challenging or skeptical questions while unfolding the purposes  
of this Law. Let them know that it “can conflict with no legitimate alle-  
giances, nor can it undermine essential loyalties. Its purpose is neither to  
stifle the flame of a sane and intelligent patriotism in men’s hearts, nor to  
abolish the system of national autonomy so essential if the evils of excessive  
centralization are to be avoided.”[[174]](#footnote-174)145-8

145.18 Let us by word and example show that “it does not ignore, nor does it at-  
tempt to suppress, the diversity of ethnical origins, of climate, of history, of  
language and tradition, of thought and habit, that differentiate the peoples  
and nations of the world.” Finally, let them appreciate that “it calls for a  
wider loyalty, for a larger aspiration than any that has animated the human  
race”; that “it insists upon the subordination of national impulses and inter-  
ests to the imperative claims of a unified world”; that “it repudiates excessive  
centralization on one hand, and disclaims all attempts at uniformity on the  
other”; that “its watchword is unity in diversity.”[[175]](#footnote-175)145-9

145.19 It is especially noteworthy that coincidental with this Bahá’í Holy Year  
are the commemorations of other world-shaking occurrences which, centu-  
ries ago, commenced processes destined to attain their glorious consumma-  
tion in the Promised Day of God. The ultimate resolution of the profound  
issues to which they gave rise, and which have ripened with the passage  
of time, is discernible in the eventual realization of the world-embracing  
System of Bahá’u’lláh.

145.20 Our thoughts turn to the history of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s epic journey to the  
West and particularly to North America where, in New York, He disclosed  
to His western disciples the implications of the Covenant of Bahá’u’lláh. It  
was, in a sense, an act of renewal, prospective of the consolidation of the  
union of the Old and New Worlds into one global entity. Surnamed by  
Him “City of the Covenant,” New York resonates with the effects of that  
experience of eighty years ago.[[176]](#footnote-176)145-10 Then it was still the major entryway to  
the “Land of Promise” for millions of people seeking new horizons. Now it  
is recognized as a gathering place for the leaders of nations, an international  
venue for efforts at achieving unity in the political realm. Its very atmo-  
sphere vibrates with the hopes of a world seeking to set its affairs in order.  
Today, the hearts of the Bahá’ís throughout the earth are focused on this  
City of the Covenant wherein many thousands of their fellow-believers,  
from all parts of the planet, have assembled in the second Bahá’í World  
Congress. The presence there of such a widely varied representation of the  
human race is an affirmation of the unific power of the Covenant which the  
event was convened to celebrate.

145.21 In this season of beginnings and of the commemorations of beginnings,  
we Bahá’ís set for ourselves a new measure of effort, one more daring and  
persistent than before. May our words proclaim, and our deeds demon-  
strate, that there is only one God, only one religion, only one race. And few  
though we be, may we thus fulfill our duty towards Bahá’u’lláh, towards His  
Covenant, and, indeed, towards all humankind.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

146  
Success of the second Bahá’í World Congress

3 DECEMBER 1992

To the Bahá’ís of the World

146.1 The Bahá’í World Congress held in New York, the second major event of  
the Holy Year, ended on the Day of the Covenant in a blaze of celestial glo-  
ry. Far exceeding the brightest expectation anyone might have entertained,  
it was a triumph of the spirit in which, on all continents, the friends in their  
magnificent diversity witnessed a solidarity of the Bahá’í world community  
at a level new to their experience. Our hearts have not the capacity to con-  
tain, nor our minds the language to express, our joy and gratitude at the  
conspicuous outpouring of divine confirmations which made possible such  
a spectacular celebration and proclamation of the Covenant of Bahá’u’lláh.

146.2 The unity engendered among the 27,000 multifarious participants from  
almost 180 countries evinced a new dynamic, which signifies a stage of  
evolvement of the Faith which was not evident before. We noted with im-  
mense gratification the magnetic and transformative effects of this mani-  
festation of unity arising from a quality of personal conduct which, on  
such a vast, collective scale as was realized at the World Congress, certainly  
indicated the new stature of a people becoming seasoned in the truths and  
virtues of the Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh; and in this we recognize one of the  
enduring gifts of the Holy Year.

146.3 As for those who devoted their specialized talents and expertise towards  
meeting the programmatic and logistical challenges of this conglomerate  
occasion, and the thousands of eager volunteers who staffed the event, our  
admiration and loving appreciation know no bounds.

146.4 Vitalized by such evidences of the potency of the Covenant as the Con-  
gress displayed, may the followers of Bahá’u’lláh, wherever they reside and  
whatever their personal circumstances, derive fresh courage and demon-  
strate new determination in carrying forward the momentum so magnifi-  
cently reinforced by the astounding success of the proclamation raised in  
the City of the Covenant.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

147  
Establishment of an Office  
for the Advancement of Women

10 DECEMBER 1992

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

147.1 We take much pleasure in announcing the decision to establish an Office  
for the Advancement of Women, which, as an agency of the Bahá’í Inter-  
national Community, will promote the principles of the Faith through its  
interaction with international entities concerned with matters affecting the  
rights, status and well-being of women. It will also advise National Spiritual  
Assemblies regarding programs and projects in which the involvement of  
the community can encourage efforts towards the realization of the equality  
of men and women.

147.2 The establishment of this Office now is largely a consequence of two  
gratifying developments, namely: the great extent to which the work of  
our United Nations Office concerning women’s issues has expanded in re-  
cent years; and the rising stature for the Bahá’í community which this work  
has achieved in international circles. We are delighted that, for instance,  
the Bahá’í International Community has been serving since 1988 as the  
convener of Advocates for African Food Security, a coalition of non-gov-  
ernmental organizations, United Nations agencies and intergovernmental  
bodies formed in 1986 to raise awareness of women as producers of most  
of the domestic food in Africa; that our United Nations representative who  
specializes in women’s issues is a member of the Steering Committee which  
is planning the Non-Governmental Organizations’ Forum to be held in Bei-  
jing in 1995 at the time of the Fourth World Conference on Women; and  
that she chairs the NGO Committee on the Status of Women, New York,  
a position of great prestige in the UN/NGO community. Furthermore, the  
relations of the Bahá’í International Community with the United Nations  
Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) have fostered a mutual confi-  
dence that has encouraged UNIFEM to collaborate with the Bahá’í Interna-  
tional Community in the launching in three countries of projects aimed at  
promoting change in attitudes between men and women. All three projects  
involve the Bahá’í community at international, national and local levels.

147.3 The inauguration of the Office for the Advancement of Women, as a  
companion of the other offices of the Bahá’í International Community in  
New York, is a further significant step in the administration of the external  
affairs of the Faith and, of course, provides our community with a visible  
instrument for the practical application of one of the cardinal principles of  
the Cause of Bahá’u’lláh.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

148  
Initiation of third phase of Mount Carmel projects

17 DECEMBER 192

To the Bahá’ís of the World

148.1 DELIGHTED ANNOUNCE INITIATION PHASE THREE MOUNT CARMEL PROJECTS.

148.2 FOLLOWING PROTRACTED NEGOTIATIONS WITH HAIFA MUNICIPAL AUTHORI-  
TIES NECESSARY PERMITS FOR EXCAVATION SITE INTERNATIONAL TEACHING CEN-  
TER AND FOR COMMENCEMENT UPPER TERRACES WERE OBTAINED IN SEPTEMBER  
1992. FURTHER CONTRACTS AMOUNTING TO FIVE AND A HALF MILLION DOLLARS  
HAVE BEEN AWARDED AND EARTHWORK ON BOTH SITES HAS BEGUN ON 9 DECEM-  
BER 1992.

148.3 CONFIDENT FOLLOWERS BLESSED BEAUTY THROUGHOUT BAHÁ’Í WORLD WILL  
CONTINUE THEIR UNSTINTING SUPPORT THESE HISTORIC PROJECTS THUS ENSUR-  
ING UNINTERRUPTED PROGRESS CONSTRUCTION.

148.4 ARDENTLY SUPPLICATING SACRED THRESHOLD CONFIRMATIONS SPEEDY EXECU-  
TION MAJOR UNDERTAKING ESTABLISHMENT SEATS INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS  
FAITH ON GOD’S HOLY MOUNTAIN.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

149  
Importance of non-violence in families

24 JANUARY 1993

Dear Bahá’í Friend,

149.1 Further to our letter of 14 November 1991, the Universal House of Jus-  
tice has now completed its consideration of your letter of 21 September

1991, in which you raised a number of questions pertaining to violence and  
to the sexual abuse of women and children. We have been instructed to  
provide the following response to your questions.

149.2 As you know, the principle of the oneness of mankind is described in the  
Bahá’í Writings as the pivot round which all the Teachings of Bahá’u’lláh  
revolve. It has widespread implications which affect and remold all dimen-  
sions of human activity. It calls for a fundamental change in the manner  
in which people relate to each other, and the eradication of those age-old  
practices which deny the intrinsic human right of every individual to be  
treated with consideration and respect.

149.3 Within the family setting, the rights of all members must be respected.  
‘Abdu’l-Bahá has stated:

149.3a The integrity of the family bond must be constantly considered and  
the rights of the individual members must not be transgressed. The  
rights of the son, the father, the mother—none of them must be trans-  
gressed, none of them must be arbitrary. Just as the son has certain  
obligations to his father, the father, likewise, has certain obligations to  
his son. The mother, the sister and other members of the household  
have their certain prerogatives. All these rights and prerogatives must  
be conserved ….[[177]](#footnote-177)149-1

149.4 The use of force by the physically strong against the weak, as a means of  
imposing one’s will and fulfilling one’s desires, is a flagrant transgression of  
the Bahá’í Teachings. There can be no justification for anyone compelling  
another, through the use of force or through the threat of violence, to do  
that to which the other person is not inclined. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has written, “O  
ye lovers of God! In this, the cycle of Almighty God, violence and force,  
constraint and oppression, are one and all condemned.”[[178]](#footnote-178)149-2 Let those who,  
driven by their passions or by their inability to exercise discipline in the  
control of their anger, might be tempted to inflict violence on another hu-  
man being be mindful of the condemnation of such disgraceful behavior by  
the Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh.

149.5 Among the signs of moral downfall in the declining social order are the  
high incidence of violence within the family, the increase in degrading and  
cruel treatment of spouses and children, and the spread of sexual abuse. It  
is essential that the members of the community of the Greatest Name take  
utmost care not to be drawn into acceptance of such practices because of  
their prevalence. They must be ever mindful of their obligation to exem-  
plify a new way of life distinguished by its respect for the dignity and rights  
of all people, by its exalted moral tone, and by its freedom from oppression  
and from all forms of abuse.

149.6 Consultation has been ordained by Bahá’u’lláh as the means by which  
agreement is to be reached and a collective course of action defined. It is  
applicable to the marriage partners and within the family, and indeed, in  
all areas where believers participate in mutual decision making. It requires  
all participants to express their opinions with absolute freedom and with-  
out apprehension that they will be censured or their views belittled; these  
prerequisites for success are unattainable if the fear of violence or abuse is  
present.

149.7 A number of your questions pertain to the treatment of women, and  
are best considered in light of the principle of the equality of the sexes  
which is set forth in the Bahá’í Teachings. This principle is far more than the  
enunciation of admirable ideals; it has profound implications in all aspects  
of human relations and must be an integral element of Bahá’í domestic and  
community life. The application of this principle gives rise to changes in  
habits and practices which have prevailed for many centuries. An example  
of this is found in the response provided on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to a  
question whether the traditional practice whereby the man proposes mar-  
riage to the woman is altered by the Bahá’í Teachings to permit the woman  
to issue a marriage proposal to the man; the response is, “The Guardian  
wishes to state that there is absolute equality between the two, and that no  
distinction or preference is permitted ….” With the passage of time, during  
which Bahá’í men and women endeavor to apply more fully the principle of  
the equality of the sexes, will come a deeper understanding of the far-reach-  
ing ramifications of this vital principle. As ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has stated, “Until  
the reality of equality between man and woman is fully established and  
attained, the highest social development of mankind is not possible.”[[179]](#footnote-179)149-3

149.8 The Universal House of Justice has in recent years urged that encourage-  
ment be given to Bahá’í women and girls to participate in greater measure in  
the social, spiritual and administrative activities of their communities, and  
has appealed to Bahá’í women to arise and demonstrate the importance of  
their role in all fields of service to the Faith.

149.9 For a man to use force to impose his will on a woman is a serious trans-  
gression of the Bahá’í Teachings. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has stated that:

149.9a The world in the past has been ruled by force, and man has  
dominated over woman by reason of his more forceful and aggressive  
qualities both of body and mind. But the balance is already shifting;  
force is losing its dominance, and mental alertness, intuition, and the  
spiritual qualities of love and service, in which woman is strong, are  
gaining ascendancy.[[180]](#footnote-180)149-4

Bahá’í men have the opportunity to demonstrate to the world around them  
a new approach to the relationship between the sexes, where aggression  
and the use of force are eliminated and replaced by cooperation and con-  
sultation. The Universal House of Justice has pointed out in response to  
questions addressed to it that, in a marriage relationship, neither husband  
nor wife should ever unjustly dominate the other, and that there are times  
when the husband and the wife should defer to the wishes of the other,  
if agreement cannot be reached through consultation; each couple should  
determine exactly under what circumstances such deference is to take place.

149.10 From the Pen of Bahá’u’lláh Himself has come the following statement  
on the subject of the treatment of women:

149.10a The friends of God must be adorned with the ornament of justice,  
equity, kindness and love. As they do not allow themselves to be the  
object of cruelty and transgression, in like manner they should not  
allow such tyranny to visit the handmaidens of God. He, verily, spea-  
keth the truth and commandeth that which benefiteth His servants  
and handmaidens. He is the Protector of all in this world and the  
next.[[181]](#footnote-181)149-5

No Bahá’í husband should ever beat his wife, or subject her to any form of  
cruel treatment; to do so would be an unacceptable abuse of the marriage  
relationship and contrary to the Teachings of Bahá’u’lláh.

149.11 The lack of spiritual values in society leads to a debasement of the atti-  
tudes which should govern the relationship between the sexes, with women  
being treated as no more than objects for sexual gratification and being  
denied the respect and courtesy to which all human beings are entitled.  
Bahá’u’lláh has warned: “They that follow their lusts and corrupt inclina-  
tions, have erred and dissipated their efforts. They, indeed, are of the lost.”  
Believers might well ponder the exalted standard of conduct to which they  
are encouraged to aspire in the statement of Bahá’u’lláh concerning His  
“true follower,” that: “And if he met the fairest and most comely of women,  
he would not feel his heart seduced by the least shadow of desire for her  
beauty. Such an one, indeed, is the creation of spotless chastity. Thus in-  
structeth you the Pen of the Ancient of Days, as bidden by your Lord, the  
Almighty, the All-Bountiful.”[[182]](#footnote-182)149-6

149.12 One of the most heinous of sexual offenses is the crime of rape. When  
a believer is a victim, she is entitled to the loving aid and support of the  
members of her community, and she is free to initiate action against the  
perpetrator under the law of the land should she wish to do so. If she be-  
comes pregnant as a consequence of this assault, no pressure should be  
brought upon her by the Bahá’í institutions to marry. As to whether she  
should continue or terminate the pregnancy, it is for her to decide on the  
course of action she should follow, taking into consideration medical and  
other relevant factors, and in the light of the Bahá’í Teachings. If she gives  
birth to a child as a result of the rape, it is left to her discretion whether  
to seek financial support for the maintenance of the child from the father;  
however, his claim to any parental rights would, under Bahá’í law, be called  
into question, in view of the circumstances.

149.13 The Guardian has clarified, in letters written on his behalf, that “The  
Bahá’í Faith recognizes the value of the sex impulse,” and that “The proper  
use of the sex instinct is the natural right of every individual, and it is pre-  
cisely for this very purpose that the institution of marriage has been estab-  
lished.”[[183]](#footnote-183)149-7 In this aspect of the marital relationship, as in all others, mutual

consideration and respect should apply. If a Bahá’í woman suffers abuse or  
is subjected to rape by her husband, she has the right to turn to the Spiritual  
Assembly for assistance and counsel, or to seek legal protection. Such abuse  
would gravely jeopardize the continuation of the marriage, and could well  
lead to a condition of irreconcilable antipathy.

149.14 You have raised several questions about the treatment of children. It is  
clear from the Bahá’í Writings that a vital component of the education of  
children is the exercise of discipline. Shoghi Effendi has stated, in a letter  
written on his behalf about the education of children, that:

149.14a Discipline of some sort, whether physical, moral or intellectual is  
indeed indispensable, and no training can be said to be complete and  
fruitful if it disregards this element. The child when born is far from  
being perfect. It is not only helpless, but actually is imperfect, and  
even is naturally inclined towards evil. He should be trained, his natu-  
ral inclinations harmonized, adjusted and controlled, and if necessary  
suppressed or regulated, so as to ensure his healthy physical and moral  
development. Bahá’í parents cannot simply adopt an attitude of non-  
resistance towards their children, particularly those who are unruly  
and violent by nature. It is not even sufficient that they should pray  
on their behalf. Rather they should endeavor to inculcate, gently and  
patiently, into their youthful minds such principles of moral conduct  
and initiate them into the principles and teachings of the Cause with  
such tactful and loving care as would enable them to become “true  
sons of God” and develop into loyal and intelligent citizens of His  
Kingdom ….[[184]](#footnote-184)149-8

149.15 While the physical discipline of children is an acceptable part of their  
education and training, such actions are to be carried out “gently and pa-  
tiently” and with “loving care,” far removed from the anger and violence  
with which children are beaten and abused in some parts of the world. To  
treat children in such an abhorrent manner is a denial of their human rights,  
and a betrayal of the trust which the weak should have in the strong in a  
Bahá’í community.

149.16 It is difficult to imagine a more reprehensible perversion of human con-  
duct than the sexual abuse of children, which finds its most debased form  
in incest. At a time in the fortunes of humanity when, in the words of the  
Guardian, “The perversion of human nature, the degradation of human  
conduct, the corruption and dissolution of human institutions, reveal them-  
selves … in their worst and most revolting aspects,” and when “the voice  
of human conscience is stilled,” when “the sense of decency and shame is  
obscured,”[[185]](#footnote-185)149-9 the Bahá’í institutions must be uncompromising and vigilant  
in their commitment to the protection of the children entrusted to their  
care, and must not allow either threats or appeals to expediency to divert  
them from their duty. A parent who is aware that the marriage partner is  
subjecting a child to such sexual abuse should not remain silent, but must  
take all necessary measures, with the assistance of the Spiritual Assembly or  
civil authorities if necessary, to bring about an immediate cessation of such  
grossly immoral behavior, and to promote healing and therapy.

149.17 Bahá’u’lláh has placed great emphasis on the duties of parents toward  
their children, and He has urged children to have gratitude in their hearts  
for their parents, whose good pleasure they should strive to win as a means  
of pleasing God Himself. However, He has indicated that under certain  
circumstances, the parents could be deprived of the right of parenthood as  
a consequence of their actions. The Universal House of Justice has the right  
to legislate on this matter. It has decided for the present that all cases should  
be referred to it in which the conduct or character of a parent appears to  
render him unworthy of having such parental rights as that of giving con-  
sent to marriage. Such questions could arise, for example, when a parent  
has committed incest, or when the child was conceived as a consequence  
of rape, and also when a parent consciously fails to protect the child from  
flagrant sexual abuse.

149.18 As humanity passes through the age of transition in its evolution to a  
world civilization which will be illuminated by spiritual values and will be  
distinguished by its justice and its unity, the role of the Bahá’í community  
is clear: it must accomplish a spiritual transformation of its members, and  
must offer to the world a model of the society destined to come into being  
through the power of the Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh. Membership in the  
Bahá’í community is open to all who accept Bahá’u’lláh as the Manifesta-  
tion of God, and who thereupon embark on the process of changing their

conduct and refining their character. It is inevitable that this community  
will, at times, be subject to delinquent behavior of members whose actions  
do not conform to the standards of the Teachings. At such times, the in-  
stitutions of the Faith will not hesitate to apply Bahá’í law with justice and  
fairness in full confidence that this Divine Law is the means for the true  
happiness of all concerned.

149.19 However, it should be recognized that the ultimate solution to the prob-  
lems of humanity lies not in penalties and punishments, but rather in spiri-  
tual education and illumination. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has written:

149.19a It is incumbent upon human society to expend all its forces on the  
education of the people, and to copiously water men’s hearts with the  
sacred streams that pour down from the Realm of the All-Merciful,  
and to teach them the manners of Heaven and spiritual ways of life,  
until every member of the community of man will be schooled, re-  
fined, and exalted to such a degree of perfection that the very commit-  
ting of a shameful act will seem in itself the direst infliction and most  
agonizing of punishments, and man will fly in terror and seek refuge  
in his God from the very idea of crime, as something far harsher and  
more grievous than the punishment assigned to it.

It is toward this goal that the community of the Greatest Name is striving,  
aided and reinforced by the limitless power of the Holy Spirit.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

150  
Publication of English translation  
of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas

5 MARCH 1993

To the Bahá’ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

150.1 The Kitáb-i-Aqdas—the Book described in such exalted terms by the  
Guardian of the Cause of God as “that priceless treasury enshrining for all  
time the brightest emanations of the mind of Bahá’u’lláh, the Charter of  
His World Order, the chief repository of His laws, the Harbinger of His

Covenant, the Pivotal Work containing some of His noblest exhortations,  
weightiest pronouncements, and portentous prophecies, and revealed dur-  
ing the full tide of His tribulations, at a time when the rulers of the earth  
had definitely forsaken Him”[[186]](#footnote-186)150-1—this Most Holy Book, we have the honor  
to announce, will, in a copiously annotated English translation, be released  
to the Community of Bahá at Naw-Rúz.

150.2 Bahá’u’lláh’s own designations of the Book—the “Unerring Balance,”  
the “Straight Path,” the “quickener of mankind,” the “source of true felic-  
ity”—indicate its phenomenal importance, an importance which staggers  
the mind when viewed in light of the realization that this Book is, in the  
words of Shoghi Effendi, the “principal repository of that Law which the  
Prophet Isaiah had anticipated, and which the writer of the Apocalypse had  
described as the ‘new heaven’ and the ‘new earth,’ as ‘the Tabernacle of God,’  
as the ‘Holy City,’ as the ‘Bride,’ the ‘New Jerusalem coming down from  
God.’”[[187]](#footnote-187)150-2 Such metaphors of hope have been recited from sacred scriptures  
down the ages, have fired the imagination and excited the expectations of  
unnumbered generations, and now, at long last, in this new Dispensation,  
have been given tangible form by the Promised One of All Ages in this  
Mother Book of His Revelation.

150.3 The publication of the Book in English satisfies a major goal of the Six Year  
Plan. But even beyond this, it initiates the fulfillment of a prospect voiced by  
‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Who anticipated its publication in various languages; it real-  
izes an intention cherished by Shoghi Effendi, who had himself translated  
substantial portions of it into English which he diffused through his letters  
and in his compilations of Bahá’u’lláh’s Writings, and who had also, “as an es-  
sential prelude to the eventual translation and publication of its entire text,”  
initiated steps in 1955 for the preparation of a Synopsis and Codification of  
the Laws of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas. This was a task on which he made considerable  
progress and which was completed by the Universal House of Justice in 1973,  
on the hundredth anniversary of the revelation of the Book which occurred,  
as Shoghi Effendi confirmed, “soon after Bahá’u’lláh had been transferred to  
the house of ‘Údí Khammár (circa 1873), at a time when He was still encom-  
passed by the tribulations that had afflicted Him, through the acts committed  
by His enemies and the professed adherents of His Faith.”[[188]](#footnote-188)150-3

150.4 The accessibility to Western readers of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas in full authorized  
text, for the first time in one of their major languages, enormously extends the  
sphere of its influence, opening wider the door to a vast process of individ-  
ual and community development which must certainly exert an increasingly  
powerful, transformative effect on peoples and nations as the Book is trans-  
lated further into other languages. That the English edition of this highly  
treasured and incalculably potent work should appear now amid the welter  
of a world at odds with itself is a demonstration of confidence in the ultimate  
emergence of a peaceful, civilized, global society. That it should be published  
during the period of the centenary of both the Ascension of its divine Author  
and the inauguration of His Covenant amplifies the striking impact, already  
felt, of the Holy Year which marks so important an anniversary.

150.5 A Book of such indescribable holiness is itself a symbol of the incom-  
parable greatness of the Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh and is, indeed, a potent  
reminder of the high respect which is due to all that has flowed from His  
prodigious, truth-bearing pen. May the friends of God ever be mindful of  
its exalted rank among the sacred texts of the Faith; treasure it as the bread  
of life; regard possession of it as a sacred honor, as a priceless legacy from the  
Pen of the Most High, as a source of God’s greatest bounty to His creatures;  
place their whole trust in its provisions; recite its verses; study its contents;  
adhere to its exhortations; and thus transform their lives in accordance with  
the divine standard.

150.6 Let us rejoice. Let us be filled with the felicitous spirit evoked in the Blessed  
Beauty’s own announcement of the Mother Book of His Dispensation when  
He said: “We announce unto everyone the joyful tidings concerning that  
which We have revealed in Our Most Holy Book—a Book from above whose  
horizon the day-star of My commandments shineth upon every observer and  
every observed one.” May we be such upholders of its laws and principles as  
to deserve His gloriously promised benediction: “Blessed those who peruse it.  
Blessed those who apprehend it. Blessed those who meditate upon it. Blessed  
those who ponder its meaning. So vast is its range that it hath encompassed all  
men ere their recognition of it. Ere long will its sovereign power, its pervasive  
influence and the greatness of its might be manifested on earth. Verily, thy  
God is the All-Knowing, the All-Informed.”[[189]](#footnote-189)150-4

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

1993–1996

The Three Year Plan

151  
Riḍván Message 1993

RIḌVÁN 150

To the Bahá’ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

151.1 We have come to the King of Festivals in the undiminished glow of  
the marvelous benedictions of the Holy Year through which we have just  
passed, confirmed, renewed and energized in our sacred pursuits. For it was  
a time when the Abhá Beauty shed upon His worldwide community the  
radiance of His grace in such effulgence as to invest with astonishing success  
the efforts of His followers to observe so significant a double anniversary as  
the centenary of His Ascension and of the inauguration of His Covenant.  
It was the memorial pause that yielded a proclamation of the Most Great  
Name that resounded throughout the earth as never before; but what was so  
clearly an external phenomenon was quite markedly a reflection of an inner  
attainment to a deeper understanding of our relation to Bahá’u’lláh than  
hitherto obtained. The greater appreciation in ourselves of the universality  
of the community, of its embodiment of the first and overarching principle  
of His Faith, has left a new and compelling impression upon our hearts; the  
effects of that awareness were strikingly demonstrated at the commemora-  
tion in the Holy Land last May and more broadly at the World Congress  
last November, as if to confirm our assurance in these desperately troubled  
times that the world of humanity is moving inexorably towards its as-yet  
elusive destiny of unity and peace. Indeed, during the Holy Year, we were  
transported on the wings of the spirit to a summit from which we have  
seen the fast-approaching glory of the Lord’s immemorial promise that all  
humankind will one day be united.

151.2 The thrilling details of the happenings throughout the year are too nu-  
merous to describe here, for the workings of the Holy Spirit were universally  
felt, imbuing the activities of the friends with a mysterious force. Let it  
suffice, then, to recall such highlights as the gathering last May of the larg-  
est number of Bahá’ís to participate in an event in the Holy Land; the  
circumambulation of the Shrine of Bahá’u’lláh by the representatives of  
virtually every nation; the presence of the majority of the living Knights  
of Bahá’u’lláh at the time of the depositing of the Roll of Honor at the en-  
trance door of the Most Holy Shrine; the unprecedented size of the World

Congress and the vast variety of its participants, including a huge body of  
youth who engaged in their own auxiliary program; the procession of the  
representatives of the races and nations of the world on that spectacular  
occasion; the satellite broadcast which linked the Congress and the World  
Center with all the continents. These were of a rare category of experience,  
and they have immortalized the fame of the centennial commemorations.

151.3 The innumerable, imaginative efforts undertaken by the friends around  
the world, from remote villages to great cities, in observance of these im-  
portant anniversaries illustrated afresh the profound degree to which the  
Faith of Bahá’u’lláh has been consolidated, and they generated the teaching  
work in many areas, with unusual and surprising results. The unprecedent-  
ed publicity accorded the purpose and activities of the Holy Year through  
the mass media in large and small countries, the notice given by legislative  
bodies and public officials to the centennial, the gestures of recognition  
and appreciation of the Faith by governmental agencies, the involvement  
of representatives of the Bahá’í International Community in major global  
events, including the United Nations Conference on Environment and  
Development held in Rio de Janeiro last June, in connection with which a  
public monument bearing an inscription from the writings of Bahá’u’lláh  
and a large imprint of the Greatest Name was dedicated—such develop-  
ments gave clear indications that the profile of the community has been  
raised in the public eye.

151.4 Apart from all these outstanding events and developments, but of even  
greater magnitude because of its far-reaching implications for the whole hu-  
man race, was the release at Naw-Rúz of the annotated English translation  
of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, the Most Holy Book. We draw a stage closer, then, to  
a time envisaged by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá: “When the laws of the Most Holy Book  
are enforced,” the Master said, “… universal peace will raise its tent in the  
center of the earth, and the blessed Tree of Life will grow and spread to such  
an extent that it will overshadow the East and West.”[[190]](#footnote-190)151-1

151.5 The centennial year was also a period in which the situation in the world  
at large became more confused and paradoxical: there were simultaneous  
signs of order and chaos, promise and frustration. Amid the convolutions  
of the current global state of affairs, but with such feelings of wonder and  
joy, courage and faith as the Holy Year has induced in our hearts, we, at this

Riḍván, in the one hundred and fiftieth year of our Faith, are embarked  
upon a Three Year Plan. Its brevity is compelled by the swiftly changing  
tides of the times. But the Plan’s primary purpose is indispensable to the fu-  
ture of the Cause and of humankind. It is the next stage in the unfoldment  
of the divine charter of teaching penned by the Center of the Covenant.  
The Plan will be a measure of our determination to respond to the immense  
opportunities at this critical moment in the social evolution of the planet.  
Through resolute pursuit of its stated objectives and full realization of its  
goals, as suited to the circumstances of each national community, the way  
will be made clear for a fit projection of the role of the Faith in relation to  
the inevitable challenges facing all humanity towards the end of the fast-  
fleeting, fate-laden twentieth century.

151.6 A massive expansion of the Bahá’í community must be achieved far be-  
yond all past records. The task of spreading the Message to the generality  
of mankind in villages, towns and cities must be rapidly extended. The  
need for this is critical, for without it the laboriously erected agencies of the  
Administrative Order will not be provided the scope to be able to develop  
and adequately demonstrate their inherent capacity to minister to the crying  
needs of humanity in its hour of deepening despair. In this regard the mu-  
tuality of teaching and administration must be fully understood and widely  
emphasized, for each reinforces the other. The problems of society which  
affect our community and those problems which naturally arise from within  
the community itself, whether social, spiritual, economic or administrative,  
will be solved as our numbers and resources multiply, and as at all levels  
of the community the friends develop the ability, willingness, courage and  
determination to obey the laws, apply the principles and administer the  
affairs of the Faith in accordance with divine precepts.

151.7 The new Plan revolves around a triple theme: enhancing the vitality of  
the faith of individual believers, greatly developing the human resources  
of the Cause, and fostering the proper functioning of local and national  
Bahá’í institutions. This is to lend focus to requisites of success as the Plan’s  
manifold goals are pursued in these turbulent times.

151.8 Against the conspicuous signs of moral decadence which daily is cor-  
roding the foundations of civilized life, these graphic words of Bahá’u’lláh  
assume an acute urgency: “The vitality of men’s belief in God is dying out  
in every land; nothing short of His wholesome medicine can ever restore  
it. The corrosion of ungodliness is eating into the vitals of human society;  
what else but the Elixir of His potent Revelation can cleanse and revive

it?”[[191]](#footnote-191)151-2 Such words have particular implications for the actions of anyone  
who has recognized the Lord of the Age. A crucial consequence of this rec-  
ognition is a belief that impels acceptance of His commandments. Depth  
of belief is assured by the inner transformation, that salutary acquisition  
of spiritual and moral character, which is the outcome of obedience to the  
divine laws and principles. Towards this end the release of the annotated  
Kitáb-i-Aqdas in English, and its anticipated early publication in other ma-  
jor languages, provide a mighty infusion of divine guidance for realizing the  
vitality of faith which is essential to the spiritual well-being and happiness  
of individuals and the strengthening of the fabric of the community. No less  
essential to nourishing this vitality is the cultivation of a sense of spiritual-  
ity, that mystic feeling which unites the individual with God and is achieved  
through meditation and prayer.

151.9 Training of the friends and their striving, through serious individual  
study, to acquire knowledge of the Faith, to apply its principles and admin-  
ister its affairs, are indispensable to developing the human resources neces-  
sary to the progress of the Cause. But knowledge alone is not adequate; it is  
vital that training be given in a manner that inspires love and devotion, fos-  
ters firmness in the Covenant, prompts the individual to active participation  
in the work of the Cause and to taking sound initiatives in the promotion  
of its interests. Special efforts to attract people of capacity to the Faith will  
also go far towards providing the human resources so greatly needed at this  
time. Moreover, these endeavors will stimulate and strengthen the ability of  
Spiritual Assemblies to meet their weighty responsibilities.

151.10 The proper functioning of these institutions depends largely on the ef-  
forts of their members to familiarize themselves with their duties and to  
adhere scrupulously to principle in their personal behavior and in the con-  
duct of their official responsibilities. Of relevant importance, too, are their  
resolve to remove all traces of estrangement and sectarian tendencies from  
their midst, their ability to win the affection and support of the friends  
under their care and to involve as many individuals as possible in the work  
of the Cause. By their constantly aiming at improving their performance,  
the communities they guide will reflect a pattern of life that will be a credit  
to the Faith and will, as a welcome consequence, rekindle hope among the  
increasingly disillusioned members of society.

151.11 As National Spiritual Assemblies, with the ready support of the Conti-  
nental Counselors, chart the course to be followed in this brief span, the  
World Center will attend to coordinating widely diverse activities through-  
out the planet, giving further direction to the external affairs of the Faith as  
the Bahá’í International Community is drawn more deeply into dealing with  
world issues. It will do this while at the same time pursuing with deliberate  
speed the gigantic building projects on God’s Holy Mountain, which con-  
stitute part of a process clearly perceived by Shoghi Effendi as synchronizing  
with two no less significant developments: the establishment of the Lesser  
Peace and the evolution of Bahá’í national and local institutions. By the end  
of the Plan all remaining construction phases of the Mount Carmel projects  
will have been set in motion; the structural framework of the International  
Teaching Center, the Center for the Study of the Texts and the Extension  
to the International Archives Building will have been raised up; and seven  
terraces below the Shrine of the Báb will have been completed.

151.12 The dramatic expansion of the work of the Cause in recent years and the  
developments expected during this new Plan demand material resources  
which have not been adequate for some time, even though substantial in-  
creases have been made in the contributions to Bahá’í Funds. The economic  
crises so widely reported seem destined to grow even worse, but neither  
the economic nor other pressing problems confronting humanity will ul-  
timately be resolved unless the Cause of Bahá’u’lláh is given due regard by  
nations and peoples and unless it receives the adequate material support of  
its avowed adherents. May the friends everywhere consider, together with  
their Bahá’í institutions and individually, undaunted by the uncertainties,  
the perils and the financial stringency afflicting nations, what must now be  
done by each and all to meet this inescapable, sacred responsibility resting  
upon them.

151.13 Our appeal for immediate, redoubled and sustained action on all aspects  
of the Plan is addressed primarily to the individual believer of every local-  
ity, who possesses within himself or herself the measures of initiative that  
ensure the success of any global Bahá’í enterprise, and “on whom, in the  
last resort,” as our beloved Guardian plainly stated, “depends the fate of  
the entire community.”[[192]](#footnote-192)151-3 The goals of the Three Year Plan will not be  
easily won, but they must be magnificently achieved, whatever the sacrifice.  
There should therefore be no hesitation or delay on the part of individuals

or Spiritual Assemblies in attending to them, lest the problems of mankind  
pile up unchecked, or the rise of internal crises slows us down. Let it ever be  
borne in mind that we earn our victories through test and trial; we turn crisis  
to the advantage of progress by seizing the opportunity it provides to dem-  
onstrate the viability and winning power of our principles. In the onward  
surge of the Cause of God, crisis and victory have always alternated and  
have ever proven to be the staple of progress. As we savor the triumphs of  
the Holy Year, let us not forget the reality of this recurrent experience. Let us  
also remember that our blessings are equal to our challenges, as repeatedly  
shown by our glorious history.

151.14 Beloved friends: Do not be dismayed or deterred. Take courage in the  
security of God’s law and ordinances. These are the darkest hours before the  
break of day. Peace, as promised, will come at night’s end. Press on to meet  
the dawn.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

152  
Election of the Universal House of Justice—  
Riḍván 1993

30 APRIL 1993

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

152.1 ANNOUNCE NEWLY ELECTED MEMBERS UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE ‘ALÍ NAKHJA-  
VÁNÍ, GLENFORD MITCHELL, ADIB TAHERZADEH, IAN SEMPLE, PETER KHAN, HUSH-  
MAND FATHEAZAM, HOOPER DUNBAR, FARZAM ARBAB, DOUGLAS MARTIN.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

153  
Applicability of the laws of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas

9 MAY 1993

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

153.1 In the introduction to the English translation of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas it is  
stated that its publication does not increase the number of laws which are

binding on Bahá’ís. As an assistance to those friends who may not have a  
clear understanding of the matter, the Universal House of Justice has in-  
structed us to send you the attached copy of a letter which it wrote to the  
National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of Iceland, on 9 June 1974, to  
identify those laws which were not then universally applicable.[[193]](#footnote-193)153-1 The law  
of Ḥuqúqu’lláh was applied universally at Riḍván 1992. In due course, the  
Universal House of Justice will announce further applications of the laws  
when the friends have had the opportunity of familiarizing themselves with  
the Most Holy Book and when it is propitious to do so.

153.2 National Spiritual Assemblies are asked to share this letter and its enclo-  
sure with the friends under their jurisdiction.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

154  
Appointment of International Teaching Center  
members

13 MAY 1993

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

154.1 WITH JOYFUL HEARTS WE ANNOUNCE APPOINTMENT COUNSELOR MEMBERS IN-  
TERNATIONAL TEACHING CENTER FOR FIVE-YEAR TERM BEGINNING 23 MAY 1993:  
MR. KISER BARNES, MR. HARTMUT GROSSMANN, MRS. LAURETTA KING, MRS. JOAN  
LINCOLN, MR. SHAPOOR MONADJEM, MR. DONALD ROGERS, MR. FRED SCHECH-  
TER, MRS. KIMIKO SCHWERIN, MRS. JOY STEVENSON. PROFOUNDLY GRATEFUL MR.  
MAS‘ÚD KHAMSÍ AND MR. PETER VUYIYA FOR ILLUSTRIOUS RECORD YEARS DEVOT-  
ED LABORS IN DEVELOPMENT WORLDWIDE OPERATION THIS VITAL INSTITUTION.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

155  
Confiscation of Bahá’í properties in Iran

20 MAY 1993

To selected National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

155.1 This is in reference to our circular letter dated 30 September 1992 con-  
cerning the confiscation of Bahá’í properties in various cities of Iran. A  
copy of that letter is being forwarded herewith to all National Spiritual  
Assemblies marked with an asterisk, as they have not previously received it.

155.2 We are instructed to draw your attention to the fact that the confiscations  
of the properties of the Bahá’ís in Yazd are of a different nature than those  
taking place elsewhere in the country. In Yazd, they are based on a religious  
edict issued by the late Áyatu’lláh Ṣadúqí, former Imam of Yazd. This edict  
is now being invoked by the authorities in Yazd to justify their decision that  
no Bahá’í in that city may possess any property or engage in any transac-  
tions involving properties.

155.3 The confiscation of properties and the prohibition of Bahá’ís to be en-  
gaged in any property transactions clearly constitute religious persecution,  
as the individuals concerned are not being punished for any wrongdoing,  
but are deprived of their properties on the basis of belonging to a particular  
religious community.

155.4 In the meantime, the Bahá’ís of Saysán and Ílkhchí have reported con-  
fiscations of their properties on the grounds that they are members of the  
Bahá’í community ….

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

156  
Appointment of four new Continental Counselors

16 JUNE 1993

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

156.1 JOYFULLY ANNOUNCE APPOINTMENT FOLLOWING CONTINENTAL COUNSELORS TO  
FILL VACANCIES CREATED BY RECENT APPOINTMENTS TO INTERNATIONAL TEACH-

ING CENTER: IN AFRICA KOBINA FYNN, IN THE AMERICAS STEPHEN BIRKLAND AND  
FARHAD SHAYANI, IN ASIA NOBUKO IWAKURA.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

157  
Consultations between the Universal House of Justice  
and the International Teaching Center

24 JUNE 1993

To the Bahá’ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

157.1 Following fast upon the inspiring events of the seventh International  
Bahá’í Convention and the subsequent Counselors’ Conference, the open-  
ing weeks of the Three Year Plan have been marked with yet another highly  
significant event. On the morning of Saturday 5 June, the Hands of the  
Cause of God ‘Alí Akbar Furútan and ‘Alí-Muḥammad Varqá, with all nine  
Counselor members of the International Teaching Center, joined the mem-  
bers of the Universal House of Justice in Bahjí and proceeded to the Shrine  
of Bahá’u’lláh for prayer as the initial act of the newly appointed Teaching  
Center. All then held a first meeting in the room used by Shoghi Effendi  
in the Mansion of Bahjí, recalling the many historic associations of that  
blessed spot.

157.2 Joint consultations continued on the afternoon of that same day in the  
Council Chamber of the Universal House of Justice, exploring the tasks now  
facing the International Teaching Center as the world advances through the  
climacteric years at the close of the twentieth century.

157.3 During the five years since May 1988, when far-reaching decisions were  
made on the functioning of the International Teaching Center and, for the  
first time, the number of its Counselor members was raised to nine, that  
institution has abundantly demonstrated its capacity and eagerness to as-  
sume the wide range of responsibilities conferred upon it.

157.4 The clarification of various approaches to the teaching work which the  
Teaching Center has issued, its indication of potentially fruitful methods  
and fields of endeavor, and the collaboration of the Counselors with the  
National Spiritual Assemblies in the formulation of their goals for the Three  
Year Plan have contributed immeasurably to the deepening of the under-

standing of the individual believers; the teaching, enrollment and inspirit-  
ing of children and youth; the consolidation of growing communities; the  
strengthening of their institutions; and unflagging pursuit of the expansion  
of the Cause.

157.5 The Teaching Center’s former duties relating to the formulation of plans  
for our approval have undergone a change as a result of the devolution of  
planning upon National Spiritual Assemblies which was a mark of the open-  
ing of the Fourth Epoch of the Formative Age. We have been most favorably  
impressed by the guidance it has given to the Continental Counselors to  
promote consultation at the local and national levels, among institutions  
and believers, leading to the initiation and sustaining of processes of growth  
in the Bahá’í community, and we look forward to the perpetuation and  
expansion of this collaboration.

157.6 The responsibility of the Continental Boards of Counselors to protect  
the Faith, under the guidance of the International Teaching Center, will  
undoubtedly gain greater importance in the years ahead. They will encour-  
age and assist the National and Local Spiritual Assemblies, not only to deal  
with questions on the Faith raised by interested non-Bahá’ís, but also to  
counter attacks launched by external opponents.

157.7 Study of the Faith itself is a vital element in the soundness of the growth  
of Bahá’í communities, their consolidation and their protection. This  
should include systematic study of the Writings of the Faith, its history, its  
relationship to various systems of thought, and the application of its Teach-  
ings to the spiritual and material life of society. The International Teaching  
Center will contribute significantly to the advancement of such study.

157.8 In the production and dissemination of Bahá’í literature, which is funda-  
mental to both the expansion and consolidation of the Cause, the support  
given by the Counselors to National Assemblies through the Literature Sub-  
vention Fund and especially the Teaching Center’s promotion of the core  
literature concept have resulted in an admirable surge forward, and we are  
confident that this effort will be augmented in the years ahead.

157.9 The flow of pioneers and traveling teachers has been notably increased  
through the development of the Continental Pioneer Committees under  
the aegis of the International Teaching Center, as well as by the actions of  
the Continental Counselors and National Assemblies. It has become appar-  
ent that, with the growth of the Bahá’í world and the increased mobility of  
the friends, new methods are required for advising and routing pioneers.  
The pioneering call for the Three Year Plan therefore assumes a character

different from that to which the friends have been accustomed and will, we  
confidently expect, permit a far more fruitful use of the energies and devo-  
tion of the friends.

157.10 All the above matters were among the subjects of consultation between  
the Universal House of Justice and the International Teaching Center at  
their meetings on 5 June, and during a subsequent meeting towards the  
close of the intensive consultations carried on by the Teaching Center itself.  
The five members who are still resident abroad are now preparing to move  
to the Holy Land.

157.11 It is our fervent prayer at the Sacred Threshold that these developments  
will impart a yet greater impetus to the activities of the individual believers  
and their institutions throughout the world and accelerate the work already  
so eagerly launched for the achievement of the Three Year Plan.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

158  
Visit to the Bahá’í World Center of Deputy Prime  
Minister of Papua New Guinea

25 JUNE 1993

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

158.1 DELIGHTED INFORM FRIENDS VISIT BAHÁ’Í WORLD CENTER 12 JUNE 1993 SIR JU-  
LIUS CHAN, DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER PAPUA NEW GUINEA, ACCOMPANIED BY LADY  
CHAN DURING COURSE OFFICIAL VISIT ISRAEL. HIGHLY SIGNIFICANT THAT UNIVER-  
SAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE MET WITH SIR JULIUS CHAN IN RESPONSE HIS REQUEST  
FOR CONSULTATION ON FUTURE ROLE PAPUA NEW GUINEA AS EMERGING NATION  
AND ON DESTINY PACIFIC REGION. MEETING HELD COUNCIL CHAMBER FOCUSSED  
POTENTIAL PACIFIC NATIONS SET EXAMPLE UNITY, MUTUAL COOPERATION. SIR  
JULIUS EXPRESSED APPRECIATION ACHIEVEMENTS BAHÁ’Í COMMUNITY AND ADMI-  
RATION BAHÁ’Í APPROACH PERSONAL, SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION. MEETING WITH  
SIR JULIUS CHAN, FOLLOWING EARLIER MEETINGS PRIME MINISTER COOK ISLANDS  
AND PRESIDENT MARSHALL ISLANDS, FURTHER EVIDENCE REMARKABLE RESPONSE  
PACIFIC LEADERS PRINCIPLES BAHÁ’Í FAITH, HARBINGER FUTURE APPLICATION BY  
WORLD STATESMEN PRESCRIPTION DIVINE PHYSICIAN HEALING MANIFOLD ILLS  
HUMANITY.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

159  
Four categories of pioneers for the Three Year Plan

27 JUNE 1993

To the Bahá’ís of the World

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

159.1 Integral to the success and development of the Cause of God is the  
continual deployment of pioneers and traveling teachers throughout the  
world. During the course of the Six Year Plan more than 4,000 Bahá’ís left  
their homes to serve as either short-term or long-term pioneers in other  
lands. This is an indication of the increased mobility that the modern world  
provides, and of the believers’ eagerness to advance the Cause wherever the  
need is greatest. It suggests that new methods must be adopted to make the  
best use of this massive flow of Bahá’ís.

159.2 We have therefore decided, in consultation with the International Teach-  
ing Center, to adopt a new pattern for the pioneer call for the Three Year  
Plan.

159.3 The essence of this method is that friends may arise from anywhere in  
the world to pioneer to any other part of the world. There are very few  
places where long-term and short-term pioneers and traveling teachers are  
not needed. But the needs vary in nature, intensity and urgency. To help  
each volunteer to choose his or her goal, a list of four categories has been  
prepared to indicate the particular needs. These four categories comprise  
countries and territories where:

159.3a 1. there are now especially fertile opportunities for the rapid spread of  
the Faith that must be urgently met;

159.3b 2. the Faith is established, but pioneers are needed to stimulate the  
process of growth and to assist in the opening of new centers;

159.3c 3. the process of expansion and consolidation has a significant mo-  
mentum, but there is a need for pioneers who can undertake specific  
tasks, such as arousing the interest of prominent people, strengthen-  
ing the communities in certain areas, or assisting with projects of  
social and economic development;

159.3d 4. pioneers are greatly needed, but entry is difficult because of restric-  
tions on Bahá’í activity, lack of security, or other circumstances.  
These conditions present a need for believers who will resourcefully  
seek out opportunities for pioneering.

159.4 The list is attached to this letter for the information of every Bahá’í.  
Additional detailed information about many of the countries is being sup-  
plied to National Spiritual Assemblies and also to the Continental Boards of  
Counselors and Continental Pioneer Committees. Both the list and detailed  
information will be periodically updated as the outflow of pioneers and  
traveling teachers begins to meet current needs. Notification of areas of  
especially urgent concern will also be supplied from time to time.

159.5 Many National Assemblies have offered, among their international col-  
laboration goals, to raise up a given number of pioneers and traveling teach-  
ers during the Three Year Plan. But, as indicated above, even from those  
countries which have specified no such goal, the friends should feel free to  
offer their services.

159.6 Any Bahá’í who has the urge to serve as a traveling teacher, or as a pioneer  
for a short or long term, should immediately contact his (or her) National  
Spiritual Assembly or appropriate national committee to obtain advice and  
additional information. He can also consult a Counselor or Auxiliary Board  
member, and write to a Continental Pioneer Committee. Through prayer  
and consultation, and after considering his own particular experience, in-  
clinations and possibilities, he can choose his goal area and, confidently  
relying on the confirming power of Bahá’u’lláh, set out to serve the Cause  
of his Lord in distant lands.

159.7 There are still vast areas of the world where no Bahá’ís have set foot.  
There are millions desperately thirsting for this Water of Life. There are  
countries where believers are laboring day and night to foster the growth of  
the tree of the Cause, and are in urgent need of reinforcements. It is our  
fervent prayer at the Sacred Threshold that stalwart, self-sacrificing friends  
will arise and that a wave of pioneers and traveling teachers will surge forth  
to raise the banner of the Cause and reinforce the cohorts of God in every  
land.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

160  
Securing building contractors  
for Mount Carmel projects

27 JUNE 1993

To the followers of Bahá’u’lláh throughout the world

160.1 REJOICE ANNOUNCE MAJOR ADVANCE MOUNT CARMEL PROJECTS BY ISSUANCE TEN-  
DER DOCUMENTS TO BUILDING CONTRACTORS FOR CONSTRUCTION CENTER FOR  
THE STUDY OF THE TEXTS. DEVELOPMENT TERRACES ALSO PROCEEDING APACE.  
SACRIFICIAL EFFORT NOW NEEDED FRIENDS ALL LANDS CONTRIBUTION SEVENTY-  
FOUR MILLION DOLLARS ARC PROJECTS FUND DURING THREE YEAR PLAN ENSURE  
UNINTERRUPTED PROGRESS RAPIDLY ACCELERATING CONSTRUCTION WORK.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

161  
Pioneer needs for the Three Year Plan

30 JUNE 1993

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

161.1 The pioneer call raised by the Universal House of Justice on 27 June  
1993 apprised the Bahá’í world of the new pattern that has been adopted  
for the Three Year Plan to facilitate the swift and effective movement of  
international pioneers and traveling teachers. To assist in this process, the  
attached document, consisting of brief descriptions of the pioneer needs  
in various countries and territories, has been prepared by the International  
Teaching Center based on information received from National Spiritual As-  
semblies and Continental Counselors. For ease of reference, the list of the  
four categories of countries and territories included in the pioneer call is  
also attached.

161.2 As you will see, the document is not a complete listing of pioneer needs.  
Only those countries and territories for which some information was avail-  
able at the time of preparation are included. However, the document will be  
periodically updated and National Spiritual Assemblies are urged to send a  
statement of their needs to the Bahá’í World Center. It is also hoped that,

as conditions change and needs are met, the World Center will be notified  
accordingly.

161.3 It is anticipated that many as yet unforeseen opportunities for the rapid  
expansion of the Faith will present themselves during the coming three  
years. Therefore, in addition to the periodic updating of the attached docu-  
ment, there may be occasions when attention will be drawn to specific ur-  
gent needs for pioneers and traveling teachers.

161.4 As the friends respond to the pioneer call, the National Spiritual As-  
semblies and their appropriate agencies will, of course, exert their utmost  
to offer the administrative support to facilitate their move. However, the  
approach adopted for the Three Year Plan should free the institutions from  
the pressure of filling specific goals and allow them to focus their energies  
on the spiritual preparation of the friends for this vital field of service.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

**Countries and territories**

**in need of pioneers and traveling teachers**

**June 1993**

**CATEGORY 1**

161.5 The following are countries and territories where there are now especially  
fertile opportunities for the rapid spread of the Faith that must be urgently  
met. For each country or territory without its own National Spiritual As-  
sembly, the name of the responsible or assisting National Assembly, or Re-  
gional Spiritual Assembly under whose jurisdiction it falls, is in parentheses.

**Africa**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Benin | Equatorial Guinea |
| Congo Republic | Guinea |
| Djibouti (Ethiopia) | Guinea-Bissau |

**Americas**

|  |
| --- |
| Nicaragua |

**Asia**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Asiatic Russia, including Sakhalin (Russia, Georgia and Armenia | Kirgyzstan |
| Azerbaijan | Mongolia (Singapore) |
| Cambodia (Thailand) | Turkmenistan (Central Asia) |
| Georgia (Russia, Georgia and Armenia) | Uzbekistan (Central Asia |
| Kazakhstan (Central Asia) |  |

**Europe**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Albania | Poland |
| Belarus (Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova) | Russia (Russia, Georgia and Armenia) |
| Bulgaria | Serbia and Montenegro (Austria) |
| Croatia (Austria) | Slovak Republic (Czech and Slovak Republics) |
| Czech Republic (Czech & Slovak Republics) | Slovenia (Austria) |
| Hungary | Ukraine (Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova) |
| Macedonia (Austria) | Moldova (Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova) |

**CATEGORY 2**

161.6 The following are countries and territories where the Faith is established,  
but pioneers are needed to stimulate the process of growth and to assist in  
the opening of new centers. For each country or territory without its own  
National Spiritual Assembly, the name of the responsible or assisting Na-  
tional Assembly, or Regional Spiritual Assembly under whose jurisdiction it  
falls, is in parentheses.

**Africa**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Bophuthatswana | Namibia |
| Botswana | Niger |
| Burkina | Réunion |
| Burundi | Rwanda |
| Cape Verde | Sao Tome and Principe (Nigeria) |
| Central African Republic | Senegal |
| Ciskei | Seychelles |
| Gabon | Sierra Leone |
| Gambia | St. Helena (South Africa) |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Lesotho | Tanzania |
| Madagascar | Transkei |
| Malawi | Uganda |
| Mali | Venda (South Africa) |

**Americas**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Argentina | Guadeloupe |
| Aruba, Bonaire, and Curaçao (Venezuela) | Guatemala |
| Bahamas | Martinique |
| Bermuda | Mexico |
| Chile | Paraguay |
| Dominica | Puerto Rico |
| East Leeward Islands | St. Lucia |
| Falkland Islands (United States) | St. Vincent and the Grenadines |
| French Guiana | Virgin Islands |
| Greenland | West Leeward Islands |
| Grenada |  |

**Asia**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Andaman and Nicobar Islands | Sri Lanka |
| Korea, South | Thailand |

**Australasia**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Cook Islands | New Caledonia and the Loyalty Islands |
| Eastern Caroline Islands | Solomon Islands |
| Fiji Islands | Tonga |
| Kiribati | Tuvalu |
| Mariana Islands | Vanuatu |
| Marshall Islands | Western Caroline Islands |
| Nauru (Kiribati) |  |

**Europe**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Andorra (Spain) | Gibraltar (United Kingdom) |
| Azores (Portugal) | Greece |
| Belgium | Latvia (Baltic States) |
| Channel Islands (United Kingdom) | Liechtenstein (Switzerland) |
| Corsica (France) | Lithuania (Baltic States) |
| Cyprus | Madeira (Portugal) |
| Denmark | Malta (Italy) |
| Elba (Italy) | Monaco (France) |
| Estonia (Baltic States) | Portugal |
| Faroe Islands (Iceland) | Sardinia (Italy) |
| Finland | Spitsbergen (Norway) |

**CATEGORY 3**

161.7 The following are countries and territories where the process of expansion  
and consolidation has a significant momentum, but there is a need for  
pioneers who can undertake specific tasks, such as arousing the interest of  
prominent people, strengthening the communities in certain areas, or assist-  
ing with projects of social and economic development.

**Africa**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Cameroon | Mauritius |
| Chad | Nigeria |
| Cote d’Ivoire | South Africa |
| Ethiopia | Swaziland |
| Ghana | Zambia |
| Kenya | Zimbabwe |

**Americas**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Barbados | Guyana |
| Belize | Haiti |
| Bolivia | Honduras |
| Brazil | Panama |
| Colombia | Peru |
| Costa Rica | Suriname |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Dominican Republic | Trinidad and Tobago |
| Ecuador | Uruguay |
| El Salvador | Venezuela |

**Asia**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Bangladesh | Malaysia |
| Hong Kong | Pakistan |
| India | Philippines |
| Japan | Taiwan |
| Macau |  |

**Australasia**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Papua New Guinea | Samoa |

**Europe**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Canary Islands | Romania |
| Iceland |  |

**CATEGORY 4**

161.8 The following are countries and territories where pioneers are greatly  
needed, but entry is difficult because of restrictions on Bahá’í activity,  
lack of security, or other circumstances. These conditions present a need  
for believers who will resourcefully seek out opportunities for pioneering.  
For each country or territory without its own National Spiritual Assembly,  
the name of the responsible or assisting National Assembly, or Regional  
Spiritual Assembly under whose jurisdiction it falls, is in parentheses. Any  
believer interested in pioneering or travel-teaching in particularly sensitive  
areas should contact the Bahá’í World Center as indicated below.

**Africa**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Angola | Mozambique |
| Comoros (Kenya) | Somalia (Kenya) |
| Liberia (Bahá’í World Center) | Togo |
| Mauritania (Bahá’í World Center) | Zaire |

**Americas**

|  |
| --- |
| Cuba |

**Asia**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Afghanistan | Laos |
| Armenia (Russia, Georgia and Armenia) | Maldives (India) |
| Bhutan (India) | Myanmar |
| Brunei (Malaysia) | Nepal |
| Indonesia (Bahá’í World Center) | Tadzhikistan (Central Asia) |
| Korea, North | Vietnam (Malaysia) |

**Australasia**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| French Polynesia | Wallis and Futana (New Caledonia and the Loyalty Islands) |

162  
Using wisdom in teaching the Cause

30 JUNE 1993

To an individual Bahá’í

Dear Bahá’í Friend,

162.1 The Universal House of Justice received on … your letter concerning the  
teaching activities in …, and we have been asked to convey the following  
response to you ….

162.2 It is understandable that you feel concern about methods of teaching  
which apply pressure to people to declare their Faith in Bahá’u’lláh, or which  
register as believers those who apparently have no real knowledge of the  
Faith or its Message. It troubles you that such methods of teaching seem to  
be sanctioned by the institutions of the Faith in … and that your remon-  
strances have met with no satisfying response from those institutions.

162.3 The teaching of the Cause has always called for wisdom, devotion, en-  
thusiasm, purity of intention and eloquence of speech. Like other human  
beings, Bahá’ís tend to go to extremes, and too few people bring the proper

balance to the way they act. This is particularly true in the teaching of the  
Faith. At one extreme are those who are so on fire with love for the Faith and  
with awareness of the desperate need of the people for its healing message,  
that they overstep the bounds of wisdom and discretion and stray into the  
area of proselytizing. At the other extreme are those who are so gentle in  
their approach and so concerned never to arouse an adverse reaction that  
they fail to convey the enormous importance of the Cause or to convince  
their hearers; for if the messenger is not enthusiastic, how can he convey  
enthusiasm to others? The first extreme leads to misrepresentation of the  
teachings and causes disillusionment; the second results in the stagnation of  
the community and its failure to fulfill its fundamental duty of conveying  
this life-giving message to the world.

162.4 In this, as in all aspects of the work of the Cause, the solution lies in  
the friends being patient and forbearing towards those whose shortcomings  
distress them, and in endeavoring, through the Assemblies’ consultation, to  
draw closer to a proper balance while maintaining the momentum of the  
work and canalizing the enthusiasm of the believers.

162.5 In one of its messages, published on page 32 of *Wellspring of Guidance*,  
the Universal House of Justice gave the following advice:

162.5a Those who declare themselves as Bahá’ís should become enchanted  
with the beauty of the teachings, and touched by the love of  
Bahá’u’lláh. The declarants need not know all the proofs, history,  
laws, and principles of the Faith, but in the process of declaring them-  
selves they must, in addition to catching the spark of faith, become  
basically informed about the Central Figures of the Faith, as well as  
the existence of laws they must follow and an administration they  
must obey.[[194]](#footnote-194)162-1

162.6 In the western world in recent decades, Bahá’ís have grown used to think-  
ing that the process by which a person accepts the Faith takes a long time,  
and that it is unthinkable for someone to intelligently accept Bahá’u’lláh  
within minutes of hearing of Him. This may be the pattern to which they  
have become accustomed, but it is far from being a universal one. When  
people accepted the Faith quickly in Africa and other parts of the Third

World, western Bahá’ís sometimes explained it away by saying that such  
people were less educated and had fewer ideas to work their way through.  
Now the same process is happening in the countries of the former Eastern  
Bloc, and highly educated people are accepting the Faith as soon as they  
hear of it, embracing it enthusiastically, and rapidly deepening their un-  
derstanding of its teachings by reading every Bahá’í book they can lay their  
hands on. So it is clear that receptivity to spiritual truth is, as Bahá’u’lláh  
indicated, a matter of purity of heart, not of education or lack of it.

162.7 In the west of Europe, too, there are signs of greater receptivity towards  
the Faith among the people, and some are ready to join the community of  
the Most Great Name if approached in the proper manner. In such cases  
when an individual hears the Message of Bahá’u’lláh and is moved to declare  
his faith, there should be no obstacle placed in his way. Great care must  
be taken that when the heart of the individual is touched by the power  
of Bahá’u’lláh’s Message and the declarant has expressed his desire to em-  
brace the Faith, the process of deepening be followed almost immediately.  
Deepening the knowledge of the new believer in the verities of the Faith is  
the most vital part of teaching; but deepening is not merely the imparting  
of knowledge—it requires also to imbue the soul of the person with the  
love of Bahá’u’lláh so that his faith may grow day by day and he becomes a  
steadfast believer.

162.8 In the following statement, Shoghi Effendi advises the Bahá’í teacher to  
advance the process of deepening for a person who is attracted to the Faith:

162.8a Let him [the Bahá’í teacher] consider the degree of his hearer’s  
receptivity, and decide for himself the suitability of either the direct  
or indirect method of teaching, whereby he can impress upon the  
seeker the vital importance of the Divine Message, and persuade him  
to throw in his lot with those who have already embraced it. Let him  
remember the example set by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, and His constant admoni-  
tion to shower such kindness upon the seeker, and exemplify to such a  
degree the spirit of the teachings he hopes to instill into him, that the  
recipient will be spontaneously impelled to identify himself with the  
Cause embodying such teachings. Let him refrain, at the outset, from  
insisting on such laws and observances as might impose too severe a  
strain on the seeker’s newly awakened faith, and endeavor to nurse  
him, patiently, tactfully, and yet determinedly, into full maturity, and  
aid him to proclaim his unqualified acceptance of whatever has been

ordained by Bahá’u’lláh. Let him, as soon as that stage has been at-  
tained, introduce him to the body of his fellow-believers, and seek,  
through constant fellowship and active participation in the local ac-  
tivities of his community, to enable him to contribute his share to the  
enrichment of its life, the furtherance of its tasks, the consolidations  
of its interests, and the coordination of its activities with those of its  
sister communities. Let him not be content until he has infused into  
his spiritual child so deep a longing as to impel him to arise indepen-  
dently, in his turn, and devote his energies to the quickening of other  
souls, and the upholding of the laws and principles laid down by his  
newly adopted Faith.

(*The Advent of Divine Justice*, pp. 51–52)[[195]](#footnote-195)162-2

162.9 From these words of the Guardian we can see that wisdom, encourage-  
ment, persuasion, and patience, are all called for, and that these must be  
attuned to the response shown by the hearer. We also see that the process of  
deepening continues long after the new believer has enrolled in the Bahá’í  
community ….

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

163  
Personal sacrifice in giving to the Fund

1 JULY 1993

To an individual Bahá’í

Dear Bahá’í Friend,

163.1 The Universal House of Justice was touched to receive your letter of 11  
June 1993 which evinces such devotion to the Cause of God. It has asked us  
to send you the following reply.

163.2 The House of Justice has never gone to the extreme of telling the friends  
that now is the time to give their long-range savings to the Fund. It sets  
forth the needs of the Cause, and calls upon the believers to sacrifice, but  
the degree and manner of his sacrifice depends on each believer’s own faith  
and good judgment in light of his responsibilities. Again and again in His

Writings Bahá’u’lláh emphasizes the need for moderation in all things, and  
He upholds the importance of using wisdom in all we do and say.

163.3 Devoted believers in every age have found it challenging to decide how  
much of their worldly wealth they should give to the Cause of God, and  
how much they should use to meet their many responsibilities of life, such  
as educating their children, preparing for their old age so that they will not  
be a burden on others, and so forth. You will recall the story of the Muslim  
who asked Muḥammad whether he should tie up his camel or trust in God  
that it would not run away. Muḥammad’s answer was that he should tie  
up the camel *and* trust in God! In this Dispensation, by the institution of  
Ḥuqúqu’lláh, Bahá’u’lláh has provided us with a measure. We are all obliged  
to pay that portion of our savings that is God’s Right. What remains there-  
after is ours to use at our own discretion, for the promotion of the work of  
the Cause and for helping others less fortunate than ourselves.

163.4 In the Hidden Words Bahá’u’lláh revealed:

163.4a O My Servant! The best of men are they that earn a livelihood by their  
calling and spend upon themselves and upon their kindred for the  
love of God, the Lord of all worlds.[[196]](#footnote-196)163-1

Furthermore, in the twelfth Glad-Tidings He stated:

163.4b The most despised of men in the sight of God are those who sit  
idly and beg. Hold ye fast unto the cord of material means, placing  
your whole trust in God, the Provider of all means. When anyone  
occupieth himself in a craft or trade, such occupation itself is regarded  
in the estimation of God as an act of worship; and this is naught but  
a token of His infinite and all-pervasive bounty.[[197]](#footnote-197)163-2

163.5 Thus to earn a livelihood is a spiritual obligation, and one should not  
consciously place oneself in a position where one would have to beg others  
for material support.

163.6 It is against this background of responsibility for oneself and one’s family  
that each person must estimate the degree to which he or she can sacrifice

for the Funds of the Faith. The range of options and decisions that the  
believers can make regarding the management of their personal finances  
without jeopardizing their future security are great, and can only be evalu-  
ated by each individual.

163.7 The House of Justice asks us to assure you of its prayers at the Sacred  
Threshold that you may be assisted with divine guidance and confirmations  
in all your devoted services on behalf of the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

164  
Applicability of Bahá’í laws to Western believers

4 JULY 1993

To an individual Bahá’í

Dear Bahá’í Friend,

164.1 … conveyed to the Universal House of Justice the inquiries contained in  
your letter to him dated 14 June 1993, and we have been instructed to send  
the following response.

164.2 The reason that the term “the Bahá’ís in the West” was left unchanged  
in the letter of 9 June 1974 addressed to the National Spiritual Assembly  
of the Bahá’ís of Iceland when it was circulated to all National Spiritual  
Assemblies on 9 May 1993,[[198]](#footnote-198)164-1 is that it is a term the significance of which  
is generally understood by the friends, while to elucidate it exactly would  
have raised unnecessary complications in such a context.

164.3 As you are aware, many of the laws of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas were applied in  
Iran and the neighboring lands of the Middle East from very early days, and  
others were progressively enforced by Shoghi Effendi. He used to comment  
to pilgrims that he was raising the pillar of the administration of the Cause  
in the West and the pillar of the laws in the East.

164.4 As the Faith spread in Europe and the Western Hemisphere, certain laws  
were applied there also, but fewer than were already current in Iran. The  
Faith continued to spread around the world, and the terms “east” and “west”  
in this context acquired specialized meanings. While the “east” continued

to designate Iran, Iraq and other countries of the older Bahá’í communities  
of the Middle East, the term “west” came to include the rest of the world.  
Thus, Persian pilgrims in the time of Shoghi Effendi would stay in the  
“Eastern” Pilgrim House, while Australian and Chinese pilgrims would stay  
in the “Western” Pilgrim House.

164.5 To pioneer for the Faith and for many other reasons, believers from Iran  
began to move to other parts of the world. This mere change in residence  
was no reason for them to cease to observe those laws of the Aqdas with  
which they were familiar, but they had to learn not to impose them on  
the “western” Bahá’ís. With intermarriage between “eastern” and “western”  
Bahá’ís other variations arose, depending upon whether the children were  
raised in a western or eastern family environment.

164.6 In light of this explanation the individual believers now residing in the  
“west” must decide in light of their own situations which of the laws are  
binding upon them. The letter to the National Assembly of Iceland clearly  
lists those laws which are currently not binding on the “western” friends.  
The fact that they are not binding does not, of course, mean that the believ-  
ers are forbidden to obey them if they wish to and circumstances permit.  
Bahá’ís from Iran who have migrated to the west should already know  
which laws are binding upon them, having learned this in their homeland.  
Bahá’ís of Iranian or mixed descent living in the west, whose parents have  
not familiarized them with the laws, should at least follow those laws which  
are universally binding.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

165  
Laws regarding hair and manner of dress

15 AUGUST 1993

To an individual Bahá’í

Dear Bahá’í Friend,

165.1 The Universal House of Justice has received your letter of 16 July 1993  
expressing your concern over the wearing of long hair and earrings by some  
of the students of the … School, and conveying your view that the School  
should enforce Bahá’í standards as a condition for enrollment. We have been  
instructed to send you the following reply.

165.2 As you are aware, the Blessed Perfection Himself advised that the utmost  
wisdom should be exercised in applying the Sacred Laws, and it is only  
gradually that these have been enforced in the Bahá’í community. Indeed,  
as the beloved Guardian stated, certain of the laws are designed for a future  
state of society.

165.3 The law of the Aqdas that, in the case of men, “… it is not seemly to let  
the hair pass beyond the limit of the ears”[[199]](#footnote-199)165-1 has not yet been universally  
applied. Bahá’u’lláh’s statement is in the Most Holy Book for all to read,  
but its application should be left to the discretion of each individual. It is  
not fitting at this time for either Bahá’í institutions or individual believers  
to make an issue of this matter or attempt to enforce it on other believers.

165.4 As for the wearing of earrings, nothing at all has been found in the Holy  
Texts on this matter beyond the general counsel given by Bahá’u’lláh in  
paragraph 159 of the Aqdas, namely:

165.4a The Lord hath relieved you, as a bounty on His part, of the restric-  
tions that formerly applied to clothing and to the trim of the beard.  
He, verily, is the Ordainer, the Omniscient. Let there be naught in  
your demeanor of which sound and upright minds would disapprove,  
and make not yourselves the playthings of the ignorant. Well is it with  
him who hath adorned himself with the vesture of seemly conduct  
and a praiseworthy character. He is assuredly reckoned with those who  
aid their Lord through distinctive and outstanding deeds.

165.5 It is, of course, within the discretion of an institution such as a school  
to lay down codes of dress and behavior for its pupils. In this it must show  
good judgment in the light of Bahá’í principles and in the context of the  
culture in which it operates.

165.6 If you wish to convey your recommendations to the … School you are,  
of course, entirely free to do so.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

166  
Preservation of original Sacred Text

23 AUGUST 1993

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

166.1 We are forwarding to you a copy of a leaflet concerning the preservation  
and safeguarding of the original Sacred Texts which was distributed to all  
delegates and guests at the seventh International Bahá’í Convention. It is  
requested that you bring the information conveyed in the leaflet to the at-  
tention of the members of your community in whatever way you consider  
to be the most effective.

166.2 In one of His Tablets Bahá’u’lláh has revealed the following:

166.2a Thou shouldst alert the company of the faithful to the need for all to  
exert every effort and to spare no pains in preserving and honoring the  
Tablets and Holy Writings. Blessed the regions in which the fragrance  
of the Pen of the Most High is spread abroad. The preservation of  
the peerless, incomparable and blessed Tablets is highly requisite and  
beloved in the sight of God, lest either the pages of which they are  
composed or the ink in which they are inscribed should lose their  
pristine quality. Do thou guide and instruct the friends in the method  
of preservation …. Blessed be those who do His bidding.

166.3 It is hoped that those friends who have original Tablets, or letters of the  
beloved Guardian, in their possession will thereby be reminded of the ut-  
most importance of preserving these precious and sacred documents. They  
are encouraged to consider giving either the originals, or clear photocopies  
of them, to the International Bahá’í Archives.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

167  
Local and National Spiritual Assemblies  
and private initiatives

2 SEPTEMBER 1993

To a National Spiritual Assembly

167.1 … As a national community grows, the activities undertaken by its  
members also increase in number and diversity. Some of these activities  
will be initiated and administered by the Bahá’í institutions. Others will  
fall in the realm of private initiative. When an initiative is in the form of a  
private business venture undertaken by an individual or group, the institu-  
tions of the Faith have little reason to interfere with their daily affairs. Only  
if difficulties arise among the friends involved in such an enterprise, if their  
activities could damage the good name of the Faith, or if they misrepresent  
their relationship to the Faith, would a Local or National Spiritual Assembly  
intervene. Bahá’í institutions, of course, applaud any effort by these private  
ventures to apply the Teachings to their operations and to use their position  
in society to further the interests of the Faith. Spiritual Assemblies would  
do well to offer them guidance, as requested or as circumstances require,  
and to help them develop their potential for the advancement of the Cause.

167.2 The private initiatives of believers need not, however, be limited to busi-  
ness ventures. The laws of most societies allow for the establishment of non-  
profit organizations which, while private, are subject to special regulations  
and enjoy certain privileges. Customarily a board of trustees is responsible  
for all the affairs of such an organization and must ensure that its income is  
spent for the purpose stipulated in its by-laws. This board also oversees the  
functioning of the projects of the organization and the work of those who  
are in charge of them. An increasing number of believers around the world  
are taking advantage of this possibility and creating organizations dedicated  
to the application of Bahá’u’lláh’s Teachings to the analysis and resolution  
of important social and economic issues. The House of Justice looks with  
keen interest on this growing phenomenon in the Bahá’í world. It only cau-  
tions the friends that in establishing such organizations they should exercise  
care not to become a burden on the institutions or unduly divert the contri-  
butions of the believers from the essential and primary tasks of supporting  
the Funds of the Faith and the activities of the institutions. It expects them  
to conduct their affairs according to Bahá’í moral and ethical principles.

167.3 A question that often arises in relation to private organizations dedicated  
to social and economic development is whether they are “Bahá’í” or not.  
Such a question cannot be answered by a simple “yes” or “no.” Clearly,  
the fact that they have their own management structures puts them in a  
different category from projects and organizations administered by Bahá’í  
institutions. In that sense they are not “Bahá’í” enterprises. In another sense,  
to the extent that they are owned and directed by Bahá’ís and strive to  
apply the Teachings and serve the purposes of the Cause, they may indeed  
be regarded as “Bahá’í.” In referring to these organizations, we must avoid  
giving the impression that participating in their projects does not constitute  
legitimate service to the Cause. Otherwise sincere and devoted believers will  
be discouraged from engaging in activities that are “Bahá’í” in nature ….

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

168  
Recitation of the Prayer for the Dead

13 SEPTEMBER 1993

Maison d’Éditions Bahá’íes

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

168.1 We regret that we cannot answer your fax of 26 August 1993 in French,  
as requested, but we enclose a French translation of this letter in the hope  
that it will assist you.

168.2 The correct way of reciting the Prayer for the Dead is as follows:

168.2a Alláh-u-Abhá (once)

We all, verily, worship God (19 times)

Alláh-u-Abhá (once)

We all, verily, bow down before God (19 times)

Alláh-u-Abhá (once)

We all, verily, are devoted unto God (19 times)

Alláh-u-Abhá (once)

We all, verily, give praise unto God (19 times)

Alláh-u-Abhá (once)

We all, verily, yield thanks unto God (19 times)

Alláh-u-Abhá (once)

We all, verily, are patient in God (19 times)

168.3 When the Kitáb-i-Aqdas was being translated it was noted that the Eng-  
lish translation of the instructions which form part of the Prayer for the  
Dead could be understood in more than one way. Therefore, when Note 11  
was formulated it was expressed in a way that was intended to clarify the  
ambiguity, namely: “the repetition of the greeting Alláh-u-Abhá’ (God is  
the All Glorious) six times, each followed by nineteen repetitions of one of  
the six specifically revealed verses.”

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

169  
Use of the term “Bahá’í scholarship”

19 OCTOBER 1993

To an individual Bahá’í

Dear Bahá’í Friend,

169.1 The Universal House of Justice has received your letter … inquiring  
about the term “Bahá’í scholarship.” …

169.2 The House of Justice suggests that the issues raised in your letter might  
best be considered in light of the statements in the Bahá’í Writings which  
disclose the relationship between the Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh and the  
knowledge which is acquired as a result of scholarly endeavors. Bahá’u’lláh  
asserts that:

169.2a Unveiled and unconcealed, this Wronged One hath, at all times,  
proclaimed before the face of all the peoples of the world that which  
will serve as the key for unlocking the doors of sciences, of arts, of  
knowledge, of well-being, of prosperity and wealth ….[[200]](#footnote-200)169-1

169.3 It is evident that the Bahá’í Writings illuminate all areas of human en-  
deavor and all academic disciplines. Those who have been privileged to rec-

ognize the station of Bahá’u’lláh have the bounty of access to a Revelation  
which casts light upon all aspects of thought and inquiry, and are enjoined  
to use the understanding which they obtain from their immersion in the  
Holy Writings to advance the interests of the Faith.

169.4 Those believers with the capacity and opportunity to do so have repeat-  
edly been encouraged in their pursuit of academic studies by which they  
are not only equipped to render much-needed services to the Faith, but are  
also provided with the means to acquire a profound insight into the mean-  
ing and the implications of the Bahá’í Teachings. They discover also that  
the perceptions gained from a deeper understanding of the Revelation of  
Bahá’u’lláh clarify the subjects of their academic inquiry.

169.5 It is useful to review a number of statements written by Shoghi Effendi  
on this subject. To a believer who had completed advanced academic studies  
in a subject related to the Teachings the Guardian stated, in a letter written  
on his behalf:

169.5a It is hoped that all the Bahá’í students will follow the noble example  
you have set before them and will, henceforth, be led to investigate  
and analyze the principles of the Faith and to correlate them with  
the modern aspects of philosophy and science. Every intelligent and  
thoughtful young Bahá’í should always approach the Cause in this  
way, for therein lies the very essence of the principle of independent  
investigation of truth.

169.6 When he was informed of the enrollment of a scientist in the Faith, the  
response set out in the letter written on his behalf was:

169.6a We need very much the sound, sane, element of thinking which a  
scientifically trained mind has to offer. When such intellectual powers  
are linked to deep faith a tremendous teaching potential is created ….

169.7 His secretary wrote, on another occasion, that:

169.7a Shoghi Effendi has for years urged the Bahá’ís (who asked his  
advice, and in general also) to study history, economics, sociology,  
etc., in order to be au courant with all the progressive movements and  
thoughts being put forth today, and so that they could correlate these  
to the Bahá’í teachings. What he wants the Bahá’ís to do is to study

more, not to study less. The more general knowledge, scientific and  
otherwise, they possess, the better. Likewise he is constantly urging  
them to really study the Bahá’í teachings more deeply.[[201]](#footnote-201)169-2

169.8 In the simultaneous endeavor to pursue their studies and to delve deeply  
into the Bahá’í Teachings, believers are enjoined to maintain a keen aware-  
ness that the Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh is the standard of truth against which  
all other views and conclusions are to be measured. They are urged to be  
modest about their accomplishments, and to bear in mind always the state-  
ment of Bahá’u’lláh that:

169.8a The heart must needs therefore be cleansed from the idle sayings  
of men, and sanctified from every earthly affection, so that it may  
discover the hidden meaning of divine inspiration, and become the  
treasury of the mysteries of divine knowledge.[[202]](#footnote-202)169-3

169.9 At this early stage in the development of the Faith, it would not be useful  
to propound a highly restrictive definition of the term “Bahá’í scholarship.”  
In a letter written on behalf of the House of Justice to an Association for  
Bahá’í Studies recently, it is stated that:

169.9a The House of Justice advises you not to attempt to define too nar-  
rowly the form that Bahá’í scholarship should take, or the approach  
that scholars should adopt. Rather should you strive to develop within  
your Association respect for a wide range of approaches and endeav-  
ors. No doubt there will be some Bahá’ís who will wish to work in  
isolation, while others will desire consultation and collaboration with  
those having similar interests. Your aim should be to promote an at-  
mosphere of mutual respect and tolerance within which will be in-  
cluded scholars whose principal interest is in theological issues as well  
as those scholars whose interests lie in relating the insights provided by  
the Bahá’í teachings to contemporary thought in the arts and sciences.

169.9b A similar diversity should characterize the endeavors pursued by  
Bahá’í scholars, accommodating their interests and skills as well as

the needs of the Faith. The course of world events, the development  
of new trends of thought and the extension of the teaching work all  
tend to highlight attractive and beneficial areas to which Bahá’í schol-  
ars might well direct their attention. Likewise, the expansion of the  
activities of the Bahá’í International Community in its relationship  
with United Nations agencies and other international bodies creates  
attractive opportunities for scholars to make a direct and highly valued  
contribution to the enhancement of the prestige of the Faith and to  
its proclamation within an influential and receptive stratum of society.  
As the Bahá’í community continues to emerge inexorably from obscu-  
rity, it will be confronted by enemies, from both within and without,  
whose aim will be to malign and misrepresent its principles, so that its  
admirers might be disillusioned and the faith of its adherents might be  
shaken; Bahá’í scholars have a vital role to play in the defense of the  
Faith through their contribution to anticipatory measures and their  
response to defamatory accusations leveled against the Faith.

169.10 Thus, there should be room within the scope of Bahá’í scholarship to  
accommodate not only those who are interested in theological issues and  
in the historical origins of the Faith, but also those who are interested in  
relating the Bahá’í Teachings to their field of academic or professional inter-  
est, as well as those believers who may lack formal academic qualifications  
but who have, through their perceptive study of the Teachings, acquired  
insights which are of interest to others.

169.11 Since you have raised the question of whether physics is more than tan-  
gentially related to Bahá’í issues, you might consider the following com-  
ments of a well-known scientific thinker, who is not a Bahá’í, about the  
correlation between the Bahá’í Teachings and recent developments in the  
physical sciences:

169.11a In our times we can only survive, and our civilization can only  
flower, if we reorient the conventional wisdom and achieve the new  
insights which have been proclaimed by the Bahá’í Faith and which are  
now also supported by the latest discoveries of the empirical sciences.

169.11b Bahá’ís proclaim that the most important condition that can bring  
about peace is unity—the unity of families, of nations, and of the  
great currents of thought and inquiry that we denote science and  
religion. Maturity, in turn, is a prerequisite for such unity. This is

evolutionary thinking, and its validity is shown by the new theories  
which emerge from non-equilibrium thermodynamics, dynamical  
systems theory, cybernetics, and the related sciences of complexity.  
They are supported by detailed empirical investigations in such fields  
as physical cosmology, paleo-biological macro-evolutionary theory, and  
new trends in historiography.

169.12 The House of Justice wishes to avoid use of the terms “Bahá’í scholar-  
ship” and “Bahá’í scholars” in an exclusive sense, which would effectively  
establish a demarcation between those admitted into this category and those  
denied entrance to it. It is clear that such terms are relative, and that what  
is a worthy scholarly endeavor by a Bahá’í, when compared to the activities  
of those with whom he is in contact, may well be regarded as of vastly  
lesser significance when measured against the accomplishments of the out-  
standing scholars which the Faith has produced. The House of Justice seeks  
the creation of a Bahá’í community in which the members encourage each  
other, where there is respect for accomplishment, and a common realiza-  
tion that every one is, in his or her own way, seeking to acquire a deeper  
understanding of the Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh and to contribute to the  
advancement of the Faith.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

170  
Reformat of *The Bahá’í World* Series

28 OCTOBER 1993

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

170.1 The Universal House of Justice has decided that *The Bahá’í World* should  
have a new format and be published annually. Such frequency of appear-  
ance was intended by Shoghi Effendi when the publication was founded,  
but circumstances made it impossible to produce it so regularly. The first  
volume of the new annual series is scheduled to be published by the end of  
December 1993 and will focus on the Holy Year.

170.2 Beginning in 1926 as *Bahá’í Year Book*, this publication has remained a  
major record of Bahá’í activities and achievements. Assuming the title *The*

*Bahá’í World*, each volume from the second to the tenth appeared bien-  
nially; subsequent volumes until the nineteenth covered longer periods of  
varying lengths; volume XX, currently in preparation, will be the last of the  
old series and will cover the period of the Six Year Plan. The issuance of the  
first volume in the new series will precede the production of that extensive  
record.

170.3 The disclosure of current information about the Faith to the public in  
such a publication was an expectation that won Shoghi Effendi’s unstinting  
support and encouragement. He himself provided much of the material for  
each volume and supervised its development. His attitude was expressed  
in a letter dated 12 December 1929 written by his secretary on his behalf  
and which, describing *The Bahá’í World* as “destined mainly for the non-  
Bahá’ís,” said, “he has tried to attract through its pages the attention of  
educated and enlightened people and especially leaders in every country,  
with a view to acquainting them with the broad and fundamental principles  
of the Faith and to winning their consideration of the Movement as a grow-  
ing force for good and for peace throughout the entire world …. Indeed  
Shoghi Effendi has made it a point to send copies to as many leading men  
as possible ….”[[203]](#footnote-203)170-1

170.4 The House of Justice feels that the availability of a well-written, liber-  
ally illustrated, attractively designed annual record of Bahá’í activities will  
facilitate the efforts of the friends and Spiritual Assemblies to present to  
non-Bahá’ís at all levels of society current information about the Cause in  
a volume of moderate size. With this in mind, it has assigned the Office of  
Public Information at the World Center the responsibility for editing and  
producing *The Bahá’í World* in its new format. In due course, that Office  
will provide you with detailed information about the series, which is to be  
produced in both hardcover and high-quality paperback editions, making  
each volume suitable for presentation to representatives of libraries, educa-  
tional institutions, government offices, social organizations and the media.

170.5 Besides the proclamation possibilities of *The Bahá’í World*, it will, of  
course, remain for the friends an important reference source which many  
will wish to acquire for their personal use.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

171  
Relative priority of the various Bahá’í funds

31 OCTOBER 1993

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

171.1 It has come to the attention of the Universal House of Justice that the  
believers would benefit from a further clarification of the relative priority of  
the various funds of the Faith, as any confusion in this regard could inhibit  
the fulfillment of their wish to contribute towards the work of the Cause.  
It has, therefore, instructed us to send you the following comments, which  
you are asked to share with the friends under your jurisdiction in ways you  
feel would be most efficacious.

171.2 The fixing of priorities is dependent on many factors, relating both to the  
Cause as a whole and to each individual in his or her own circumstances.

171.3 As far as the Cause is concerned, all the work must be kept going; all the  
funds need to be supported, both directly by the believers, and also by the  
making of contributions by Bahá’í institutions from one fund to another,  
which do not take the place of contributions from individuals—the source  
of the life-blood of the Cause.

171.4 At the level of the individual believer, attention to the needs of the funds  
of the Faith parallels the principles which govern other multiple loyalties.  
The first loyalty of a Bahá’í is to the whole of mankind, for the benefit of  
the part is best achieved through the welfare of the whole. But this widest  
loyalty does not eliminate the lesser loyalties of love for one’s country, for  
the area in which one lives, or for one’s family. They all constitute a network  
of interdependent and mutually beneficial loyalties. So it is with the in-  
dividual believer’s relationship to the International, Continental, National  
and Local Funds.

171.5 Although the setting of priorities for contributing is a matter for personal  
judgment, the individual believer will certainly bear in mind the priorities  
of the work of the Cause as a whole.

171.6 At the present time the opportunities for the Bahá’í community, and the  
challenges in front of it in every field of activity and every part of the globe,  
are great and growing. All must be met to some degree. But the most chal-  
lenging and urgent is the completion of the Mount Carmel Projects—the

Terraces of the Shrine of the Báb and the raising of three new structures of  
the Administrative Center of the Cause. This vast undertaking is an integral  
part of God’s Plan for the development of the Cause. It is an element of the  
tremendous changes which mankind is undergoing as the end of the twen-  
tieth century approaches. Although small compared with most projects of  
governments and international bodies, it is a major challenge to the Bahá’í  
community—a challenge, nevertheless, which it is well within our capacity  
to meet—and the time for completion of these projects is now.

171.7 The united efforts of Bahá’ís in every land will yield not only the material  
means to complete the Mount Carmel Projects but will draw down divine  
confirmations on the work. It is inevitable that in a project of such size, a  
large portion of the money will have to come from those Bahá’ís who are  
endowed with wealth, whether this be to a moderate degree or of a consid-  
erable magnitude. The US$74,000,000 called for during the years of the  
Three Year Plan is a sum that is difficult for many friends to visualize. Some  
have written to suggest means of making the contribution of this large sum  
manageable. One suggested the idea of breaking it into units. Thus, to assist  
in visualizing this sum one can regard it as being a little over eight thousand  
units of $9,000 each. Individuals with means can use this as a measure of  
whether they feel able, with sacrifice, to give one or more units of $9,000  
in this time. Local communities or other groups may wish to set collective  
goals on such a unit basis. This may be helpful but, of course, contribu-  
tions of any size will constitute a vital part of the stream of means for the  
accomplishment of this historic enterprise.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

172  
Release of a compilation on entry by troops

9 NOVEMBER 1993

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Beloved Friends,

172.1 In the message sent last Riḍván, we drew the attention of the Bahá’í  
world to the critical need for a massive expansion of the Bahá’í community  
in the years immediately ahead. The growing receptivity of the peoples of

the world to Bahá’u’lláh’s Message reinforces our conviction that entry by  
troops will soon become an established pattern for the growth of the Faith  
in country after country.

172.2 To assist the National Spiritual Assemblies and all the friends to under-  
stand, welcome, initiate and sustain this process, we are enclosing a compila-  
tion entitled *Promoting Entry by Troops* and a covering statement prepared by  
the Research Department.[[204]](#footnote-204)172-1 Whoever studies these illuminating passages  
will perceive that entry by troops is not merely a stage of the progress of the  
Cause destined to occur in its own good time, dependent on the receptivity  
of the population as a whole—it is a phenomenon which the Bahá’í com-  
munities, by their own activities, can prepare for and help to bring about. It  
is also a process which, once started, can be sustained. By a wise allocation  
of resources and the energetic pursuit of simultaneous plans of expansion,  
deepening and consolidation, the process of entry by troops should bring  
about a rapidly increasing supply of active believers, soundly based local  
communities, and steadily evolving local and national Bahá’í institutions.

172.3 The Bahá’í world needs to foster a united clarity of vision for the expan-  
sion of the Cause and all its agencies, and a wide range of activities suited to  
the differing conditions of both the general population and the individual  
Bahá’ís. We therefore urge the friends, and especially the Assemblies, to  
study this compilation, to understand the coherence of its statements, and  
to use its counsels to lend a renewed impetus to the spread of the Faith and  
the establishment of the institutions of the Cause of God.

172.4 Above all, in every aspect of teaching the Message, the friends should  
have confidence in the regenerative power of the Word of God, seek strength  
from the hosts of divine assistance, and anticipate the bounties that will  
continually be showered upon them. To build a new world is no easy task.  
The road is stony and filled with obstacles, but the journey is infinitely  
rewarding.

172.5 It is our ardent prayer at the Sacred Threshold that the friends through-  
out the world, with their hearts filled with love for Bahá’u’lláh, will arise to  
teach His Message to the thirsting multitudes, and will welcome into His  
Cause all those whose spirits respond to the Divine Summons and who are  
moved to throw in their lot with the builders of God’s Kingdom on this  
earth.

172.6 We are confident that, guided and assisted by the Counselors and their  
auxiliaries, you will be confirmed in your efforts to direct the energies of the  
friends towards this momentous undertaking.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

173  
Formation of seven new Spiritual Assemblies

26 NOVEMBER 1993

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

173.1 The gathering momentum now evident in the continual teaching suc-  
cesses, notably in lands recently opened to the Faith, impels us to announce  
that conditions make it ripe for the formation next Riḍván of seven new  
National and Regional Spiritual Assemblies.

173.2 There will be established in Asia: the National Spiritual Assemblies of  
Cambodia, with its seat in Phnom Penh; Kazakhstan, with its seat in Alma-  
Ata; Kyrgyzstan, with its seat in Bishkek; Mongolia, with its seat in Ulaan  
Baatar; Tajikistan, with its seat in Dushanbe; Uzbekistan, with its seat in  
Tashkent; and in Europe: the Regional Spiritual Assembly of Slovenia and  
Croatia, with its seat in Ljubljana. The Regional Spiritual Assembly of  
Central Asia will become the National Spiritual Assembly of Turkmenistan,  
with its seat in ‘Ishqábád.

173.3 With these tidings, we express the urgent hope that the followers of  
Bahá’u’lláh throughout the world, encouraged not only by the accretion of  
new victories but particularly by the opportunities for teaching which multi-  
ply daily as a consequence of rampant social disorder, will concentrate their  
energies on spreading the redemptive Message of Bahá’u’lláh with dispatch  
and resolve. May they ever draw courage and strength from the manifest  
confirmations of the Blessed Beauty.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

174  
Commencement of construction of the Center  
for the Study of the Texts

24 DECEMBER 1993

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

174.1 We are delighted to announce that on the afternoon of Sunday 19 De-  
cember 1993 the Agreement for the General Contract for the construction  
of the Center for the Study of the Texts and the Archives’ Extension was  
signed, to be followed by immediate nomination of subcontractors for  
electrical work, plumbing, lifts, air-conditioning and, later, for all finishing  
works.

174.2 Work has already commenced.

174.3 We supplicate Bahá’u’lláh for confirmation of this historic step.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

175  
Appointment of new Continental Counselor

26 DECEMBER 1993

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

175.1 For compelling personal reasons, Mrs. Elisabeth Mühlschlegel has re-  
signed from the Continental Board of Counselors in Europe after more  
than five years of highly valued services. We are sure that she will continue  
to serve the Cause with great devotion in other ways, and assure her and her  
family of our loving prayers.

175.2 To fill the vacancy thus caused, we announce the appointment of Mrs.  
Larissa Grigorjevna Tsutskova of Perm, Russia, to the membership of the  
Continental Board of Counselors in Europe for the remainder of the cur-  
rent term.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

176  
Significance of the building projects  
on Mount Carmel

4 JANUARY 1994

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

176.1 As construction work commences on the first of the monumental Edi-  
fices which must be raised on Mount Carmel to complete the World Ad-  
ministrative Center of the Bahá’í Faith, it seems appropriate to review the  
significance of this vast project and to reflect on its basic purpose.

176.2 The projects under way on this mountain are of profound significance.  
They represent much more than the erection of buildings to meet the ex-  
panding needs of the Bahá’í World Center. The call for contributions to  
the Arc Projects Fund, far from being a diversion of resources which might  
otherwise be used to help relieve the distress of mankind, offers the follow-  
ers of Bahá’u’lláh a providential opportunity to participate in an endeavor  
which is central to the work of the Faith in eradicating the causes of the  
appalling suffering now afflicting humanity.

176.3 The Bahá’í community encourages and supports the manifold efforts be-  
ing made by people of goodwill to better the condition of humankind and  
promote unity and harmony among the peoples and nations of the earth.  
However, the believers should never, for even one moment, lose sight of  
the fact that the crisis now engulfing every part of the planet is essentially  
spiritual. “That which the Lord hath ordained as the sovereign remedy and  
mightiest instrument for the healing of all the world,” Bahá’u’lláh em-  
phatically states, “is the union of all its peoples in one universal Cause, one  
common Faith.”[[205]](#footnote-205)176-1 Our acute awareness of the magnitude of the misery  
which so many groups and individuals are experiencing should spur us on to  
ever-greater exertions, inspired and animated by an abiding consciousness  
that only through the World Order of Bahá’u’lláh can the multitudinous  
problems burdening humanity be resolved.

176.4 From the dawn of Bahá’í history, attention has been directed to the glory  
of the World Order which the Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh is destined to un-  
fold. The Báb Himself declared, “Well is it with him who fixeth his gaze  
upon the Order of Bahá’u’lláh and rendereth thanks unto his Lord!” while  
Bahá’u’lláh affirmed, in the Mother Book of His Dispensation, that “the  
world’s equilibrium hath been upset through the vibrating influence of this  
most great, this new World Order.”[[206]](#footnote-206)176-2 It is abundantly evident that the ex-  
alted aims of the Faith can be accomplished only through the instrumental-  
ity of the World Order which Bahá’u’lláh has established for that purpose.  
The spiritual transformation of humanity, the relief of the diverse peoples  
of the earth from rampant suffering, the attainment and preservation of  
true peace in the world, the birth of a world civilization—all such noble  
objectives of the Cause of God will remain unrealized unless they are as-  
sociated with that radical change in the structure and functioning of human  
society inherent in the growth and fruition of His divinely ordained Order.  
The institutions of the Bahá’í Administrative Order, now being raised in all  
parts of the world through the endeavors of the believers, are the precursor,  
the nucleus and the pattern of that World Order which will, in the course  
of time, exert its full benevolent influence on all the peoples of the earth.

176.5 Shoghi Effendi explained that the revelation by Bahá’u’lláh of the Kitáb-  
i-Aqdas “preserves for posterity the basic laws and ordinances on which  
the fabric of His future World Order must rest.” And he referred to “the  
triple impulse generated through the revelation of the Tablet of Carmel by  
Bahá’u’lláh and the Will and Testament as well as the Tablets of the Divine  
Plan bequeathed by the Center of His Covenant—the three Charters which  
have set in motion three distinct processes, the first operating in the Holy  
Land for the development of the institutions of the Faith at its World Cen-  
ter and the other two, throughout the rest of the Bahá’í world, for its propa-  
gation and the establishment of its Administrative Order.”[[207]](#footnote-207)176-3 These three  
processes, although distinct, are closely interrelated. Developments at the  
World Center of the Faith, the heart and nerve-center of the Administrative  
Order, must necessarily exert a pronounced influence on the organic body  
of the worldwide Bahá’í community, and be affected by its vitality. The  
Administrative Order may best be viewed as the chief instrument for the

prosecution of the Divine Plan, while that Plan has become recognized as  
the most potent agency for the development of the administrative structure  
of the Faith. It follows that, for the sound and balanced growth of the Faith  
and the speedy attainment of world order, due attention must be paid to all  
three processes.

176.6 The construction work now in progress on Mount Carmel should be  
seen as a major historic thrust in the development of the first of these three  
mighty processes—a process which was launched more than one hundred  
years ago by Bahá’u’lláh Himself when He pitched His tent on this Holy  
Mountain and revealed the Tablet described by the Guardian as “the Char-  
ter of the World Spiritual and Administrative Centers of the Faith.”[[208]](#footnote-208)176-4 The  
unfoldment of this process has been distinguished by the interment of the  
sacred remains of the Báb in the bosom of this mountain within a sanc-  
tuary built by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, followed subsequently by the erection of the  
superstructure of the Shrine of the Báb by Shoghi Effendi. When, in 1939,  
the Guardian transferred the bodily remains of the brother and mother of  
the Master to their final resting-place in the immediate vicinity of that of  
the Greatest Holy Leaf, he described his action as one which “incalculably  
reinforces the spiritual potencies of that consecrated Spot which, under the  
wings of the Báb’s overshadowing Sepulcher,” is designated to be the “focal  
center of these world-shaking, world-embracing, world-directing adminis-  
trative institutions”[[209]](#footnote-209)176-5 which the followers of Bahá’u’lláh are raising for the  
salvation of humanity and the fulfillment of its glorious destiny.

176.7 Shortly before his passing, the Guardian completed the structure of the  
International Bahá’í Archives, “the first stately Edifice destined to usher  
in the establishment of the World Administrative Center of the Faith on  
Mount Carmel—the Ark referred to by Bahá’u’lláh in the closing passages  
of His Tablet of Carmel.”[[210]](#footnote-210)176-6

176.8 In more recent years the contributions of the believers around the world  
permitted construction of the Seat of the Universal House of Justice, the  
second of the Edifices which Shoghi Effendi had envisaged as being located  
on a far-flung arc, surrounding the resting-places of the members of the  
Holy Family. This achievement opened the way for the announcement in  
1987 of the project for erection of the remaining buildings of the World

Administrative Center of the Faith and for the construction of the eighteen  
monumental Terraces contemplated by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, below and above the  
Shrine of the Báb. It signaled a major step toward the consummation of the  
vision expressed by the Guardian as “the splendor of the institutions which  
that triumphant Faith must erect on the slopes of a mountain, destined to  
be so linked with the city of ‘Akká that a single grand metropolis will be  
formed to enshrine the spiritual as well as the administrative seats of the  
future Bahá’í Commonwealth.”[[211]](#footnote-211)176-7

176.9 The Edifices and Terraces now under construction are a manifest expres-  
sion of the emergence from obscurity of the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh and of the  
determining role it is ordained to play in the affairs of humankind. When  
the buildings are completed, they will stand as the visible seat of mighty  
institutions whose purpose is no other than the spiritualization of humanity  
and the preservation of justice and unity throughout the world. The future  
significance of the Terraces is evident from their characterization by Shoghi  
Effendi as “the Pathway of the Kings and Rulers of the World.” The beauty  
and magnificence of the Gardens and Terraces now under development are  
symbolic of the nature of the transformation which is destined to occur  
both within the hearts of the world’s peoples and in the physical environ-  
ment of the planet.

176.10 The establishment of the World Administrative Center of the Faith on  
Mount Carmel at this juncture in the fortunes of mankind is essential to  
hasten the accomplishment of God’s purpose for humanity through the  
operation of the World Order of Bahá’u’lláh. The believers are called upon  
to sustain this vast collective enterprise upon which the community of the  
Most Great Name is now embarked, through a sacrificial outpouring of  
material resources and through their dedication to the work of the Cause at  
this time of unprecedented need and opportunity.

176.11 Mount Carmel was extolled by the prophet Isaiah almost three thousand  
years ago, when he announced that “it shall come to pass in the last days,  
that the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established in the top of  
the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall  
flow unto it.”[[212]](#footnote-212)176-8 Now, with the coming of the Lord of Hosts, His devoted  
servants throughout the world have been summoned to the momentous

undertaking with which the fulfillment of this ancient promise is associated.  
As they dedicate themselves to this mighty task, let them draw inspiration  
from these Words of Bahá’u’lláh: “Carmel, in the Book of God, hath been  
designated as the Hill of God, and His Vineyard. It is here that, by the grace  
of the Lord of Revelation, the Tabernacle of Glory hath been raised. Happy  
are they that attain thereunto; happy they that set their faces towards it.”[[213]](#footnote-213)176-9

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

177  
Reference to the Guardianship in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas

11 MARCH 1994.

To an individual Bahá’í

Dear Bahá’í Friend,

177.1 Your letter of 31 December 1993 was received and referred to us for a  
response.

177.2 You quote the reference in paragraph 42 of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas and ask  
how this can be understood as an anticipation of the institution of the  
Guardianship.

177.3 As you correctly state, this passage relates entirely to the disposition of  
endowments dedicated to charity. In it Bahá’u’lláh provides that the author-  
ity in this matter passes, after Him, to the Aghṣán. The Aghṣán comprise  
not only the sons of Bahá’u’lláh, but all His male descendants. Thus in His  
Will and Testament ‘Abdu’l-Bahá refers to Shoghi Effendi as “the chosen  
branch,” and provides that if the eldest son of the Guardian did not pos-  
sess the qualities which would befit him to be appointed as his successor,  
the Guardian should “choose another branch [Ghuṣn] to succeed him.”[[214]](#footnote-214)177-1  
There is also a letter in which Shoghi Effendi refers to his brother, Ḥusayn,  
as a “Ghuṣn.”

177.4 It should be noted that, although only two of the Aghṣán are explicitly  
mentioned in the Kitáb-i-‘Ahd (the Ghuṣn-i-A‘zam and the Ghuṣn-i-Akbar,

namely ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and Mírzá Muḥammad-‘Alí), paragraph 42 of the Aq-  
das refers to more than two. Arabic nouns have three forms for number:

Singular Branch Ghuṣn

Dual two Branches Ghuṣnán

Plural more than two Branches Aghṣán

177.5 The Aqdas foresees a hereditary function for the Aghṣán in relation to the  
disposition of endowments dedicated to charity. Paragraph 42 of the Aqdas  
continues by stating that “after them” [i.e. the Aghṣán] this authority passes  
“to the House of Justice—should it be established in the world by then.”  
This envisages the possibility that the line of Aghṣán would come to an end  
before the Universal House of Justice came into existence, which is, in fact,  
what happened on the death of Shoghi Effendi.

177.6 In this way, therefore, this passage can be seen as anticipating the institu-  
tion of the Guardianship ….

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

178  
Passing of Dorothy Ferraby,  
former Continental Counselor

24 MARCH 1994

To all National Spiritual Assemblies in Europe

178.1 HEARTS GRIEVED PASSING DEARLY LOVED STALWART MAIDSERVANT BAHÁ’U’LLÁH  
DOROTHY FERRABY WHOSE DISTINGUISHED SERVICES CAUSE GOD EXTENDED  
OVER MORE THAN HALF A CENTURY. SHE CONTRIBUTED SIGNIFICANTLY ADMINIS-  
TRATION FAITH AS MEMBER NATIONAL ASSEMBLY BRITISH ISLES AND FIRST AUXIL-  
IARY BOARD EUROPE, PLAYED VITAL PART HISTORIC AFRICA CAMPAIGN LAUNCHED  
BY SHOGHI EFFENDI, SERVED WORLD CENTER DURING CUSTODIANSHIP HANDS  
CAUSE, AND LATER AS MEMBER CONTINENTAL BOARD OF COUNSELORS EUROPE.  
THESE SERVICES, AS WELL AS HER INDEFATIGABLE LABORS AND STERLING QUALI-  
TIES, HER TENACITY, PERSEVERANCE AND UNFLINCHING LOYALTY HAVE ENRICHED  
ANNALS FAITH BRITISH ISLES AND SET WORTHY EXAMPLE.

178.2 ARDENTLY PRAYING HOLY SHRINES PROGRESS HER NOBLE SOUL ABHÁ KING-  
DOM. ADVISE HOLD MEMORIAL GATHERINGS COMMUNITIES UNITED KINGDOM.

REQUESTING NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY OF GERMANY HOLD A MEMORIAL SER-  
VICE MOTHER TEMPLE EUROPE. ALSO ADVISING EUROPEAN NATIONAL ASSEMBLIES  
HOLD COMMEMORATIVE GATHERINGS COMMUNITIES THEIR COUNTRIES.

178.3 CONVEY OUR LOVING SYMPATHY HER BELOVED DAUGHTER, OTHER MEMBERS  
HER FAMILY.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

179  
Murder of three Iranian pioneers to South Africa

28 MARCH 1994

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

179.1 With much sorrow, the Universal House of Justice has asked us to share  
with you certain details relevant to the murder of three Iranian Bahá’í  
pioneers to South Africa for the information of the friends throughout the  
world.

179.2 As you may have learned from the wide publicity which the incident  
received, on 13 March Mr. Houshmand Anvari, Dr. Shamam Bakhshandegi  
and Mr. Riaz Razavi were shot to death by gunmen who burst into the  
Bahá’í Center at Mdantsane, Ciskei, where some adults and children had  
gathered for meetings. Mr. Anvari, who served as caretaker of the Bahá’í  
Center, had been painting a portion of the building when four young gun-  
men ordered him to go inside at a time when children’s classes were ending  
and the friends were preparing for a meeting concerning the International  
Year of the Family. Mr. Razavi, Auxiliary Board member for Ciskei, and Dr.  
Bakhshandegi had been invited especially to consult with the friends at this  
meeting. The gunmen ordered the “whites,” these three Iranian friends, to  
stand apart from the others, lined them up against the wall with their hands  
above their heads, searched them, and then fired at them with automatic  
weapons as their fellow believers looked on in utter shock. The gunmen fled  
immediately, using Mr. Razavi’s car to get away. Mr. Razavi and Mr. Anvari  
were killed instantly; Dr. Bakhshandegi died upon arrival at a hospital in  
Mdantsane.

179.3 The three deceased friends lived in South Africa near the border with  
Ciskei and focused their Bahá’í services on that homeland. Mr. Razavi, 44,  
director of finance at the University of Fort Hare in Ciskei, pioneered in

1976 to Lesotho where two years later he married Vera Paquay, a Belgian  
pioneer, and in 1979 was elected to the National Spiritual Assembly. In  
1983 the Razavi family moved to King William’s Town in South Africa from  
which in subsequent years Mr. Razavi focused his attention on Ciskei as a  
Bahá’í teacher and then as an Auxiliary Board member since August 1989.  
He is survived by his wife, Vera, their 15-year-old son, Jalal, and 12-year-old  
daughter, Rouhieh.

179.4 Mr. Anvari, 43, a computer programmer, first went to the United States  
from his native Iran to complete his studies, and in 1990 journeyed with his  
family to South Africa for the second time, settling in East London in order  
to serve both in South Africa and Ciskei. He and his wife Dina established  
a crèche at the Bahá’í Center in Mdantsane and also founded a weekend  
tutorial school in King William’s Town. Mr. Anvari was a member of the  
Local Spiritual Assembly of East London and engaged in public relations  
work for the Faith. He also served as caretaker/manager of the Mdantsane  
Bahá’í Center where he was killed. He has left behind his wife and their  
three young children: Vaffa, 8; Nava, 5; and Ava, 2.

179.5 Dr. Bakhshandegi, 28, a dentist, served on the staff of the Cecilia  
Makwani Hospital in Mdantsane, Ciskei, as supervisor of the community  
dental section. He was born in Mauritania where his parents were pioneers,  
and spent his years as a child and youth there, becoming a brilliant student,  
and eventually attaining proficiency in five languages. In the early 1980s  
he went as a pioneer to South Africa with his parents, Dr. Amin Bakh-  
shandegi, also a dentist, and Mrs. Badri Bakhshandegi. While a university  
student in Johannesburg for several years, he was a member of the Local  
Spiritual Assembly. At the end of his studies, he returned to East London,  
where he served as secretary of the Local Spiritual Assembly and as public  
relations officer for his region. Just before his death Dr. Bakhshandegi had  
completed the first scientific dental research done in Ciskei for which he  
will be awarded a master’s degree posthumously. He had already won, along  
with two others, the Elida Ponds Research Award in Dentistry for his work.  
Dr. Bakhshandegi is survived by his parents and his sister, Djam.

179.6 The killers have not yet been identified nor have their motives been clari-  
fied, but the view has been expressed in press reports that their action was  
racially motivated. The incident evoked condemnatory statements from of-  
ficials of the South African Government, the African National Congress,  
and various religious communities. The South African National Spiritual  
Assembly reported unprecedented publicity of the Faith in their country as

a result. Many of the published reports mention that the Bahá’ís of South  
Africa have a 40-year history of multiracialism. Stories distributed by the  
wire services, the Associated Press and Reuters, have appeared in newspapers  
around the world. Other international media have also carried reports.

179.7 On 19 March, a dignified funeral service, attended by some five hundred  
people, was conducted at the town hall of a suburb of East London called  
Cambridge. In addition to the Bahá’ís who came from all over southern Af-  
rica as well as from many local communities in South Africa, the attendees  
included the Mayor of East London, the Chancellor and a member of the  
Council of the University of Fort Hare, two members of the National Party  
for that region and many other sympathizers from the public. In his eulogy  
the Mayor of East London regarded these deaths as a sacrifice for peace and  
the unity of mankind. After several hours of prayers, readings from the  
Sacred Scriptures, eulogies and expressions of sympathy, the three bodies  
of these dearly loved and respected friends were taken to the cemetery and  
finally laid to rest side by side.

179.8 Upon receiving news of this tragic incident from the National Spiritual  
Assembly of South Africa, the House of Justice responded with the follow-  
ing message on 14 March:

179.8 SHOCKED GRIEVED NEWS VIOLENT DEATH HOUSHMAND ANVARI, SHAMA-  
MBAKH SHANDEGI AND RIAZ RAZAVI IN CISKEI. PROFOUNDLY IMPRESSED  
STERLING EXAMPLE SET BY THEIR DEDICATION CAUSE BAHÁ’U’LLÁH IN  
WHOSE SERVICE THEY WERE DIRECTLY ENGAGED WHEN STRUCK DOWN  
BY ASSASSINS’ BULLETS. DEEPLY SYMPATHIZE IRREPARABLE LOSS THEIR  
DEAR FAMILIES AND FRIENDS. MAY ALL HEARTS BE COMFORTED BY PROM-  
ISE BLESSED BEAUTY THAT THEY THAT HAVE FORSAKEN THEIR COUNTRY  
IN PATH GOD AND SUBSEQUENTLY ASCENDED UNTO HIS PRESENCE SHALL  
BE BLESSED BY CONCOURSE ON HIGH AND THEIR NAMES RECORDED BY  
PEN GLORY AMONG SUCH AS HAVE LAID DOWN THEIR LIVES AS MARTYRS  
PATH GOD. CONFIDENT JOYOUS WELCOME ABHÁ KINGDOM THESE DIS-  
TINGUISHED SOULS. ARDENTLY PRAYING HOLY SHRINES THEIR PROGRESS  
DIVINE WORLDS. ALSO OFFERING SUPPLICATIONS BEHALF ALL RELATIVES  
FRIENDS. ADVISE HOLD MEMORIAL GATHERINGS THROUGHOUT SOUTH  
AFRICA.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

180  
Appointment of new Continental Counselor

7 APRIL 1994

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

180.1 After more than four years of highly valued service on the Continental  
Board of Counselors in Africa, Mr. Gilbert Robert has resigned for compel-  
ling health reasons. We are confident that he will continue to serve the Cause  
with great devotion in other ways, and assure him of our loving prayers.

180.2 To fill the vacancy caused by Mr. Robert’s resignation, we announce the  
appointment of Mr. Eddy Lutchmaya of Quatre-Bornes, Mauritius, to the  
membership of the Continental Board of Counselors in Africa for the re-  
mainder of the current term.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

181  
Riḍván Message 1994

RIḌVÁN 1994

Dearly loved Friends,

181.1 One year of the Three Year Plan is now behind us, a year in which the  
turmoil of the world engendered in hearts and minds both hope and fear,  
both optimism and despair, both admiration of people’s courage and shame  
at the cruelty to which mankind can sink. Amidst these trials, the follow-  
ers of Bahá’u’lláh press forward, clear-visioned and confident, raising the  
structure of God’s Kingdom, suffusing society with a new spirit, and dem-  
onstrating to all people the revitalizing effect of the divine Teachings.

181.2 At the World Center, the 23rd of May saw the opening of a new five-  
year term of the membership of the International Teaching Center. In our  
first joint meeting we applauded the many initiatives which it had pursued  
during the previous term and urged their further development. Prominent  
among these initiatives was the guidance given to the Continental Counsel-  
ors to promote consultation at local and national levels, among institutions

and believers, leading to the initiation and sustaining of processes of growth  
in the Bahá’í community. Another was the progressive clarifying of various  
approaches to the teaching work. As the year has proceeded, these actions  
have intensified the impetus being given to the development of the Faith  
and its institutions by the Counselors, the Auxiliary Board members and  
their assistants, reinforcing the insight and encouragement that they give to  
the National and Local Spiritual Assemblies and the individual believers.

181.3 The growing reputation of the Faith in the eyes of the world, and the at-  
tention that this is drawing to the World Center, underscore the importance  
of completing the Terraces of the Shrine of the Báb and the buildings for  
the World Administrative Center of the Cause of Bahá’u’lláh. Since the is-  
suing of the special appeal to the Bahá’í world to raise seventy-four million  
dollars for this project during the course of the Three Year Plan, the response  
has been heart-warming, and it is our ardent hope that the continuation of  
this spirit of sacrifice will result in the speedy achievement of this goal and  
will ensure the uninterrupted progress of the work, drawing to God’s Holy  
Mountain the admiring gaze of visitors and residents alike.

181.4 Study of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas is illuminating the lives of the rank and file  
of the believers. Awareness of the importance of upholding the principles of  
the Faith and obeying its laws is rising. Universal application of the law of  
Ḥuqúqu’lláh has aroused an enthusiastic response. The friends’ conscious-  
ness of their individual obligation to teach the Faith is growing. As they  
discharge their spiritual responsibilities and learn greater dependence on the  
confirmations of Bahá’u’lláh, they find that their faith gains new vitality,  
and their hearts fresh confidence. These are all areas where the action of the  
individual need not wait for either urging or help. Alone, and aided solely  
by the power of the Almighty, each believer is challenged to develop these  
spiritual strengths which will contribute beyond measure to the evolution  
of the community.

181.5 The human resources of the Cause are being augmented in two ways.  
People of capacity are being moved to embrace the Faith, reinforcing the  
ranks of those who are already serving. The latter, for their part, have  
been enriching their experience and acquiring greater capabilities through  
a more profound study of the Teachings and through expressing them in  
action. Recognizing the need for a more systematic deepening of their un-  
derstanding of the Teachings and their application to society, the friends  
have increased the use of workshops and institutes, with notable success.  
In the year ahead these two complementary processes—attracting people

of capacity and increasing our own abilities—must be further advanced,  
stimulating individual action and the harmonious development of a wide  
range of activities for the promotion of the Faith.

181.6 As the potentialities of the individual believers unfold, so the local and  
national Bahá’í institutions are gaining ability to foster the quality of the life  
of their communities and to conceive and implement imaginative programs.  
In many areas Local Spiritual Assemblies have collaborated in teaching the  
Faith in a region. National Assemblies, likewise, have been evolving innova-  
tive projects to seize the opportunities presented by developments outside  
the Cause. Some examples of such activities, in very different fields, have  
been the Open Letter Project in Albania; the response to the extraordinary  
receptivity of the authorities and the general population in the Sakha and  
Buryat Republics in Siberia; and the agreement signed between the National  
Spiritual Assembly of the Marshall Islands and the local government of  
Majuro Atoll in response to the national authorities’ request that the Bahá’ís  
assume responsibility for the operation of five state elementary schools.

181.7 The evolution of local and national Bahá’í institutions has made possible  
an increased measure of decentralization in the administration of the work.  
For this beneficial process to expand, however, the crucial prerequisite in  
most countries is the speedy improvement of the functioning of Local Spiri-  
tual Assemblies. This calls for the close attention of every believer. These  
local Bahá’í institutions, ordained in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas itself, constitute a  
reservoir of strength and guidance which will amplify the effectiveness of  
the work of the Cause as they mature.

181.8 We live in the midst of populations which are in desperate need of the  
Message of Bahá’u’lláh. It is our duty to present it lucidly and convincingly  
to as many souls as possible. The darkness and suffering around us not only  
are the signs of a need, but also present us with an opportunity which we  
must not fail to use. Conveying the message is merely the first step. We  
must then ensure that it is understood and applied, for, as we read in one  
of the letters written on behalf of the Guardian: “Until the public sees  
in the Bahá’í Community a true pattern, in action, of something better  
than it already has, it will not respond to the Faith in large numbers.”[[215]](#footnote-215)181-1  
When people embrace the Cause, they should then, through the Teachings,  
develop their relationships with each other and with their fellow-citizens

to gradually produce a truly Bahá’í community, a light and haven for the  
bewildered.

181.9 After the glorious events of the Heroic Age of the Faith, entry by troops  
of the peoples of the world into the Cause of God first occurred in Africa  
during the ministry of Shoghi Effendi, and then spread to other areas. Grad-  
ually, the Bahá’í communities of those regions are learning through experi-  
ence and are evolving methods and programs which aim to draw these large  
numbers of believers together in functioning communities and to establish  
strong bases for continuing growth. To assist them in their endeavors, to  
help the Bahá’ís in other countries to initiate and maintain this process,  
and to dispel the misconceptions which inevitably surround so challenging  
a concept, a compilation on *Promoting Entry by Troops* has been issued.[[216]](#footnote-216)181-2  
Study and application of the principles and approaches described therein  
will undoubtedly assist every Bahá’í teacher and community, whether in an  
area where entry by troops has been a reality for many years, or in one where  
no sign of it has yet appeared. In respect to the latter, it will help to convince  
individual believers of the reality and validity of this process and will enable  
Bahá’í communities to prepare themselves spiritually and materially for this  
surge forward, to eagerly anticipate its occurrence, to take those steps which  
will foster its beginning, and to ensure the measures which will perpetuate  
its growth.

181.10 The notable rise in international collaboration during the past year, the  
settlement of pioneers, and the flow of traveling teachers have knit ever  
more closely the fabric of the Bahá’í community. Leading the way in such  
achievements, Amatu’l-Bahá Rúḥíyyih Khánum undertook an arduous  
journey for the encouragement of the believers and the proclamation of  
the Faith, covering Russia and other lands which were formerly parts of the  
Soviet Union, from the Baltic States in the west to Siberia in the east, from  
the Central Asian republics in the south to Saint Petersburg and Yakutsk in  
the north.

181.11 This Riḍván seven inaugural National Conventions will be held. Our rep-  
resentatives at these historic events will be the Hand of the Cause Amatu’l-  
Bahá Rúḥíyyih Khánum for the election of the National Spiritual Assembly  
of the Bahá’ís of Cambodia in Phnom Penh, and for that of the National  
Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of Mongolia in Ulaan Baatar; the Hand of

the Cause ‘Alí-Muḥammad Varqá for the election of the Regional Spiritual  
Assembly of the Bahá’ís of Slovenia and Croatia in Ljubljana; Counselor  
Lauretta King for the election of the National Spiritual Assembly of the  
Bahá’ís of Kazakhstan in Alma-Ata, and for that of the National Spiritual  
Assembly of the Bahá’ís of Kyrgyzstan in Bishkek; and Counselor Shapoor  
Monadjem for the election of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís  
of Tajikistan in Dushanbe, and for that of the National Spiritual Assembly  
of the Bahá’ís of Uzbekistan in Tashkent. The present Regional Spiritual  
Assembly of Central Asia, with its seat in ‘Ishqábád, will then become the  
National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of Turkmenistan.

181.12 The end of the century is fast approaching. There is so little time and  
so much to do. We call upon every follower of the Cause of Bahá’u’lláh to  
consecrate the utmost endeavor to the two primary tasks of teaching the  
Faith to every thirsting soul, and of providing the material means for the  
completion of the monumental projects being pursued on Mount Carmel.  
Whatever the outward conditions of mankind in the year ahead, the Bahá’í  
community must gather strength, demonstrate more clearly the distinguish-  
ing character of its way of life, reach out with confidence to proclaim and  
teach its message, and draw down in ever-greater measure the confirming  
assistance of the Hosts of the Supreme Concourse. In every aspect of this  
work, it is the individual Bahá’í who holds the key to victory.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

182  
Achievements of Bahá’í youth in Europe

17 MAY 1994

To the youth gathered at the five Regional Bahá’í Youth Conferences in  
Barcelona, Berlin, Bucharest, Saint Petersburg, and Wolverhampton

Beloved Friends,

182.1 During this past year, with the encouragement of the European Bahá’í  
Youth Council, a new movement among this generation of Bahá’í youth  
has been gathering momentum throughout the continent. Like the swelling  
of a tide, some waves may be but wavelets as yet, but the time for such an  
upsurge is here. Surely the successive impulses of training seminars, of the  
conference of National Bahá’í Youth Committees held in April, and now

of these five continent-wide conferences, will reinforce the eagerness of the  
youth to rise and seize the challenge to play their part in reshaping the life  
of the peoples of the European continent.

182.2 It is but a century and a half since two young men sat in an upper room  
of the city of Shiraz; one the Manifestation of God revealing the first Words  
of God for this era, the other His first disciple. Within the space of six years,  
both had laid down their lives so that this outpouring of Divine Revelation  
might quicken all humankind. By that time, hundreds and thousands of  
eager hearts, men and women, old and young, rich and poor, learned and  
illiterate, had arisen to welcome the breaking of the Dawn of Divine Guid-  
ance and champion the truth before the world.

182.3 Now we see that the world has become another world. As Bahá’u’lláh  
has written: “Mankind’s ordered life hath been revolutionized through the  
agency of this unique, this wondrous System—the like of which mortal eyes  
have never witnessed.”[[217]](#footnote-217)182-1

182.4 You have come together from lands which are troubled by many different  
ills: ecological, economic, political, social, intellectual and, above all, moral  
and spiritual. You are aware that some of your peers are desperately seeking  
solutions and, too often alas, are driven to violent means to combat those  
immediate evils which fill their vision. Others turn aside, despairingly or  
cynically from any. thought that a remedy is possible. You know the solu-  
tion, you have the vision, you have the guidance and you are the recipients  
of the spiritual power which can enable you to triumph over all adversities  
and bring new life to the youth of Europe.

182.5 To be young is not easy. There are so many calls on one’s time and energy  
because, not only are you summoned to perform the duties of the day,  
but also to prepare yourselves for the tasks which will be yours during the  
remainder of your lives. In weighing how to apportion your time and energy  
to such a multitude of activities you can call upon the power of consulta-  
tion with your parents, your friends, and the divinely created institutions of  
the Bahá’í administration.

182.6 Those of you who are at a point in your studies or careers where you can  
devote a special period of service to the Cause of God, may be able to re-  
spond to the call of the Youth Council for an army of youth-year-of-service  
volunteers to go out after these conferences to accelerate the winning of the

goals of the Three Year Plan in Europe. Those who cannot serve in this way  
have other avenues of service in their own countries and abroad. For all of  
you there is the opportunity and the need to present the Teachings of the  
Cause to all whom you meet, through your character, your behavior, your  
unity, your deeds and your words, and to win their allegiance to the Faith.

182.7 May the Hosts of the Supreme Concourse rush to your aid, and may  
Bahá’u’lláh bless and guide every step you take for the advancement of His  
Cause.

182.8 We shall remember you all in our prayers in the Holy Shrines.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

183  
Response to concerns raised by the U.S. National  
Spiritual Assembly

19 MAY 1994

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of the United States

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

183.1 We recall with much joy and deep gratitude to Bahá’u’lláh your presence  
in the Holy Land only a short while ago during the month of the Fast.  
Your urgent request to which we acceded by meeting with all nine of your  
members in intensive consultations over a period of three days—a new fact  
of history in itself—initiated another phase in the evolution of your As-  
sembly and reinforced the bonds that bind the American Bahá’í community  
to the World Center of the Faith. Our hearts were touched by the candor,  
courage, and sincerity with which your members presented your concerns,  
as well as by the spirit of optimism you displayed despite the overwhelming  
challenges and burdens which prompted your request for a meeting with us.

183.2 Having considered the various points and queries you raised, we are now  
able to respond to those which fall under the broad categories of teaching,  
relations between your National Spiritual Assembly and the Continental  
Counselors, and the functioning of your Assembly.

\* \* \*

183.3 Regarding your “Vision in Action” initiative, you reported evidences of a  
tremendous response, some movement, and some expansion; furthermore,  
the stimulus of the recent Atlanta conference spearheaded by the Conti-  
nental Counselors caused a marked acceleration of activities. In sum, the  
friends have seldom been more visibly active, but growth is slow; you feel  
the community has for some time been on the threshold of a breakthrough  
which remains elusive. The degeneration of society, as manifested by the  
breakdown of moral standards and the alarming increase of violence, you  
feel, is exerting a debilitating effect on the individual believer. You yearn for  
a way to free the teaching potential which to a large extent is locked up in  
the individual in the face of these dreadful circumstances.

183.4 We feel that an over-anxiousness on your part about a breakthrough and  
an undue worry over the state of society can be counterproductive. While  
there are opportunities for greater growth than is occurring, neither your  
Assembly nor the friends must burden themselves with feelings of failure  
at every disappointment, for such feelings are self-fulfilling and can eas-  
ily cause stagnation in the expansion of the Cause. The tendency towards  
frustration, sometimes induced by a desire for instant gratification, must  
be resisted by an effort to gain deeper appreciation of the divine process. In  
exhorting the individual concerning the spiritual obligation resting upon  
him “to make of the mandate of teaching, so vitally binding upon all, the  
all-pervading concern of his life,” Shoghi Effendi said that “every bearer of  
the Message of Bahá’u’lláh should consider it not only an obligation but a  
privilege to scatter far and wide the seeds of His Faith, and to rest content  
in the abiding knowledge that whatever be the immediate response to that  
Message, and however inadequate the vehicle that conveyed it, the power  
of its Author will, as He sees fit, enable those seeds to germinate, and in  
circumstances which no one can foresee enrich the harvest which the labor  
of His followers will gather.”[[218]](#footnote-218)183-1 You may rest assured that your particularly  
blessed community will not be denied a triumphant expansion if its mem-  
bers remain constant and confident in their teaching activities.

183.5 Paradoxical as it may seem, the prospects towards the breakthrough you  
anticipate in the teaching field are conspicuous in the current, distressing  
state of society. You must realize that the worse conditions become, the  
more plentiful are the opportunities to teach the Cause, the greater the de-

gree of receptivity to the Divine Message. Bahá’u’lláh certainly gave ample  
foreknowledge about the radical, worldwide disturbance which His Revela-  
tion is creating as a part of the transition towards the unity and peace that  
are the ultimate goal of His Faith. Your awareness of this inevitable transi-  
tion should enable your members to detach themselves from the debilitating  
emotions aroused by the turmoil which characterizes this process and to  
equip your Assembly as the highest governing body of the Bahá’í commu-  
nity in the United States to demonstrate to the friends a confident outlook,  
which the persistence and vigor of their teaching activities will fully justify.

183.6 Such detachment as exemplified by your Assembly and practiced by  
the friends throughout the community will, moreover, signify a spiritual  
achievement which was anticipated by Shoghi Effendi in his warning to  
your community, when he said: “The glowing tributes, so repeatedly and  
deservedly paid to the capacity, the spirit, the conduct, and the high rank,  
of the American believers, both individually and as an organic commu-  
nity, must, under no circumstances, be confounded with the characteristics  
and nature of the people from which God has raised them up.” In other  
words, by the attainment of a “sharp distinction between that community  
and that people,” you and the friends who rely upon your guidance will  
recognize that American society cannot be exempted from the rigors and  
consequences of the transition affecting all the world.[[219]](#footnote-219)183-2

183.7 Painful as may be the decadent scene, deep as is your sympathy for those  
who suffer from the terrible decline of society, you must see the possibilities  
which are thus provided for augmenting the healing forces of an emerg-  
ing World Order. Shoghi Effendi advised the North American community  
plainly in this regard. “The opportunities which the turmoil of the present  
age presents, with all the sorrows which it evokes, the fears which it excites,  
the disillusionment which it produces, the perplexities which it creates, the  
indignation which it arouses, the revolt which it provokes, the grievances it  
engenders, the spirit of restless search which it awakens, must,” he asserted,  
“be exploited for the purpose of spreading far and wide the knowledge of  
the redemptive power of the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh, and for enlisting fresh  
recruits in the ever-swelling army of His followers.”[[220]](#footnote-220)183-3

183.8 Commenting further on the global spectacle of upheavals, cataclysms and  
tribulations which the worsening affairs of humanity evoke at the impend-  
ing approach of the Kingdom of God on earth, Shoghi Effendi addressed  
these words of insight and encouragement to the North American friends:  
“Far from yielding in their resolve, far from growing oblivious of their task,  
they should, at no time, however much buffeted by circumstances, forget  
that the synchronization of such world-shaking crises with the progressive  
unfoldment and fruition of their divinely appointed task is itself the work  
of Providence, the design of an inscrutable Wisdom, and the purpose of an  
all-compelling Will, a Will that directs and controls, in its own mysterious  
way, both the fortunes of the Faith and the destinies of men. Such simul-  
taneous processes of rise and of fall, of integration and of disintegration,  
of order and chaos, with their continuous and reciprocal reactions on each  
other, are but aspects of a greater Plan, one and indivisible, whose Source  
is God, whose author is Bahá’u’lláh, the theatre of whose operations is the  
entire planet, and whose ultimate objectives are the unity of the human race  
and the peace of all mankind.”[[221]](#footnote-221)183-4

183.9 Moreover, the beloved Guardian felt that: “Reflections such as these  
should steel the resolve of the entire Bahá’í community, should dissipate  
their forebodings, and arouse them to rededicate themselves to every single  
provision of that Divine Charter whose outline has been delineated for  
them by the pen of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.”[[222]](#footnote-222)183-5 By being attuned to this divine per-  
spective, your Assembly will be able to assist the friends to see that they will  
not merely be able to cope with the alarming incidents of social decline they  
are daily witnessing, but even better than that, they will be inspired to arise  
with renewed vision to recruit to Bahá’í membership an increasing number  
of men and women whose minds and hearts are ready to respond to the  
Divine Message and who will join them in dispelling the bewilderment and  
despair gripping their fellow citizens and undermining the structure of their  
country.

183.10 It is also vital for your Assembly to keep in mind that the mental anguish  
which the prevailing situation induces can and must be overcome through  
prayer and a conscious attention to teaching the Cause and living the Bahá’í  
life with a world-embracing vision. Certainly, the members of such a well

established community as yours, one enjoying the special favors providen-  
tially conferred upon it by the Tablets of the Divine Plan, do realize the  
urgency and seriousness of their task. Surely they see with what patient  
endurance the dear friends in the Cradle of the Faith are meeting their God-  
given challenges even to the extent of sacrificing their life’s blood so that  
the world may become a better place. Undoubtedly, the highly esteemed  
American believers, who bear the designation “spiritual descendants of the  
Dawn-breakers,”[[223]](#footnote-223)183-6 know quite well that they must now seize their chance  
at this critical time to prove their own capacity to endure that living sacrifice  
which, as Shoghi Effendi said, in contrast to dying, is required of them if  
they are to fulfill the glorious destiny forecast for them in the scriptures  
of our Faith. May they be granted the celestial strength to pass, over and  
over again, the mental tests which ‘Abdu’l-Bahá promised He would send to  
them to purify them, thus enabling them to achieve their divinely conferred  
potential as a force for change in the world.

183.11 In the arena of teaching, your indispensable terms of reference and the  
unerring resource to which you have ready access are the Master’s Tablets  
of the Divine Plan. They invest your community with extraordinary pow-  
ers shared by your sister community in Canada. It is in reacquainting the  
American friends with the special mission, both at home and abroad, as-  
signed to them in these seminal and timeless documents, and in relating  
their contents to current conditions, that you will find the key to the revital-  
ization of the teaching work and the winning of outstanding victories on the  
home front. In this effort you will be powerfully aided by the explanations  
provided in the letters of our dear Guardian, such as *The Advent of Divine  
Justice*, “The Challenging Requirements of the Present Hour,” “American  
Bahá’ís in the Time of World Peril.”[[224]](#footnote-224)183-7 We have every confidence that, to-  
gether with the Continental Counselors and the Auxiliary Board members,  
you can discover the way further to release the enormous energies of the  
friends and to intensify the zeal which they have so splendidly displayed in  
the teaching field on so many occasions in the past.

\* \* \*

183.12 We were very pleased by the sense you conveyed of an ever-closer rela-  
tionship between your Assembly and the Continental Counselors, and we  
were even more deeply impressed by your eagerness to know how you might  
strengthen this relationship. A beginning towards achieving your desire  
would be for you to obtain an integrated understanding of the Counselors’  
responsibilities and sphere of action in relation to your own.

183.13 As you know, a distinguishing feature of the Administrative Order is  
the existence of elected institutions, on the one hand, which function cor-  
porately with vested legislative, executive and judicial powers, and of ap-  
pointed, eminent and devoted believers, on the other hand, who function  
primarily as individuals for the specific purposes of protecting and propa-  
gating the Faith under the guidance of the Head of the Faith. The two sets  
of institutions collaborate in their functions so as to ensure the progress of  
the Cause. You are undoubtedly aware of the previous exposition of this  
subject; however, we offer the following comments to assist your further  
understanding of the matter.

183.14 The Continental Boards of Counselors and the National Spiritual As-  
semblies share in the functions of propagation and protection, but the  
Counselors specialize in these functions from a different level and in a dif-  
ferent manner. From a continental vantage point, the Counselors bring a  
perspective to their functions which, when offered to a National Assembly  
in the form of counsel, advice, recommendations, suggestions or commen-  
tary, enriches the latter’s understanding, acquaints it with a broader experi-  
ence than its own, and encourages it to maintain a world-embracing vision.

183.15 An aspect of the difference in the manner of functioning of the Counsel-  
ors derives from the instructions given in the Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-  
Bahá to the Hands of the Cause of God, the extension into the future of  
whose functions of protection and propagation is the responsibility of the  
Counselors. As appointees of the Universal House of Justice, the Counselors  
assist the Head of the Faith to broaden the base, foster the strength and  
ensure the security of the National Spiritual Assemblies and the institu-  
tions and communities under their jurisdiction. Through their Auxiliary  
Boards, the Continental Counselors spread the benefits of their functions to  
the Local Spiritual Assemblies and the grassroots of the community. These  
functions are shaped by their obligations, in the words of the Will and Tes-  
tament, “to diffuse the Divine Fragrances, to edify the souls of men, to

promote learning, to improve the character of all men and to be, at all times  
and under all conditions, sanctified and detached from earthly things.”[[225]](#footnote-225)183-8  
It can be seen, then, that through their work in propagating and protecting  
the Faith, the Counselors play a major role in knitting and bolstering the  
entire fabric of the Bahá’í community.

183.16 The flexibility and speed with which the Counselors and their Auxiliary  
Board members can respond to a perceived need in the community—such  
as a need for encouragement, explanation of plans, deepening in the Teach-  
ings, protection of the Covenant—are elements of their functioning which  
distinguish them from Spiritual Assemblies; this flexibility enables them to  
operate as occasions demand, whether it is in giving counsel at a meeting, or  
advising an individual in private, or helping the friends to understand and  
obey a ruling of the Spiritual Assembly, or dealing with issues of the Cov-  
enant. In such different modes these officers of the Faith are able to draw  
attention to relevant Texts, to impart information, explore situations, and  
acquaint themselves with conditions in ways not possible to a Spiritual As-  
sembly but important to the success of its plans. They are able then to share  
with Spiritual Assemblies, as deemed necessary, ideas, analyses, perceptions  
and advice which inevitably enhance the ability of these Assemblies to serve  
their communities. They thus assist Assemblies to mature. Where Local  
Assemblies are new or weak, Auxiliary Board members help them to under-  
stand their functions, encourage them to organize their work, and rally the  
local believers in support of their Assemblies’ initiatives.

183.17 Through the various modes of their activities, the Counselors aided by  
their Auxiliary Boards spark and buttress the growth and development of  
Spiritual Assemblies and local and national communities. With this per-  
spective, Shoghi Effendi’s regarding of the Auxiliary Board members as “a  
prop and mainstay to the often overworked and overburdened National  
Spiritual Assemblies” becomes clear. The indispensability of the involve-  
ment of Continental Counselors and Auxiliary Board members in the plan-  
ning stages of the teaching work and the benefits of acquainting them with  
the hopes and concerns of National Spiritual Assemblies and of seeking  
their advice are also obvious.

183.18 With the opening of the fourth epoch of the Formative Age, a procedure  
was activated by which the goals of national plans are formulated in joint  
consultations of National Spiritual Assemblies and Continental Counselors.

It initiated a new phase in the maturation of the Administrative Order. This  
development ensures two significant benefits in particular: It enables each  
institution to draw on the experiences and insights particular to the other,  
thereby making available to the planning process two distinct channels of  
information from two levels of Bahá’í administration; and it also assures to  
the Counselors a necessary familiarity with the background, rationale, and  
content of national plans, which as a matter of principle they are expected  
to support. Both institutions obtain strength from such collaboration, and  
we are particularly pleased that the designing of the Three Year Plan in  
the United States followed a pattern which involved the two arms of the  
administration in the manner you described to us.

183.19 While the Counselors and their Auxiliary Boards, in addition to the dis-  
charge of their specific responsibilities, will support the initiatives adopted  
by a National Spiritual Assembly, the Assembly should recognize that the  
Counselors must be free to determine, according to their own best judg-  
ment, in what manner that support will be given. There is a great difference  
between the functions of national committees and Auxiliary Board members  
in this respect. ‘Whereas the committees may be required by the Assembly  
to follow particular procedures, Auxiliary Board members are not similarly  
bound; yet they should not act in a manner that undermines the operations  
of the National Assembly or its agencies. This does not mean that Auxil-  
iary Board members may not decide, upon request or not, to participate in  
the execution of a particular program or educational project devised by a  
national committee, or even to contribute towards the conceptualization  
and fruition of the project. It does mean, however, that their prerogative to  
proceed within a wider latitude than that accessible to the national commit-  
tee should be respected.

183.20 By working at the grassroots of the community, an Auxiliary Board  
member is often able to satisfy a need not being met by any national or  
local program, but which if dealt with by the Auxiliary Board member will  
better equip the local friends to achieve the established goals of the com-  
munity. Such a flexibility on the part of the Auxiliary Board member in  
dealing with immediate situations, such a freedom for independent action,  
should be taken for granted by all concerned. However, a pattern of activity  
on the part of the Auxiliary Board member, or even of a Counselor, which  
appears to the National Assembly to be seriously diverting attention from  
the adopted plans of the community should unhesitatingly be made a mat-  
ter for remedial consultation with the Counselor.

183.21 The Counselors are members of a continental, as distinct from a na-  
tional, institution, and they occupy a rank higher than that of the National  
Spiritual Assembly. Apart from any other consideration, their rank is, in a  
practical sense, a functional necessity if these officers of the Faith are to be  
accorded freedom of the community at all levels and their advice and other  
functions are to be taken seriously. We have said in an earlier letter that “the  
existence of institutions of such exalted rank, comprising individuals who  
play such a vital role, who yet have no legislative, administrative or judicial  
authority, and are entirely devoid of priestly functions or the right to make  
authoritative interpretations, is a feature of Bahá’í administration unparal-  
leled in the religions of the past.”[[226]](#footnote-226)183-9 It is a difficult concept to grasp. But  
with the passage of time since the first contingent of Continental Counsel-  
ors was appointed, much understanding has surely been acquired.

183.22 Shoghi Effendi stated categorically to your Assembly: “There can be no  
conflict of authority, no duality under any form or circumstances in any  
sphere of Bahá’í jurisdiction whether local, national or international.”[[227]](#footnote-227)183-10  
The authority of a National Assembly is therefore not diminished but,  
rather, enhanced by the existence of the Continental Counselors, who are  
duty bound by the very character of their responsibilities as protectors of  
the Faith to uphold the rank and to support the authority of Spiritual As-  
semblies. Similarly, the National Assembly must, on the basis of principle  
and in its own best interest, ensure that Counselors and Auxiliary Board  
members are not hampered in carrying out their sacred responsibilities and  
that their right and freedom to function are upheld.

183.23 The attitude of these two institutions towards each other should be mo-  
tivated not merely by a legalistic application of the rules of their functional  
relationship. Far more is required, for they must, in the first place, approach  
their joint responsibilities within the framework of the spiritual requisites  
for all successful Bahá’í relationships. Where love, respect and courtesy are  
genuinely and mutually expressed, estrangement finds no accommodation  
and problems become soluble challenges. Bahá’u’lláh’s admonition is highly  
instructive in this regard; He says: “Abase not the station of the learned in  
Bahá and belittle not the rank of such rulers as administer justice amidst  
you.”[[228]](#footnote-228)183-11

183.24 Achieving a closer and more effective relationship between you and the  
Continental Counselors will depend on the cultivation of an incrementally  
harmonious attitude and on an openness in your dealings with them which  
this attitude will certainly facilitate. The relationship between you should  
be one of fellowship informed with a sense of respect but devoid of the  
rigid formalities associated with so many social organizations. When you  
have doubts and concerns about your own plans, confide in the Counselors;  
when something they do causes you worry, talk to them in the proper spirit  
of Bahá’í consultation. Remember that they, like yourselves, are burdened  
with the work of the Cause and are beset with many concerns in its service,  
and they need your sympathetic understanding of the challenges they face.  
Open your hearts and your minds to them; regard them as your confidants,  
your loving friends. And be ever ready to extend to them your hand in  
support.

183.25 The existence of a loving, trusting and informal atmosphere in your deal-  
ings with the Counselors should not, however, be allowed to relax adherence  
to the rules governing the working relationship between the Continental  
Board of Counselors and their Auxiliary Boards, on the one hand, and the  
National Spiritual Assembly and its committees, on the other. These mat-  
ters are explained in detail in our letter of 1 October 1969, which you have  
published.[[229]](#footnote-229)183-12

\* \* \*

183.26 We now wish to address the manner of your functioning as a National  
Spiritual Assembly. Your analysis of the situation identified the issues of im-  
mediate concern about the national administration of the Faith, such issues  
as: over-centralization, particularly with regard to the administration of the  
teaching work; your fear that you may be exercising a level of administrative  
control that may be stifling individual initiative throughout the country;  
and the relation of your Assembly to the community.

183.27 You live in a society caught in the tightening grip of moral decadence on  
a vast scale. But this should come as no surprise to you. It is the unavoid-  
able consequence of a pervasive godlessness; its symptoms and repercussions  
were described in painful detail by Shoghi Effendi in several of his letters to

the Western friends. Inevitably, the American Bahá’í community is affected  
by this condition to some extent. The corrosive influence of an overbearing  
and rampant secularization is infecting the style of administration of the  
Faith in your community and threatening to undermine its efficacy.

183.28 The aggressiveness and competitiveness which animate a dominantly  
capitalist culture; the partisanship inherent in a fervidly democratic system;  
the suspicion of public-policy institutions and the skepticism towards estab-  
lished authority ingrained in the political attitude of the people and which  
trace their origins to the genesis of American society; the cynical disregard  
of the moderating principles and rules of civilized human relationships re-  
sulting from an excessive liberalism and its immoral consequences—such  
unsavory characteristics inform entrenched habits of American life, which  
imperceptibly at first but more obviously in the long run have come to exert  
too great a sway over the manner of management of the Bahá’í community  
and over the behavior of portions of its rank and file in relation to the  
Cause. This unwholesome influence must be arrested by immediate, delib-  
erate effort—an effort which must surely begin within your Assembly itself.  
Further accommodation of it will severely impede the progress of your com-  
munity, despite the abundant possibilities of an imminent breakthrough.  
It was due to this concern in particular that we anxiously welcomed your  
request for a meeting with us.

183.29 The guarantee of well-being and success in all your endeavors to serve the  
Cause of God can be stated in one word: unity. It is the alpha and omega  
of all Bahá’í objectives. Among the first admonitions addressed to National  
Spiritual Assemblies by Shoghi Effendi was the following assertion: “It is, I  
firmly believe, of the utmost urgent importance that, with unity of purpose  
and action firmly established in our midst, and with every trace of animos-  
ity and mistrust of the past banished from our hearts, we should form one  
united front, and combat, wisely and tactfully, every force that might darken  
the spirit of the Movement, cause division in its ranks, and narrow it by  
dogmatic and sectarian belief.” He then stated that “it is primarily upon the  
elected members of the National Spiritual Assemblies throughout the Bahá’í  
world that this highly important duty devolves,” warning that, “should such a  
representative and responsible body fail to realize this fundamental requisite  
for all successful achievement, the whole structure is sure to crumble.”[[230]](#footnote-230)183-13

183.30 Unity within the Assembly itself is, of course, of immediate importance  
to the wider unity your actions are intended to foster and sustain. At no  
time can any member of your Assembly afford to be unmindful of this  
basic requirement nor neglect to work towards upholding it. Of particular  
relevance is the attitude that the members adopt towards their membership  
on that exalted body. There needs to be a recognition on their part of the  
Assembly’s spiritual character and a feeling in their hearts of respect for the  
institution based upon a perception of it as something beyond or apart from  
themselves, as a sacred entity whose powers they have the privilege to engage  
and canalize by coming together in harmony and acting in accordance with  
divinely revealed principles. With such a perspective the members will be  
able better to acquire an appropriate posture in relation to the Assembly  
itself, to appreciate their role as Trustees of the Merciful and to counteract  
any impression that they have assumed ownership and control of the insti-  
tution in the manner of major stockholders of a business enterprise.

183.31 Also relevant to effecting unity is the attitude of the friends, whether  
serving on any Assembly or not, towards the exercise of authority in the  
Bahá’í community. People generally tend to be suspicious of those in au-  
thority. The reason is not difficult to understand, since human history is  
replete with examples of the disastrous misuse of authority and power. A  
reversal of this tendency is not easily achievable, but the Bahá’í friends must  
be freed of suspicion towards their institutions if the wheels of progress are  
to turn with uninterrupted speed. A rigorous discipline of thought and ac-  
tion on the part of both the friends and the National Assembly will succeed  
in meeting this challenge; both must live up to their responsibilities in this  
regard by recognizing some fundamental realities.

183.32 The oneness of humanity, which is the primary principle and ultimate  
goal of the Cause of Bahá’u’lláh, implies, as Shoghi Effendi said, an “or-  
ganic change in the structure of present-day society.”[[231]](#footnote-231)183-14 So fundamental  
a change in the structural conception of society must also imply a new  
pattern for the administration of community affairs in a Bahá’í context. The  
insights offered by the beloved Guardian, as conveyed by his secretary in a  
letter dated 14 October 1941, shed light on this critical subject:

183.32a The friends must never mistake the Bahá’í administration for an  
end in itself. It is merely the instrument of the spirit of the Faith. This  
Cause is a Cause which God has revealed to humanity as a whole. It is  
designed to benefit the entire human race, and the only way it can do  
this is to reform the community life of mankind, as well as seeking to  
regenerate the individual. The Bahá’í Administration is only the first  
shaping of what in future will come to be the social life and laws of  
community living.[[232]](#footnote-232)183-15

Shoghi Effendi’s advice to an individual in another instance provides a fur-  
ther perspective: “He urges you to do all you can to promote unity and love  
amongst the members of the Community there, as this seems to be their  
greatest need. So often young communities, in their desire to administer the  
Cause, lose sight of the fact that these spiritual relationships are far more  
important and fundamental than the rules and regulations which must gov-  
ern the conduct of community affairs.”[[233]](#footnote-233)183-16

183.33 It can therefore be deduced that the importance of the Bahá’í administra-  
tion is its value in serving as a facilitator of the emergence and maintenance  
of community life in a wholly new mode, and in catering to the require-  
ments of the spiritual relationships which flow from love and unity among  
the friends. This touches upon a distinguishing characteristic of Bahá’í life  
which such spiritual relationships foster, namely, the spirit of servitude to  
God, expressed in service to the Cause, to the friends and to humanity as a  
whole. The attitude of the individual as a servant, an attitude pre-eminently  
exemplified in the life and person of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, is a dynamic that perme-  
ates the activities of the Faith; it acquires collective, transformative force in  
the normal functioning of a community. In this regard, the institutions of  
the Faith stand as channels for the promotion of this salient characteristic. It  
is in this framework that the concepts of rulership and leadership, authority  
and power are properly understood and actualized.

183.34 The appearance of a united, firmly based and self-sustaining community  
must be a major goal of a Spiritual Assembly. Composed of a membership  
reflecting a diversity of personalities, talents, abilities and interests, such a  
community requires a level of internal interaction between the Assembly

and the body of the believers based on a commonly recognized commitment  
to service, and in which a sense of partnership based on appreciation of  
each other’s distinctive sphere of action is fully recognized and unfailingly  
upheld, and no semblance of a dichotomy between the two appears. In such  
a community leadership is that expression of service by which the Spiritual  
Assembly invites and encourages the use of the manifold talents and abili-  
ties with which the community is endowed, and stimulates and guides the  
diverse elements of the community towards goals and strategies by which  
the effects of a coherent force for progress can be realized.

183.35 The maintenance of a climate of love and unity depends largely upon the  
feeling among the individuals composing the community that the Assembly  
is a part of themselves, that their cooperative interactions with that divinely  
ordained body allow them a fair latitude for initiative and that the quality  
of their relationships with both the institution and their fellow believers  
encourages a spirit of enterprise invigorated by an awareness of the revo-  
lutionizing purpose of Bahá’u’lláh’s Revelation, by a consciousness of the  
high privilege of their being associated with efforts to realize that purpose,  
and by a consequent, ever-present sense of joy. In such a climate, the com-  
munity is transformed from being the mere sum of its parts to assuming a  
wholly new personality as an entity in which its members blend without  
losing their individual uniqueness. The possibilities for manifesting such a  
transformation exist most immediately at the local level, but it is a major  
responsibility of the National Assembly to nurture the conditions in which  
they may flourish.

183.36 The authority to direct the affairs of the Faith locally, nationally and  
internationally, is divinely conferred on elected institutions. However, the  
power to accomplish the tasks of the community resides primarily in the  
mass of the believers. The authority of the institutions is an irrevocable  
necessity for the progress of humanity; its exercise is an art to be mastered.  
The power of action in the believers is unlocked at the level of individual  
initiative and surges at the level of collective volition. In its potential, this  
mass power, this mix of individual potentialities, exists in a malleable form  
susceptible to the multiple reactions of individuals to the sundry influences  
at work in the world. To realize its highest purpose, this power needs to  
express itself through orderly avenues of activity. Even though individuals  
may strive to be guided in their actions by their personal understanding of  
the Divine Texts, and much can be accomplished thereby, such actions,  
untempered by the overall direction provided by authorized institutions, are

incapable of attaining the thrust necessary for the unencumbered advance-  
ment of civilization.

183.37 Individual initiative is a preeminent aspect of this power; it is therefore  
a major responsibility of the institutions to safeguard and stimulate it.  
Similarly, it is important for individuals to recognize and accept that the  
institutions must act as a guiding and moderating influence on the march of  
civilization. In this sense, the divine requirement that individuals obey the  
decisions of their Assemblies can clearly be seen as being indispensable to  
the progress of society. Indeed, individuals must not be abandoned entirely  
to their own devices with respect to the welfare of society as a whole, neither  
should they be stifled by the assumption of a dictatorial posture by members  
of the institutions.

183.38 The successful exercise of authority in the Bahá’í community implies the  
recognition of separate but mutually reinforcing rights and responsibilities  
between the institutions and the friends in general, a recognition that in  
turn welcomes the need for cooperation between these two interactive forces  
of society. As was stated in advice given by Shoghi Effendi: “The individuals  
and assemblies must learn to cooperate, and to cooperate intelligently, if  
they desire to adequately discharge their duties and obligations towards the  
Faith. And no such cooperation is possible without mutual confidence and  
trust.”[[234]](#footnote-234)183-17

183.39 Direction comes from Assembly decisions, but its effectiveness depends  
not only on the clarity with which it is given but also on a number of  
spiritual and moral factors which must be blended in the general attitude of  
the individual believers, on the one hand, and the manner and style of the  
functioning of the Assembly, on the other. The following advice of Shoghi  
Effendi, addressed in an early letter to the Western friends, deals with these  
two aspects:

183.39a Let us also bear in mind that the keynote to the Cause of God is not  
dictatorial authority, but humble fellowship, not arbitrary power, but  
the spirit of frank and loving consultation. Nothing short of the spirit  
of a true Bahá’í can hope to reconcile the principles of mercy and  
justice, of freedom and submission, of the sanctity of the right of the

individual and of self-surrender, of vigilance, discretion and prudence  
on the one hand and fellowship, candor and courage on the other.

183.39b The duties of those whom the friends have freely and conscien-  
tiously elected as their representatives are no less vital and binding  
than the obligations of those who have chosen them. Their function is  
not to dictate, but to consult, and consult not only among themselves,  
but as much as possible with the friends whom they represent. They  
must regard themselves in no other light but that of chosen instru-  
ments for a more efficient and dignified presentation of the Cause of  
God. They should never be led to suppose that they are the central  
ornaments of the body of the Cause, intrinsically superior to others in  
capacity or merit, and sole promoters of its teachings and principles.  
They should approach their task with extreme humility, and endeavor  
by their open-mindedness, their high sense of justice and duty, their  
candor, their modesty, their entire devotion to the welfare and in-  
terests of the friends, the Cause, and humanity, to win not only the  
confidence and the genuine support and respect of those whom they  
should serve, but also their esteem and real affection.[[235]](#footnote-235)183-18

183.40 These instructions of the beloved Guardian get to the very heart of what  
must be more deeply internalized by the members of your Assembly at this  
time. We repeat for emphasis the terms “extreme humility,” “open-mind-  
edness,” “candor,” “modesty”; and we underscore the openness which is  
implicit in candor, because the cooperation which must be fostered between  
your Assembly and the friends will depend significantly on the degree to  
which, with wise discretion, you share your concerns with the community.  
Your greatest opportunity for this is the annual National Convention, when  
the representatives of the entire community come together to consult with  
you. It is not sufficient that you give only good news and encouraging sta-  
tistics to the delegates. Do as Shoghi Effendi advised you: “Banishing every  
vestige of secrecy, of undue reticence, of dictatorial aloofness, from their  
midst, they should radiantly and abundantly unfold to the eyes of the del-  
egates, by whom they are elected, their plans, their hopes, and their cares.  
They should familiarize the delegates with the various matters that will have

to be considered in the current year, and calmly and conscientiously study  
and weigh the opinions and judgments of the delegates.”[[236]](#footnote-236)183-19

183.41 Even if the delegates find themselves unable to offer useful recommenda-  
tions toward the resolution of particular issues, by your bringing them into  
your confidence, they will develop an appreciation, as would be impos-  
sible otherwise, of the serious matters confronting the Cause. With this  
understanding, they will be equipped to assist the community to respond  
effectively to your decisions, no matter how challenging these may turn out  
to be. Moreover, it will relieve you of any overwhelming sense of burden  
to know that such a responsible body of believers shares your innermost  
concerns; and even more than that, the effect of your openness will be to  
strengthen the delegates’ support of your authority, which it is their sacred  
duty to give. Besides, as it is neither possible nor practicable for your As-  
sembly to meet with all the believers, nor for the members to be constantly  
traveling throughout the community, the friends’ feeling that you are re-  
mote can be ameliorated, though not entirely removed, by the effectiveness  
of your interactions with the delegates.

183.42 In your openness and candor you will, no doubt, avoid ineptitudes that  
pass as norms in the freedom of speech practiced in your nation. In a society  
where “telling it like it is” employs a style of expression which robs language  
of its decorum, and in a time when stridency is commonly presumed to be  
a quality of leadership, candor is crass, and authority speaks in a loud and  
vulgar voice. People are frequently obliged to receive direction from their  
leaders in such disrespectful modes; this is a reason for resentment and sus-  
picion towards those in authority. By contrast, Bahá’í institutions have the  
task of accustoming the friends to recognizing the expression of authority  
in language at a moderate pitch.

183.43 It would be impossible to overestimate the obligation resting upon you to  
refine your dealings with the community in the ways already described. You  
cannot at any time afford to forget that the manner of the use of authority  
is critical to the success of your work. With this in mind, you must also  
attend seriously to the behavior of those, more particularly your officers,  
who must of necessity act on your behalf in carrying out your decisions  
and conveying your instructions to others. Further, it is sometimes the case  
that staff members at your National Center, in their eagerness to be exactly

and completely obedient, carry out the instruction of your Assembly with  
a sharpness of manner and tone that hurts people and provokes resentment  
against the very body the staff are striving to serve with loyalty and devotion.  
The staff should be sensitized to the situation and made to realize, through  
your loving and persistent guidance, that the spiritual requisites for good  
and respectful relations with others must be conscientiously applied in their  
interactions with the friends because to do so is not only virtuous in itself  
but will also minimize the incidence of bad feeling towards your Assembly.

183.44 The temperament of authority in the administration of justice varies ac-  
cording to the degree of the gravity of each case. Some cases require that  
the Assembly take action that is firm or drastic. Even so, Assembly members  
have always to be mindful that the authority they wield must in general  
be expressed with love, humility and a genuine respect for others. Thus  
exercised, authority strikes a natural note and accords with that which is  
acceptable to spiritually attuned and fair-minded souls. The following guid-  
ance of Shoghi Effendi, as conveyed by his secretary, is especially relevant:  
“The administrators of the Faith of God must be like unto shepherds. Their  
aim should be to dispel all the doubts, misunderstandings and harmful dif-  
ferences which may arise in the community of the believers. And this they  
can adequately achieve provided they are motivated by a true sense of love  
for their fellow-brethren coupled with firm determination to act with justice  
in all cases which are submitted to them for their consideration.”[[237]](#footnote-237)183-20

183.45 Do clearly bear in mind that our emphasis of the spiritual requisites of  
your functioning is not a mere expression of pious idealism. Far, far from it.  
Their exclusion from public discourse and from the considerations of world  
leaders largely accounts for the current state of society. Indeed, they are as  
practical in effect as they are spiritual in essence. Employ them consciously,  
constantly, confidently; and see how your actions will attract the confirma-  
tions of the Holy Spirit in the response of the community.

183.46 As to your worry about over-controlling the friends: by appreciating the  
nature of the power of action which they possess, you will be able to gauge  
how best to guide and direct them. A wide latitude for action must be al-  
lowed them, which means that a large margin for mistakes must also be  
allowed. Your National Assembly and the Local Assemblies must not re-  
act automatically to every mistake, but distinguish between those that are

self-correcting with the passage of time and do no particular harm to the  
community and those which require Assembly intervention. Related to this  
is the tendency of the friends to criticize each other at the slightest provoca-  
tion, whereas the Teachings call upon them to encourage each other. Such  
tendencies are of course motivated by a deep love for the Faith, a desire to  
see it free of any flaw. But human beings are not perfect. The Local As-  
semblies and the friends must be helped through your example and through  
loving counsel to refrain from such a pattern of criticism, which stunts the  
growth and development of the community. You should also be fearful of  
laying down too many rules and regulations. The Cause is not so fragile  
that a degree of mistakes cannot be tolerated. When you feel that certain  
actions may become trends with harmful consequences, you may, instead  
of making a new rule, discuss the matter with the Counselors, enlisting  
their support in educating the friends in a manner that will improve their  
understanding and their conduct.

183.47 A new burst of energy would accrue to the operation of the Three Year  
Plan if the friends, both individually and collectively, could feel a greater  
sense of freedom to engage in a wide range of activities originating with  
themselves. Even if you are doing nothing deliberately to discourage such  
freedom, their accumulated impression of institutional disapproval, how-  
ever derived, and their fear of criticism are, to a considerable extent, in-  
hibiting their exercise of initiative. At this exact time in history when the  
peoples of the world are weighed down with soul-crushing difficulties and  
the shadow of despair threatens to eclipse the light of hope, there must  
be revived among the individual believers a sense of mission, a feeling of  
empowerment to minister to the urgent need of humanity for guidance  
and thus to win victories for the Faith in their own sphere of life. The com-  
munity as a whole should be involved in efforts to resolve such issues. A  
single answer would, of course, be inadequate, there being so many diverse  
elements and interests in the community. These matters require not only  
your own independent consultation but consultation with the Counselors  
as well. Although Spiritual Assemblies are good at specifying goals, they  
have not yet mastered the art of making use of the talents of individuals  
and rousing the mass of the friends to action in fulfillment of such goals.  
Removing this deficiency would be a mark of the maturation of these insti-  
tutions. May your Assembly lead the way.

183.48 A further decentralization of the national administration would increase  
the possibility of loosening control at the top and encouraging the involve-

ment of individuals in the work of the community at the grassroots. We  
therefore welcome your intention to take such action. However, you may  
wish to do this in incremental steps rather than in one sweeping motion.  
The matter is left entirely to your judgment. It may encourage you to know  
that in a few countries where the challenge of administering the teach-  
ing work and providing other administrative services assumed formidable  
proportions, various approaches have been used to achieve a measure of  
decentralization. A detailed description of some of these approaches will be  
sent to you separately.

\* \* \*

183.49 Having said all the foregoing, we pause to assure you of our full aware-  
ness of the great burdens you carry and of the ceaseless calls upon you to  
render services in the absence of adequate resources. Do not despair. Your  
capacity to respond will match any challenge that may confront you in  
these troubled times; you have only to act on principle. Your community’s  
past has been glorious; its future is great beyond calculation. The divine  
promises to your community are certain; the blessings of Bahá’u’lláh are  
assured as you strive to fulfill His purpose. The wings of the beloved Mas-  
ter remain spread over you that you may succeed in discharging the tasks  
He has especially entrusted to your care. And our love ever surrounds you  
and your cherished community, growing stronger at every moment. Step  
forward then to meet the requirements of the hour with undiminished hope  
and confidence.

183.50 The power released by Bahá’u’lláh works at a quickening pace, speeding  
the processes of change which must usher in the new order He proclaimed.  
The declining state of society demonstrates it, the global yearning for new  
solutions to human problems confirms it. Much is at stake: the fortunes of  
humankind hang precariously in the balance. The Bahá’í community bears  
grave responsibilities toward the near and far future as movement towards  
the Lesser Peace accelerates. Now is the time for the friends to seize new  
opportunities to extend the range and influence of the Faith, to reach a new  
level of action in expanding the community and fortifying its foundations.  
It is indeed time for audacious action undeterred by a fear of mistakes, fired  
by the urgency of ministering to the pressing needs of humanity. Will the  
American Bahá’í community not see its chance to meet the challenge? Will

its members not once again blaze a trail that can set in motion a myriad  
victories?

183.51 Our ardent petition at the Holy Threshold is that the response of the  
champion-builders of the New World Order will be immediate, whole-  
hearted and abundantly confirmed.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

184  
Availability of electronic versions of Sacred Writings

31 MAY 1994

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

184.1 On 7 April 1994, it was announced to various computer user groups that  
electronic versions of a number of the Sacred Writings were available for  
downloading from a computer at the Bahá’í World Center.

184.2 Within the first three days of operation, over one thousand copies of the  
books in electronic format were transferred to computers around the world.

184.3 The system being used is known as FTP (File Transfer Protocol). It allows  
those with the appropriate programs on their own computers to connect via  
the Internet directly to the FTP Server at the Bahá’í World Center. They can  
then see a list of the Bahá’í books available electronically from the World  
Center, and copy them into their own computers.

184.4 The text files have been reduced to their simplest form (known as ASCII,  
an international standard format recognized by most computers), then  
“compressed” to save computer space and transmission time. When copied  
to another computer they are uncompressed and become basic, readable  
files. Other computer programs owned by the users can then be used to  
conduct word searches and similar functions on the text ….

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

185  
Responsibility of delegates to a National Convention

25 JULY 1994

To a National Spiritual Assembly

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

185.1 The Universal House of Justice has received your letter of 28 June 1994  
concerning the extraordinary behavior of one of the delegates at your recent  
National Convention.

185.2 How to deal with this situation would depend to some degree upon the  
believer in question; for example, whether he is a new and inexperienced  
Bahá’í or a long-time believer who would be expected to know better. This  
is a matter within your jurisdiction, but if you require any further advice  
from the Universal House of Justice on the specific case, you will need to  
provide it with more detailed information. In general it would, of course, be  
desirable for you to try to clarify the principles for this friend and help him  
to understand his responsibilities. At the same time you will wish to try to  
ascertain the reasons for his behavior so that you can assist him to overcome  
his problems.

185.3 To assist you in consulting with this friend, we enclose a few extracts  
from passages relating to the responsibilities of delegates to a National  
Bahá’í Convention.

185.4 Of all the responsibilities resting upon a delegate, that of voting for the  
members of the National Spiritual Assembly is clearly the most weighty. In  
carrying out this duty, the delegate must, prayerfully and conscientiously,  
vote for those whom he judges best fit the qualifications that the beloved  
Guardian has outlined for those who are to serve on Spiritual Assemblies  
and, in making this choice, he must be left free from every external influ-  
ence by either individual believers or Bahá’í institutions. If he states that  
he has difficulty in thinking of nine Bahá’ís who measure up to the high  
standards mentioned, he could be referred to the following passage written  
on behalf of the Guardian to a National Spiritual Assembly on 24 October  
1947:

185.4a In regard to your question about qualifications of delegates and  
Assembly members: the qualifications which he outlined are really ap-

plicable to anyone we elect to a Bahá’í office, whatever its nature. But  
these are only an indication, they do not mean people who don’t fulfill  
them cannot be elected to office. We must aim as high as we can. He  
does not feel the friends should attach so much importance to limi-  
tations—such as people perhaps not being able to attend Assembly  
or Convention meetings, because if they do, then the fundamental  
concept of everyone being willing to do Bahá’í service on administra-  
tive bodies will be weakened, and the friends may be tempted to vote  
for those who because of independent means or circumstances in their  
lives are freer to come and go but less qualified to serve.[[238]](#footnote-238)185-1

185.5 For a delegate to walk out of the convention hall at the time of the elec-  
tion would seem to indicate a disdain for the electoral process and a public  
abdication of his responsibilities, which would be quite improper. It is en-  
tirely within the authority of the National Spiritual Assembly to inquire the  
reason for such extraordinary behavior, inasmuch as it has the responsibility  
for the proper conduct of the Convention.

185.6 Furthermore, one of the responsibilities of a delegate is to report back  
from the Convention to the district by which he was elected. If this particu-  
lar delegate does not explain to his electors the reason for his failure to vote,  
your Assembly would be fully entitled to report the occurrence to them.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

186  
Visit to the Bahá’í World Center  
by the President of the Seychelles

26 JULY 1994

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

186.1 We take great pleasure in sharing the news of the visit to the Bahá’í World  
Center on 22 and 23 July of His Excellency France Albert René, President  
of the Republic of the Seychelles. President René was welcomed by the

members of the Universal House of Justice for consultations in the Coun-  
cil Chamber. These discussions, which he had requested, lasted just under  
two hours and dealt both with issues affecting global peace and important  
development challenges facing the Seychelles. They were marked by a spirit  
of candor and great cordiality.

186.2 Highly gratifying, too, was the presence at the World Center of His Ex-  
cellency’s wife, Sarah, their young daughter, Ella, and Mrs. René’s parents,  
Mr. and Mrs. ‘Abdu’l Rahman Zarqani. The First Lady and her parents are  
Bahá’ís, and Mr. Zarqani is a Knight of Bahá’u’lláh for the Seychelles islands.

186.3 During the course of the two days spent at the World Center, the presi-  
dential party was able to visit the Shrines of both Bahá’u’lláh and the Báb,  
as well as several other Bahá’í Holy Places. On the first evening, a formal  
dinner was offered in His Excellency’s honor in the Banquet Hall of the  
Seat of the House of Justice. In addition to our guests, who included the  
Mayor of Haifa and his wife, the dinner was graced by the presence of the  
Hands of the Cause of God Amatu’l-Bahá Rúḥíyyih Khánum and Mr. ‘Alí-  
Akbar Furútan. On this occasion, as throughout the visit, President René  
expressed a lively appreciation of the relevance of the Bahá’í Teachings and  
of the contribution that the Seychellois Bahá’í community is making to his  
country.

186.4 This historic event brings perceptibly closer that future age envisioned by  
Shoghi Effendi when “embodiments of kingly power” from every part of the  
world will eagerly visit the World Center of the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

187  
Improving our understanding of the Cause of God

1 AUGUST 1994

To an individual Bahá’í

Dear Bahá’í Friend,

187.1 Your letter of 18 July 1994 has been received by the Universal House of  
Justice, which has asked us to send the following reply ….

187.2 You have asked how you can “overcome [your] view of the Faith as  
flawed.” Your comment correctly locates the difficulty, which inheres not  
in the Faith, in itself perfect, but in the inability of the finite human mind

to fully grasp the import and perfection of the Teachings. Given the tre-  
mendous variety of culture and individual type, it should be clear upon  
reflection to any fair-minded observer that the Revelation of God cannot  
accord with all of the theories, whims and desiderata of mankind, which are  
in a constant state of flux and are the product of limited human aspirations,  
very often corrupted by selfish motives. Nor could it possibly be true that  
the Revelation as a whole would necessarily appear to a given observer to be  
in every way a perfect tapestry, according with one’s subjective concepts of  
beauty, elegance, coherence, order, rationality, etc.

187.3 Thus, it would not be surprising if, during the course of one’s life and  
as one’s understanding and perspective evolves, from time to time one finds  
aspects of the Faith that seem in conflict with one’s best understanding,  
particularly insofar as that understanding is informed by the broader society  
or culture around oneself. How one responds to such episodes is of critical  
importance to the maintenance of one’s faith. The task is to seek a larger  
context in which to understand the issue which is disturbing and to seek to  
prayerfully accept what one cannot for the time being understand. This is  
different from adopting an antirational or romantic posture whereby one  
believes in all sorts of nonsense. Quite to the contrary, what one is doing in  
such a case is accepting the Teachings of One whose authority is acknowl-  
edged to be from God. This is the light of faith which enables a believer to  
weather difficult situations in which he cannot see his way clearly by the  
light of reason alone. It is an attitude which flows from a recognition of the  
finite nature of one’s own mind and the inevitable limitations of one’s expe-  
rience. Bahá’u’lláh Himself urges us in the Hidden Words to “Pass beyond  
the baser stages of doubt and rise to the exalted heights of certainty.”[[239]](#footnote-239)187-1

187.4 Consider, when one looks about at the world and at the condition into  
which its peoples have fallen and the untold agony of human suffering, what  
could have caused such a lamentable state of affairs? Is it not a fair assump-  
tion that the reigning materialist worldview, with its inordinate emphasis  
on individual liberty and its discounting of ordering norms and mores, is at  
least partly to blame? Again, in *Gleanings*, Bahá’u’lláh writes: “Regard men  
as a flock of sheep that need a shepherd for their protection.”[[240]](#footnote-240)187-2 He also  
admonishes us:

187.4a Regard the world as the human body which, though at its creation  
whole and perfect, hath been afflicted, through various causes, with  
grave disorders and maladies. Not for one day did it gain ease, nay its  
sickness waxed more severe, as it fell under the treatment of ignorant  
physicians, who gave full rein to their personal desires, and have erred  
grievously. And if, at one time, through the care of an able physician,  
a member of that body was healed, the rest remained afflicted as be-  
fore. Thus informeth you the All-Knowing, the All Wise.[[241]](#footnote-241)187-3

187.5 If one extends this line of thinking yet a little further, is it not conceiv-  
able that many, if not most, of those who mould public opinion on issues  
such as sexuality are themselves steeped in a climate of thinking which in-  
fluences and biases their reading of scientific evidence? To what degree then,  
one might ask, does this climate of opinion color the way one perceives the  
Revelation itself? This argument is suggested to you as a stimulus to your  
thinking as you grapple with the problem referred to in your letter. The  
intent is not to cast general aspersions on the entire scientific community  
or to suggest that there are not many reliable and clear-thinking leaders of  
public opinion.

187.6 A few things which one encounters in the Teachings do not lend them-  
selves to rational analysis at all, but must be accepted in a spirit of deep  
faith. The ineligibility of women for service on the Universal House of  
Justice is one such instance. However, here again, the important thing is to  
view this fact within the larger context of what our Teachings actually say  
about the role of women and the role of men.

187.7 As you strive to acquire a fuller understanding of the Teachings, be as-  
sured of the loving prayers of the House of Justice in the Holy Shrines on  
your behalf.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

188  
Message to the World Forestry Charter gathering

7 AUGUST 1994

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

188.1 We take pleasure in sharing with you news of the highly successful World  
Forestry Charter Gathering held at St. James’s Palace, Thursday, 28 July, in  
the presence of Amatu’l-Bahá Rúḥíyyih Khánum and H.R.H. The Prince  
Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, who were the two principal speakers. Amatu’l-  
Bahá’s brief and radiant address on the spiritual dimensions of the environ-  
mental challenge, which cited words of Bahá’u’lláh as the inspiration for her  
own devotion to the environmental cause, was several times interrupted by  
the warm applause of her listeners. For his part, Prince Philip used the oc-  
casion to issue an urgent call for a legally binding international convention  
to halt reckless deforestation of the planet.

188.2 Among the more than two hundred distinguished guests at the luncheon  
and the reception that followed were ambassadors and other diplomats,  
representatives of major environmental protection organizations, and  
prominent personalities in government, business and the professions. The  
government of the United Kingdom participated through a statement from  
Prime Minister John Major, read by the Secretary of State for Environmen-  
tal Affairs. Messages of support and encouragement were received from  
seventeen governments, the one from President Bill Clinton of the United  
States capturing succinctly the vision that animated the gathering, that, in  
the protection and sustainable management of the earth’s forests, there are  
no borders.

188.3 The idea of regular gatherings to focus government and media attention  
on preservation of the world’s forests was begun in 1945 by Dr. Richard St.  
Barbe Baker, a well-known member of the Bahá’í Faith and an internation-  
ally renowned pioneer in the field of ecology. The tradition was revived  
on the one hundredth anniversary of his birth in 1989 by the Bahá’í Inter-  
national Community acting in collaboration with the International Tree  
Foundation (formerly “Men of the Trees”), the Worldwide Fund for Nature,  
the United Nations Environment Program, and Dr. Baker’s literary execu-  
tor, Mr. Hugh Locke.

188.4 Bahá’í leadership in the initiative won generous praise in the address  
given to this year’s gathering by His Royal Highness and in several messages  
from heads of state and government.

188.5 You are welcome to share this information with the friends in your  
community.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

189  
Progress of the Mount Carmel Project Fund

12 SEPTEMBER 1994

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

189.1 The Universal House of Justice has asked us to inform you of the progress  
being made towards raising the US$74,000,000 called for in contributions  
to the Mount Carmel Projects.

189.2 During the first year of the Three Year Plan, as a result of the self-  
sacrificing efforts of the friends throughout the world, a total of almost  
sixteen million dollars was contributed to the Arc Projects Fund, equivalent  
to nearly 1,800 units of nine thousand dollars each. During the course of  
the year the volume of contributions grew at a progressively increasing rate,  
showing the friends’ eager response to the letter of 31 October 1993 written  
on behalf of the Universal House of Justice in which mention was made of  
units of $9,000.

189.3 A total of over $7,500,000 was contributed during the three months  
of February through April 1994. If the friends can maintain this level of  
devoted sacrifice during the remaining two years of the Plan, they will tri-  
umphantly raise the fifty-eight million dollars which remain to be provided  
to meet the goal.

189.4 The rate of contributions dropped considerably in the months of May  
and June, to only just over 40% of the needed monthly average. However,  
the early months of an administrative year often show a lower level of con-  
tributions, and it is the ardent prayer of the Universal House of Justice that  
the followers of Bahá’u’lláh in every land will keep the high importance  
and urgency of this great undertaking always in their thoughts and prayers,

and will exert every effort to ensure that the goal is met and there will be no  
cause for a halt in the work.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

190  
Increasing urgency of the goals of the Three Year Plan

20 OCTOBER 1994

To the Bahá’ís of the World

190.1 At this midpoint in the Three Year Plan, we feel moved to offer thanksgiv-  
ing to Bahá’u’lláh on behalf of His followers in every land for the abundant,  
unfailing signs of His life-giving confirmations. We rejoice particularly at  
the significant response to the call for pioneers and traveling teachers and  
are heartened by the sacrificial outpourings in support of the majestic proj-  
ects on the Mountain of the Lord.

190.2 The time now remaining is short indeed. Swift, concentrated action  
is imperative if crucial national goals are to be achieved in fulfillment of  
the vital overall objectives of the Plan. We especially appeal to our fellow  
Bahá’ís everywhere to mount a mightier effort than ever before in offering  
the Message of Bahá’u’lláh to increasing numbers of their compatriots, and  
in inviting them to investigate and embrace His Cause. Growing suffering  
and turmoil of humankind call for a commensurate acceleration in the op-  
eration of the healing and unifying energies of God’s holy Cause.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

191  
Formation of five new National Spiritual Assemblies

7 DECEMBER 1994

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

191.1 With joyful hearts we announce the formation next Riḍván of five new  
National Spiritual Assemblies. One will be in Africa: Eritrea with its seat in  
Asmara; two in Asia: Armenia with its seat in Yerevan and Georgia with its

seat in Tbilisi; and two in Europe: Belarus with its seat in Minsk and Sicily  
with its seat in Palermo.

191.2 The Regional Spiritual Assembly of Russia, Georgia and Armenia will  
then become the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of the Russian  
Federation, and the Regional Spiritual Assembly of the Ukraine, Belarus,  
and Moldova will become the Regional Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of  
the Ukraine and Moldova.

191.3 Moreover, a simultaneous occurrence will be the merging of the Bahá’í  
communities of Bophuthatswana, Ciskei, South Africa and Transkei under  
the one National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of South Africa, to re-  
flect the recent political reunion of that region.

191.4 These thrilling prospects denote the quickening pace of the consolida-  
tion process in different parts of the world, making possible a further thrust  
in the evolution of the wondrous System originated by the Lord of the  
Age for ordering the affairs and ultimately guaranteeing the peace of the  
entire planet. In their contemplation of such impending victories, may the  
friends everywhere derive fresh encouragement to increase and accelerate  
their manifold efforts in spreading the Message of Bahá’u’lláh in all regions.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

192  
Questions regarding translation of Sacred Writings

15 DECEMBER 1994

To an individual Bahá’í

Dear Bahá’í Friend,

192.1 Your letter of 20 September 1994 to …, concerning the degrees of  
authority possessed by Bahá’í historical sources, the process by which trans-  
lations are authorized, the development of a “canon of Bahá’í doctrine,”  
the status of documents prepared by the Research Department, and your  
request for various materials, was forwarded to the Universal House of Jus-  
tice for its consideration. We are instructed to make the following reply  
to your questions numbered two, three and five. The remaining questions  
were referred to the Research Department for study. The enclosed memo-  
randum and attachments represent the result of the deliberations of that  
Department.

192.2 Your questions concerning translation revolve around two major issues:  
the process by which new translations into the English language are autho-  
rized and the authority of the translations of Shoghi Effendi. We are asked  
to state that a translation is regarded as authorized when it is approved by  
one or more translation committees appointed by the Universal House of  
Justice. While members of the Research Department may well, from time to  
time, be appointed to serve on such a translation committee, the authoriza-  
tion of new translations is currently not one of the responsibilities assigned  
to the Research Department by the House of Justice. Further, the approval  
of a translation does not mean that improvements or amendments cannot  
be made to it in the future. As you, yourself, note, even Shoghi Effendi  
described his translation of the Kitáb-i-Íqán as

192.2a … one more attempt to introduce to the West, in a language however  
inadequate, this book of unsurpassed pre-eminence among the writ-  
ings of the Author of the Bahá’í Revelation. The hope is that it may  
assist others in their efforts to approach what must always be regarded  
as the unattainable goal—a befitting rendering of Bahá’u’lláh’s match-  
less utterance.[[242]](#footnote-242)192-1

192.3 As to the policy concerning the publication of new translations of the  
Writings made by individual Bahá’ís, we are instructed to convey the fact  
that translations into English and revisions of earlier translations in that lan-  
guage must be checked by a translation committee at the Bahá’í World Cen-  
ter and officially approved for publication. While individuals are permitted  
to paraphrase or describe the contents of the passages they have translated  
and to include them in their manuscripts, without reference to the World  
Center, new translations need to be submitted to the Universal House of  
Justice for checking and approval prior to publication. The importance of  
this policy lies in the fact that translations into most other languages are  
based on the approved English texts and are not made directly or solely from  
the original texts. There have been, however, occasions when the House of  
Justice has permitted the publication of provisional translations made by  
individuals whose work is known to it. In these cases the translations usually

appear in scholarly or other publications of limited distribution and are not  
likely to be used as a basis for translations into other languages.

192.4 You ask whether the translations of Shoghi Effendi should be consid-  
ered as the “standard” and whether, because of his function as infallible  
interpreter, the Guardian’s translations provide “the true interpretation of  
the Writings.” We are asked to call attention to the Introduction to *The  
Kitáb-i-Aqdas* where the Universal House of Justice describes the essential  
qualities of the Guardian’s translations and the fact that they “are illumined  
by his uniquely inspired understanding of the purport and implications of  
the originals.”[[243]](#footnote-243)192-2

192.5 In view of your observations that “the chain of interpretation is unbro-  
ken, from the Báb to Bahá’u’lláh to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to Shoghi Effendi,” and  
that “the ‘authorized’ interpretation of the Writings ends with the Guard-  
ian,” you ask about the possibility of establishing a “canon of Bahá’í doc-  
trine which could then be regarded as ‘authorized’ and ‘official,’” and which  
would serve as a means by which “truth could be separated from falsehood  
according to the divinely revealed and interpreted standard.” In this regard,  
the House of Justice asks us to state that, while it would be possible to  
codify and cross-reference the Bahá’í teachings, it would also be impor-  
tant to take into account such functions assigned to the Universal House  
of Justice in the Bahá’í Writings as its role in elucidating all matters “which  
have not outwardly been revealed in the Book” and in ensuring the essential  
flexibility of the Cause.[[244]](#footnote-244)192-3

192.6 The elucidations of the Universal House of Justice stem from its legisla-  
tive function, and as such differ from interpretation. The divinely inspired  
legislation of the House of Justice does not attempt to say what the revealed  
Word means—it states what must be done in cases where the revealed Text  
or its authoritative interpretation is not explicit. It is, therefore, on quite a  
different level from the sacred Text, and the Universal House of Justice is  
empowered to abrogate or amend its own legislation whenever it judges the  
conditions make this desirable.

192.7 As to your question concerning whether the translations, compilations  
and other works prepared by the Research Department at the Bahá’í World  
Center should be considered as partaking in the infallibility of the Universal

House of Justice and, therefore, constituting the “final word,” the House  
of Justice indicates that such materials, though prepared at its direction,  
represent the views of that Department. While such views are very useful  
as an aid to resolving perplexities or gaining an enhanced understanding of  
the Bahá’í teachings, they should never be taken to be in the same category  
as the elucidations and clarifications provided by the Universal House of  
Justice in the exercise of its assigned functions. However, the House of Jus-  
tice chooses to convey the materials prepared by the Research Department  
to the friends because it wishes them to be thoughtfully attended to and  
seriously considered.

192.8 We are asked to assure you of the prayers of the Universal House of  
Justice that your services to the Cause will be confirmed.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

193  
Progress of Mount Carmel projects

30 DECEMBER 1994

To the followers of Bahá’u’lláh in every land

193.1 CONTRIBUTIONS RECEIVED FOR MOUNT CARMEL PROJECTS SINCE LAUNCHING  
THREE YEAR PLAN NOW TOTAL SOME TWENTY-SIX MILLION DOLLARS. FORTY-EIGHT  
MILLION REMAIN TO BE RAISED TO MEET GOAL OF SEVENTY-FOUR MILLION DOL-  
LARS BY RIḌVÁN 1996.

193.2 IMMENSE ENTERPRISE GATHERING MOMENTUM; CONSTRUCTION INTERNATION-  
AL TEACHING CENTER COMMENCED; CENTER FOR STUDY OF TEXTS PROGRESSING  
WITH FULL FORCE, RISING IN CERTAIN AREAS BEYOND FOURTH LEVEL; TERRACE  
IMMEDIATELY BELOW SHRINE ALREADY GIVES PREVIEW BEAUTY FINAL COMPLE-  
TION; WORK OTHER LOWER TERRACES ADVANCING RAPIDLY AMIDST EXPANSE OF  
GREEN; UPPER TERRACES TAKING SHAPE ON STEEP SLOPES ABOVE SHRINE. ENTIRE  
PROJECT STANDS IN URGENT NEED INCREASED SUPPORT THROUGH MIGHTY SELF-  
SACRIFICING EFFORT DURING REMAINING MONTHS THREE YEAR PLAN.

193.3 ARDENTLY PRAYING SACRED THRESHOLD WORLDWIDE RESPONSE THIS CHAL-  
LENGING JUNCTURE RAISING ADMINISTRATIVE CENTER GOD’S HOLY FAITH.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

194  
Release of *The Prosperity of Humankind*

23 JANUARY 1995

To the National Spiritual Assemblies of the Bahá’ís throughout the world  
Dear Friends,

194.1 As the twentieth century rapidly approaches its end, there is a marked  
acceleration in the efforts of governments and peoples to reach common  
understandings on issues affecting the future of humankind. The 1992  
Conference on Environment and Development held in Rio de Janeiro, the  
1993 World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna, the 1994 Interna-  
tional Conference on Population and Development in Cairo, the forthcom-  
ing March 1995 World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen, to  
be followed in September by the Fourth World Conference on Women in  
Beijing, are conspicuous indications of this acceleration. These events are as  
capstones to the myriad activities taking place in different parts of the world  
involving a wide range of nongovernmental organizations and networks in  
an urgent search for values, ideas and practical measures that can advance  
prospects for the peaceful development of all peoples. In this endeavor can  
be discerned the gathering momentum of an emerging unity of thought in  
world undertakings, the realization of which our sacred scriptures describe  
as one of the lights of unity that will illumine the path to peace. The Bahá’ís  
around the world are, of course, heartened by such hopeful trends and will  
continue increasingly to lend moral and practical support to them as op-  
portunities allow.

194.2 In view of the intensive attention being given to the issues of social and  
economic development since the Earth Summit in Brazil, we requested the  
Bahá’í International Community’s Office of Public Information to prepare  
a statement on the concept of global prosperity in the context of the Bahá’í  
Teachings. This statement is now ready for distribution. We are therefore  
very pleased to send each of you herewith a copy of *The Prosperity of Hu-  
mankind* and to commend it to your use as you pursue activities that enable  
you to interact with governments, organizations, and people everywhere.[[245]](#footnote-245)194-1

Our confident hope is that the statement will assist you to foster under-  
standing of this important topic among the members of your communities  
and thus vitalize their contribution to the constructive social processes at  
work throughout the planet.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

195  
Release of a compilation on scholarship

10 FEBRUARY 1995

To selected National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

195.1 We have been asked by the Universal House of Justice to send you the en-  
closed copy of a compilation on scholarship prepared recently at its request  
by the Research Department at the Bahá’í World Center.[[246]](#footnote-246)195-1

195.2 It is the hope of the House of Justice that a study of this compilation will  
serve as a stimulus and a guide in the further development of Bahá’í scholar-  
ship, and that the unique features of this vital aspect of Bahá’í activity will  
be clarified through a perusal of its contents.

195.3 The House of Justice calls upon the members of the community of the  
Greatest Name, young and old, men and women alike, to strive to develop  
and offer to humanity a new model of scholarly activity along the lines set  
out in this compilation, animated by the spirit of inquiry into the limitless  
meaning of the Divine Teachings. This scholarly endeavor should be char-  
acterized by the welcome it offers to all who wish to be involved in it, each  
in his or her own way, by mutual encouragement and cooperation among  
its participants, and by the respect accorded to distinguished accomplish-  
ment and outstanding achievement. The spirit and approach should be far  
removed from the arrogance, contention, and exclusiveness which have too  
often sullied the name of scholarship in the wider society, and which have  
created barriers to the sound development of this worthy pursuit.

195.4 It is left to your discretion to determine the use you should make of the  
enclosed material.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

196  
Cultivating a proper attitude toward Bahá’í elections

14 MARCH 1995

To a National Spiritual Assembly

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

196.1 The Universal House of Justice has received your letter of 8 February  
1995 and we have been asked to respond as follows.

196.2 The House of Justice does not feel that you should be inhibited from  
carrying out the functions specified for the National Spiritual Assembly at  
the National Convention through fear of being accused of electioneering.  
Through the performance of these assigned functions to the best of your  
ability, you will be able to find the appropriate balance between, on the  
one hand, an excessive prominence of the outgoing members, which could  
arouse concerns among delegates, and, on other hand, such disengagement  
from the Convention consultation and from presentation of National As-  
sembly concerns and plans that the delegates could feel deprived of an im-  
portant component in their deliberations.

196.3 Electioneering is principally a matter of attitude rather than of the extent  
of exposure of a believer indulging in such a deplorable form of conduct. As  
the believers grow in their powers of discernment, they can more accurately  
come to their own private conclusions about any Bahá’í who appears to be  
seeking to put himself forth in a desire to be elected to an administrative po-  
sition. It should also be understood that, at this stage in the development of  
the Bahá’í community, it is not unusual for Assembly members to be subject  
to unwarranted accusations of electioneering from believers who may have  
a distorted impression of what a National Spiritual Assembly should do in  
the discharge of its functions; this should not cause you undue concern, and  
should not detain you from conscientiously taking those actions which you  
believe to be in the best interests of the Cause.

196.4 You are no doubt familiar with the statement of the Guardian, in refer-  
ring to the duties of members of a National Spiritual Assembly, that

196.4a They should approach their task with extreme humility, and endeavor  
by their open-mindedness, their high sense of justice and duty, their  
candor, their modesty, their entire devotion to the welfare and in-  
terests of the friends, the Cause, and humanity, to win not only the  
confidence and the genuine support and respect of those whom they  
should serve, but also their esteem and real affection.[[247]](#footnote-247)196-1

196.5 The National Convention is the only occasion at which believers from  
distant areas, such as … to which you refer in your letter, can have infor-  
mal fellowship with the members of both outgoing and incoming National  
Spiritual Assemblies, and thus provides a unique opportunity to reassure  
them about the attitudes of their elected representatives and overcome the  
sense of separation to which you refer.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

197  
Tenth anniversary of Universidad Núr

19 MARCH 1995

To an individual Bahá’í

197.1 The Universal House of Justice understands that you will be attending  
the celebration of the tenth anniversary of the establishment of Universidad  
Núr, an institution which has been so dear to you over the course of those  
many years. It would be appreciated if you would convey the following on  
behalf of the House of Justice to the friends gathered on that occasion.

197.2 The Universal House of Justice is moved to convey its warm congratula-  
tions to the many friends associated with Universidad Núr for the notable  
achievements that institution has made since it opened its doors ten years  
ago—for the rapidity with which it has progressed, for its close adherence to  
the principles of the Faith, for its constant effort to apply the Teachings of  
Bahá’u’lláh to human affairs, for the cordial relations it has developed with  
government authorities at various levels, and for the manner in which it has  
time and again placed itself at the disposal of the National Spiritual As-

sembly to help promote the interests of the Faith in whatever way it deemed  
necessary. All of this clearly could not have been achieved without the self-  
abnegation and sacrificial efforts of many firm and devoted believers. The  
Universal House of Justice will pray for each and every one of them that,  
through their endeavors, Universidad Núr will continue to go from strength  
to strength and add fresh luster to the annals of the Bahá’í community of  
Bolivia.

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

198  
Preparations for completion of lower terraces  
on Mount Carmel

4 APRIL 1995

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

198.1 We rejoice at the opportunity to announce a major advance in the Mount  
Carmel Projects marked by the razing of several houses, thus opening the  
way for the completion of the lower terraces of the Shrine of the Báb. These  
are the same structures to which Shoghi Effendi referred in a cable on 1  
October 1954 to the Bahá’í world stating that “preliminary documents have  
been signed in connection with the purchase from the Development Au-  
thority of the State of Israel of five houses, situated at the foot of Mount  
Carmel and adjoining the last terrace of the Báb’s Shrine ….”[[248]](#footnote-248)198-1 Subse-  
quently, in March 1955, he confirmed the acquisition of these houses by the  
Bahá’í World Center.

198.2 The action just taken with the full cooperation of the city authorities  
harmonizes with the intention of the beloved Guardian: it clears the site  
for the monumental entrance to the majestic path leading from the south-  
ern end of Ben Gurion Avenue up to the central edifice of the Shrine and  
beyond to the crest of God’s Holy Mountain. This progress in the construc-  
tion work is complemented by yet another welcome development, namely,  
a municipal scheme involving restoration of the German Templar houses  
along that avenue and a general beautification of the area—a scheme that

will ensure an uninterrupted vista of splendor northward from the Terraces  
to the sea, towards Bahjí.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

199  
Response of Bahá’í community  
to believer suffering from AIDS

17 APRIL 1995

To a National Spiritual Assembly

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

199.1 Your letter of 10 January 1995 to the Universal House of Justice was  
received by fax only on 14 February. It has asked us to convey to you that  
it was deeply saddened to learn that a member of your Bahá’í community  
has been diagnosed as being infected with the AIDS virus. If it will not  
be distressing to this friend to know that the news has been shared with  
the House of Justice, then you are asked to kindly extend to him (or her)  
its loving sympathy, and the assurance of its fervent prayers at the Sacred  
Threshold, beseeching Bahá’u’lláh to shower this servant of the Cause with  
His tender mercies and protection.

199.2 You ask if there is any guidance on this matter. It is not clear from your  
letter whether the situation of this believer is commonly known in the Bahá’í  
community. If it is, then the House of Justice hopes you will encourage the  
Local Spiritual Assembly involved, and the friends in the community, to  
turn to non-Bahá’í agencies specializing in dealing with AIDS for informa-  
tion and counseling as appropriate or needed. Furthermore, all should draw  
inspiration and guidance from the peerless example of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, whose  
compassion, loving understanding and sincere concern for the welfare of  
others exemplified the Bahá’í attitude to those who are suffering ….

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

200  
Riḍván Message 1995

RIḌVÁN 152

To the Bahá’ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

200.1 At this Season of seasons, we greet you with profound pleasure at the  
increased activity throughout the Bahá’í community during the year just  
passed and with ardent expectations as to what must and can be accom-  
plished during the last third of the Three Year Plan. We feel both concern  
and hope in the face of the despair besetting leaders of nations and peoples  
in their search for solutions to pressing social problems. Indeed, such des-  
peration is tantamount to a worldwide cry for the Teachings of Bahá’u’lláh,  
truly a challenge and a promise no conscientious Bahá’í institution or indi-  
vidual can ignore.

200.2 No occasion has more sharply conveyed this melancholy outlook than  
the recent World Summit for Social Development, the latest in a series of  
international gatherings of world leaders called by the United Nations. But  
however little may be the immediate influence of such events on the policies  
of governments, however much the vast majority of the world’s population  
may disregard or be unaware of them, their successive occurrence indicates  
to any Bahá’í observer a gradual movement towards the ultimate fulfillment  
of the will of Bahá’u’lláh that the rulers of nations meet to consult and  
decide on the outstanding issues confronting an increasingly global society.

200.3 Propitiously on that momentous occasion in Copenhagen, an impressive  
Bahá’í effort, involving some 250 friends from more than 40 countries, was  
mounted to acquaint the participants in the Summit and the related NGO  
Forum with the remedies prescribed by the Divine Physician. This effort  
was extended beyond the Summit and is even now continuing in many  
places throughout the world. We applaud with heartfelt gratitude the Bahá’í  
institutions, agencies and individuals who produced this spate of action  
before, during and after the Summit, for surely it evinced both the further  
advance of our world community in influencing the processes towards the  
Lesser Peace and a multiplication of opportunities for a wider diffusion of  
the reformative Message of Bahá’u’lláh. As such world events take place with  
greater frequency and the Bahá’í community pursues its goals with increased  
intensity, we can see more clearly the drawing closer together of the parallel

processes about which Shoghi Effendi wrote several decades ago: the one  
leading to the political union of nations, the other to the ultimate union of  
hearts in one common faith.

200.4 We make these observations against an encouraging background of de-  
velopment in the Bahá’í community during the second year of the Three  
Year Plan. Even more thrilling than the leap in external affairs activities at  
local and national levels are the evidences of a qualitative change in the re-  
sponse of believers everywhere to the call to teach. A deeper understanding  
of this inescapable, individual duty is implied by the rise in teaching activ-  
ity, a heartening situation resulting from several stimulating factors which  
all together augur well for the long-awaited influx of troops of new believ-  
ers. Among these factors are the attention being given to the compilation  
on entry by troops as it appears in an increasing number of languages, the  
influences of the movement of International and Continental Counselors  
throughout the globe, the evolution in the functioning of Auxiliary Board  
members and their assistants, the effects of the emphasis being placed on  
the education of children, and the vigor of the youth in initiating teaching  
projects and engaging in a range of other Bahá’í activities.

200.5 Conducive to this positive picture is the gathering strength of Spiritual  
Assemblies, which are called upon to cope with manifold challenges while  
endeavoring primarily to focus on the demands of the teaching work. We  
are especially mindful of the burdens borne by National Spiritual Assem-  
blies as the communities within their jurisdictions grow more diverse in  
their composition and more complex in their demands upon the guidance  
and assistance of these institutions.

200.6 The combined impression of the various stages of development at which  
the community has arrived suggests that strong effort is being devoted to the  
triple theme of the Plan, which calls for enhancing the vitality of the faith of  
individual believers, greatly developing the human resources of the Cause,  
and fostering the proper functioning of local and national Bahá’í institu-  
tions. But as there is yet much to be done along these lines, a more striking  
response is required of individuals and institutions, if our community is to  
combat the ravages of a rampant moral decadence, to raise up a massive army  
of consecrated souls to meet the demands of teaching and of administering  
the affairs of the Faith, and to render our institutions fit for the tasks that a  
burst in the size of the community will surely impose upon them.

200.7 Fundamental to any effective response to the immediate challenges fac-  
ing the community are these requisites which are especially addressed to

the individual and the Local Spiritual Assembly: On the one hand is the  
initiative that it is the duty and privilege of the individual to take in teach-  
ing the Cause and in obtaining a deeper understanding of the purpose and  
requirements of the Faith. Parallel with the exercise of such initiative is the  
necessity of the individual’s participation in collective endeavors, such as  
community functions and projects. On the other hand is the role of the  
Local Spiritual Assembly to welcome, encourage and accommodate the ini-  
tiatives of individual believers to the maximum extent possible; and there is,  
too, the responsibility of the Assembly to devise or promote plans that will  
employ the talents and abilities of the individual members of its commu-  
nity, and that will involve individuals in collective action, such as teaching  
and development projects, institutes, and other group activities. The effects  
of conscientious attempts at realizing these inseparable requisites will be to  
expand and consolidate the community and to foster a climate of unified  
action.

200.8 During the last year, there was a sharp increase in the visits to the World  
Center of high-ranking government officials, other dignitaries and media  
representatives, demonstrating the growing significance of the spiritual and  
administrative center of the Faith in the eyes of the world. This appeared  
to underscore a trend towards a greater familiarity of the governments of  
the nations with the evolving center of a World Faith. Viewing this trend  
from the Mountain of God, the site of the current construction projects,  
and considering it in conjunction with the developments taking place in  
local and national Bahá’í communities, we can appreciate more adequately  
the unfolding reality of the vision projected by Shoghi Effendi when he  
explained the implications of the raising up of buildings that will constitute  
the world administrative seat of the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh. “This vast and  
irresistible process,” he said, “will synchronize with two no less significant  
developments—the establishment of the Lesser Peace and the evolution of  
Bahá’í national and local institutions.”[[249]](#footnote-249)200-1 It is a vision which, given the  
state of the world, compels the completion of the Mount Carmel Projects  
as scheduled.

200.9 These projects are advancing with remarkable speed, astonishing pilgrims,  
tourists and local residents by their magnitude and emerging magnificence.  
The construction work is occurring on all structures at once. Work on seven

of the Terraces below and five above the Shrine of the Báb is in full force.  
More construction contracts were signed during this year than in any previ-  
ous one, including the contract recently awarded to an Italian firm for the  
supply of the marble for the buildings on the Arc. Clearly, the work has  
gathered a momentum that can abide no delay. Hence, a matching momen-  
tum in the flow of contributions is imperative, if the remaining forty mil-  
lion dollars towards fulfillment of the Three Year Plan goal of seventy-four  
million dollars is to be provided by Riḍván 1996.

200.10 The new year begins auspiciously with the formation this Riḍván of five  
National Spiritual Assemblies. Our representatives to the inaugural Nation-  
al Conventions are the Hand of the Cause of God Amatu’l-Bahá Rúḥíyyih  
Khánum, Armenia and Georgia; the Hand of the Cause ‘Alí-Muḥammad  
Varqá, Belarus and Sicily; Counselor Hushang Ahdieh, Eritrea. Moreover,  
during this period the communities of Bophuthatswana, Ciskei, South Af-  
rica and Transkei will merge under the jurisdiction of one National Spiritual  
Assembly of South Africa, so as to reflect the recent political reunion of  
that region. As a result of the foregoing, the number of National Spiritual  
Assemblies throughout the world will rise from 172 to 174.

200.11 Beloved co-workers: Beyond the need to win our goals, humanity’s current  
plight summons us to redoubled action. The cloud of despair hanging over  
the fortunes of a deranged world is the very harbinger of the spring rain that  
can quench the spiritual and material thirst of every people. It has only to be  
seeded through constant and confident acts of teaching. The performance  
of such acts, though dependent for reinforcement on the functions of Bahá’í  
institutions, rests primarily and ultimately with Bahá’í individuals.

200.12 Let no excessive self-criticism or any feelings of inadequacy, inability or  
inexperience hinder you or cause you to be afraid. Bury your fears in the  
assurances of Bahá’u’lláh. Has He not asserted that upon anyone who men-  
tions His Name will descend the “hosts of Divine inspiration” and that on  
such a one will also descend the “Concourse on high, each bearing aloft a  
chalice of pure light”? Step forth, then, into the arena where all His loved  
ones are equally summoned, equally challenged and abundantly blessed.  
For to teach, Bahá’u’lláh Himself affirms, is to do the “most meritorious  
of all deeds.”[[250]](#footnote-250)200-2 And at this extraordinary moment in the history of the

planet, nothing whatever is of more critical importance than inviting people  
of every sort and every gift to the banquet table of the Lord of Hosts.

200.13 As we send you this message, clearly before us is a vision of untold vic-  
tories waiting to be seized. We are certain you can realize a myriad of these  
in the remaining time of the Three Year Plan. Just such an accomplishment  
must earnestly be striven for, so as to set the stage for the next global enter-  
prise to be launched at Riḍván 1996. There shall be mobilized then a world-  
embracing campaign to ensure a befitting crescendo to the achievements of  
a century regarded by no less than ‘Abdu’l-Bahá Himself as a period that will  
have “left traces which shall last forever.”[[251]](#footnote-251)200-3

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

201  
Separation of church and state

27 APRIL 1995

To an individual Bahá’í

Dear Bahá’í Friend,

201.1 Your email of 19 February 1995 addressed to the Research Department  
was referred to the Universal House of Justice. In it you quote two phrases  
which appear in a book you have recently read, and which seem from the  
context to be citations from Shoghi Effendi. These phrases are “Bahá’í  
theocracy” and “humanity will emerge from that immature civilization in  
which church and state are separate.” You ask whether these references can  
be authenticated and dated. We have been instructed to send you the fol-  
lowing reply.

201.2 A reference to “Bahá’í theocracy” is to be found in a letter written on  
behalf of the Guardian to an individual Bahá’í on 30 September 1949. This  
reads as follows:

201.2a He thinks your question is well put: what the Guardian was re-  
ferring to was the theocratic systems, such as the Catholic Church  
and the Caliphate, which are not divinely *given* as systems, but man-  
made, and yet, being partly derived from the teachings of Christ and

Muḥammad are in a sense theocracies. The Bahá’í theocracy, on the  
contrary, is both divinely ordained as a system and, of course, based  
on the teachings of the Prophet Himself.

201.3 The other passage does not comprise words of Shoghi Effendi, although  
its purport was approved by him. As you yourself have since discovered,  
it can be found in *The Bahá’í World*, volume VI, on page 199, in a state-  
ment entitled “Concerning Membership in Non-Bahá’í Religious Organiza-  
tions,” about which the Guardian’s secretary had written on his behalf on  
11 December 1935: “The Guardian has carefully read the copy of the state-  
ment you had recently prepared concerning non-membership in non-Bahá’í  
religious organizations, and is pleased to realize that your comments and  
explanations are in full conformity with his views on the subject.”

201.4 The complete paragraph in which the words appear is as follows:

201.4a In the light of these words,[[252]](#footnote-252)201-1 it seems fully evident that the way to  
approach this instruction is in realizing the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh as an  
ever-growing organism destined to become something new and greater  
than any of the revealed religions of the past. Whereas former Faiths  
inspired hearts and illumined souls, they eventuated in formal reli-  
gions with an ecclesiastical organization, creeds, rituals and churches,  
while the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh, likewise renewing man’s spiritual life,  
will gradually produce the institutions of an ordered society, fulfill-  
ing not merely the function of the churches of the past but also the  
function of the civil state. By this manifestation of the Divine Will  
in a higher degree than in former ages, humanity will emerge from  
that immature civilization in which church and state are separate and  
competitive institutions, and partake of a true civilization in which  
spiritual and social principles are at last reconciled as two aspects of  
one and the same Truth.

201.5 You also ask how these statements could be reconciled with Shoghi  
Effendi’s comment on page 149 of *Bahá’í Administration*, which appears to  
anticipate “a future that is sure to witness the formal and complete separa-  
tion of Church and State,” and with the following words in his letter of 21  
March 1932 addressed to the Bahá’ís of the United States and Canada:

201.5a Theirs is not the purpose, while endeavoring to conduct and per-  
fect the administrative affairs of their Faith, to violate, under any  
circumstances, the provisions of their country’s constitution, much  
less to allow the machinery of their administration to supersede the  
government of their respective countries.[[253]](#footnote-253)201-2

201.6 A careful reading of the letter dated 6 December 1928 in which the  
Guardian’s comment about the separation of Church and State occurs  
would suggest that, rather than enunciating a general principle, Shoghi  
Effendi is simply reviewing “the quickening forces of internal reform” that  
had “recently transpired throughout the Near and Middle East,” and enu-  
merating a number of factors that impinge on the development of the Faith  
in those parts of the world.[[254]](#footnote-254)201-3

201.7 As for the statement made by Shoghi Effendi in his letter of 21 March  
1932, the well-established principles of the Faith concerning the relationship  
of the Bahá’í institutions to those of the country in which the Bahá’ís reside  
make it unthinkable that they would ever purpose to violate a country’s  
constitution or so to meddle in its political machinery as to attempt to take  
over the powers of government. This is an integral element of the Bahá’í  
principle of abstention from involvement in politics. However, this does  
not by any means imply that the country itself may not, by constitutional  
means, decide to adopt Bahá’í laws and practices and modify its constitu-  
tion or method of government accordingly. The relationship between the  
principle of abstention from involvement in politics and the emergence of  
the Bahá’í State is commented on later in this letter. In the meantime we can  
quote the following extracts from letters written on behalf of the Guardian  
in response to queries from individual believers, which indicate that the  
relationship is an evolving one:

201.7a Regarding the question raised in your letter, Shoghi Effendi be-  
lieves that for the present the Movement, whether in the East or  
the West, should be dissociated entirely from politics. This was the  
explicit injunction of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá …. Eventually, however, as you  
have rightly conceived it, the Movement will, as soon as it is fully  
developed and recognized, embrace both religious and political issues.  
In fact Bahá’u’lláh clearly states that affairs of state as well as religious  
questions are to be referred to the Houses of Justice into which the  
Assemblies of the Bahá’ís will eventually evolve.

(30 November 1930)

201.7b The Bahá’ís will be called upon to assume the reins of government  
when they will come to constitute the majority of the population in a  
given country, and even then their participation in political affairs is  
bound to be limited in scope unless they obtain a similar majority in  
some other countries as well.

(19 November 1939)

201.7c The Bahá’ís must remain non-partisan in all political affairs. In the  
distant future, however, when the majority of a country have become  
Bahá’ís then it will lead to the establishment of a Bahá’í State.

(19 April 1941)

201.8 A proper understanding of all the above passages, and of their implica-  
tions, requires an acceptance of two fundamental principles for the exegesis  
of Bahá’í Texts.

201.9 The first, which derives from the Covenant, is the principle that the  
writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and the Guardian are thoroughly imbued with the  
spirit of the Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh and intimately linked with the Teach-  
ings of Bahá’u’lláh Himself. This principle is clearly expounded in two  
paragraphs from a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual  
believer on 19 March 1946:

201.9a Whatever the Master has said is based on the teachings of  
Bahá’u’lláh. He was the perfect Interpreter, had lived with Him all  
His life; therefore what He says has the same standing, even if a text  
of Bahá’u’lláh is not available ….

201.9b We must take the teachings as a great, balanced whole, not seek  
out and oppose to each other two strong statements that have dif-  
ferent meanings; somewhere in between, there are links uniting the  
two. That is what makes our Faith so flexible and well balanced. For  
instance there are calamities for testing and for punishment—there  
are also accidents, plain cause and effect!

201.10 Bahá’u’lláh has given us a Revelation designed to raise mankind to  
heights never before attained. It is little wonder that the minds of individual  
believers, no matter how perceptive, have difficulty in comprehending its  
range. It is the words of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and the Guardian which elucidate this  
vast Revelation and make clear the manner in which different statements  
relate to one another and what is implied by the Revealed Word. Without  
the bright light of the Covenant, this Faith, like all those before it, would  
be torn to pieces by the conflicting opinions of scholars applying limited  
human reasoning to divinely revealed truths.

201.11 The second fundamental principle which enables us to understand the  
pattern towards which Bahá’u’lláh wishes human society to evolve is the  
principle of organic growth which requires that detailed developments, and  
the understanding of detailed developments, become available only with  
the passage of time and with the help of the guidance given by that Central  
Authority in the Cause to whom all must turn. In this regard one can use  
the simile of a tree. If a farmer plants a tree, he cannot state at that moment  
what its exact height will be, the number of its branches or the exact time  
of its blossoming. He can, however, give a general impression of its size and  
pattern of growth and can state with confidence which fruit it will bear.  
The same is true of the evolution of the World Order of Bahá’u’lláh. For  
example, we find the following illuminating explanation in a letter written  
by Shoghi Effendi to the Bahá’ís in America on 23 February 1924:

201.11a And as we make an effort to demonstrate that love to the world  
may we also clear our minds of any lingering trace of unhappy mis-  
understandings that might obscure our clear conception of the exact  
purpose and methods of this new world order, so challenging and  
complex, yet so consummate and wise. We are called upon by our  
beloved Master in His Will and Testament not only to adopt it unre-  
servedly, but to unveil its merit to all the world. To attempt to estimate

its full value, and grasp its exact significance after so short a time since  
its inception would be premature and presumptuous on our part. We  
must trust to time, and the guidance of God’s Universal House of  
Justice, to obtain a clearer and fuller understanding of its provisions  
and implications. But one word of warning must be uttered in this  
connection. Let us be on our guard lest we measure too strictly the  
Divine Plan with the standard of men. I am not prepared to state that  
it agrees in principle or in method with the prevailing notions now  
uppermost in men’s minds, nor that it should conform with those  
imperfect, precarious, and expedient measures feverishly resorted to  
by agitated humanity. Are we to doubt that the ways of God are not  
necessarily the ways of man? Is not faith but another word for implicit  
obedience, wholehearted allegiance, uncompromising adherence to  
that which we believe is the revealed and express will of God, however  
perplexing it might first appear, however at variance with the shadowy  
views, the impotent doctrines, the crude theories, the idle imaginings,  
the fashionable conceptions of a transient and troublous age? If we are  
to falter or hesitate, if our love for Him should fail to direct us and  
keep us within His path, if we desert Divine and emphatic principles,  
what hope can we any more cherish for healing the ills and sicknesses  
of this world?

201.11b Pending the establishment of the Universal House of Justice, whose  
function it is to lay more definitely the broad lines that must guide the  
future activities and administration of the Movement, it is clearly our  
duty to strive to obtain as clear a view as possible of the manner in  
which to conduct the affairs of the Cause, and then arise with single-  
mindedness and determination to adopt and maintain it in all our  
activities and labors.[[255]](#footnote-255)201-4

201.12 At this time we have the benefit of many subsequent interpretations  
by Shoghi Effendi and also the initial guidance of the Universal House  
of Justice, which will continue to elucidate aspects of this mighty system  
as it unfolds. In striving to attain a “clearer and fuller understanding” of  
the World Order of Bahá’u’lláh, we need to contemplate the operation of  
the Bahá’í principles of governance and social responsibility as they persist

through changing sets of conditions, from the present time when the Bahá’í  
community constitutes a small number of people living in a variety of  
overwhelmingly non-Bahá’í societies, to the far different situation in future  
centuries when the Bahá’ís are becoming, and eventually have become, the  
vast majority of the people.

201.13 The Administrative Order is certainly the nucleus and pattern of the  
World Order of Bahá’u’lláh, but it is in embryonic form, and must undergo  
major evolutionary developments in the course of time. Certain passages  
in the writings on this subject establish matters of principle, certain ones  
describe the ultimate goal of the Most Great Peace, and certain of them  
relate to stages of development on the way to the attainment of that goal.  
For example, in this familiar passage in His Will and Testament, ‘Abdu’l-  
Bahá states:

201.13a This House of Justice enacteth the laws and the government enforceth  
them. The legislative body must reinforce the executive, the executive  
must aid and assist the legislative body so that through the close union  
and harmony of these two forces, the foundation of fairness and jus-  
tice may become firm and strong, that all the regions of the world may  
become even as Paradise itself.[[256]](#footnote-256)201-5

201.14 In response to a question about the “government” in the above passage,  
Shoghi Effendi’s secretary wrote on his behalf, on 18 April 1941, the follow-  
ing clarification:

201.14a By “Government” … is meant the executive body which will enforce  
the laws when the Bahá’í Faith has reached the point when it is recog-  
nized and accepted entirely by any particular nation.[[257]](#footnote-257)201-6

201.15 The same relationship between legislature and executive is expressed in  
the well-known passage in “The Unfoldment of World Civilization,” show-  
ing how one principle is applied over successive periods.

201.15a A world executive, backed by an international Force, will carry  
out the decisions arrived at, and apply the laws enacted by, this  
world legislature, and will safeguard the organic unity of the whole  
commonwealth.[[258]](#footnote-258)201-7

201.16 In relation to other international institutions, the Guardian has given the  
following guidance:

201.16a Touching the point raised in the Secretary’s letter regarding the nature  
and scope of the Universal Court of Arbitration, this and other simi-  
lar matters will have to be explained and elucidated by the Universal  
House of Justice, to which, according to the Master’s explicit Instruc-  
tions, all important fundamental questions must be referred.[[259]](#footnote-259)201-8

201.17 In his letter to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of the  
United States and Canada written on 27 February 1929, Shoghi Effendi  
stated:

201.17a Not only will the present-day Spiritual Assemblies be styled differ-  
ently in future, but they will be enabled also to add to their present  
functions those powers, duties, and prerogatives necessitated by the  
recognition of the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh, not merely as one of the rec-  
ognized religious systems of the world, but as the State Religion of an  
independent and Sovereign Power. And as the Bahá’í Faith permeates  
the masses of the peoples of East and West, and its truth is embraced  
by the majority of the peoples of a number of the Sovereign States of  
the world, will the Universal House of Justice attain the plenitude of  
its power, and exercise as the supreme organ of the Bahá’í Common-  
wealth all the rights, the duties and responsibilities incumbent upon  
the world’s future superstate.[[260]](#footnote-260)201-9

201.18 Complementing these words are the Guardian’s repeated and force-  
ful requirement that Bahá’ís strictly abstain from involvement in politics.  
This requirement has far-reaching implications for the method by which

Bahá’u’lláh’s Administrative Order will evolve into His World Order. We  
can consider, for example, the well-known passage in his letter of 21 March  
1932 to the Bahá’ís in the United States and Canada:

201.18a Let them refrain from associating themselves, whether by word or  
by deed, with the political pursuits of their respective nations, with  
the policies of their governments and the schemes and programs of  
parties and factions …. Let them affirm their unyielding determina-  
tion to stand, firmly and unreservedly, for the way of Bahá’u’lláh, to  
avoid the entanglements and bickerings inseparable from the pursuits  
of the politician, and to become worthy agencies of that Divine Polity  
which incarnates God’s immutable Purpose for all men ….

201.18b … Let them beware lest, in their eagerness to further the aims of  
their beloved Cause, they should be led unwittingly to bargain with  
their Faith, to compromise with their essential principles, or to sacri-  
fice, in return for any material advantage which their institutions may  
derive, the integrity of their spiritual ideals.[[261]](#footnote-261)201-10

As one studies these words, one begins to understand the processes at work  
in the gradual unfoldment and establishment of the Bahá’í System.

201.19 Clearly the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth is a “po-  
litical” enterprise, and the Teachings of the Faith are filled with “political”  
principles—using the word in the sense of the science of government and  
of the organization of human society. At the same time the Bahá’í world  
community repeatedly and emphatically denies being a “political” organiza-  
tion, and Bahá’ís are required, on pain of deprivation of their administrative  
rights, to refrain from becoming involved in “political” matters and from  
taking sides in “political” disputes. In other words, the Bahá’ís are following  
a completely different path from that usually followed by those who wish to  
reform society. They eschew political methods towards the achievement of  
their aims, and concentrate on revitalizing the hearts, minds and behavior  
of people and on presenting a working model as evidence of the reality and  
practicality of the way of life they propound.

201.20 The Bahá’í Administrative Order is the “nucleus and pattern”[[262]](#footnote-262)201-11 of the  
divinely intended future political system of the world, and undoubtedly

non-Bahá’í governments will benefit from learning how this system works  
and from adopting its procedures and principles in overcoming the prob-  
lems they face. Nevertheless, this Administration is primarily the framework  
and structure designed to be a channel for the flow of the spirit of the Cause  
and for the application of its Teachings. As the Guardian wrote:

201.20a It is surely for those to whose hands so priceless a heritage has been  
committed to prayerfully watch lest the tool should supersede the  
Faith itself, lest undue concern for the minute details arising from  
the administration of the Cause obscure the vision of its promoters,  
lest partiality, ambition, and worldliness tend in the course of time to  
becloud the radiance, stain the purity, and impair the effectiveness of  
the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh.[[263]](#footnote-263)201-12

201.21 The gradual process of the evolution of the Bahá’í Administrative Order  
into the World Order of Bahá’u’lláh has been described by Shoghi Effendi  
in many of his writings, as in the following excerpt from his letter of 30  
April 1953 to the All-America Intercontinental Teaching Conference:

201.21a This present Crusade, on the threshold of which we now stand,  
will, moreover, by virtue of the dynamic forces it will release and its  
wide repercussions over the entire surface of the globe, contribute  
effectually to the acceleration of yet another process of tremendous  
significance which will carry the steadily evolving Faith of Bahá’u’lláh  
through its present stages of obscurity, of repression, of emancipation  
and of recognition—stages one or another of which Bahá’í national  
communities in various parts of the world now find themselves—to  
the stage of establishment, the stage at which the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh  
will be recognized by the civil authorities as the State Religion, similar  
to that which Christianity entered in the years following the death of  
the Emperor Constantine, a stage which must later be followed by  
the emergence of the Bahá’í state itself, functioning, in all religious  
and civil matters, in strict accordance with the Laws and Ordinances  
of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, the Most Holy, the Mother-Book of the Bahá’í  
Revelation, a stage which, in the fullness of time, will culminate in the

establishment of the World Bahá’í Commonwealth, functioning in  
the plenitude of its powers, and which will signalize the long-awaited  
advent of the Christ-promised Kingdom of God on earth—the King-  
dom of Bahá’u’lláh—mirroring however faintly upon this humble  
handful of dust the glories of the Abhá Kingdom.[[264]](#footnote-264)201-13

201.22 In answer to those who raise objections to this vision of a worldwide  
commonwealth inspired by a Divine Revelation, fearing for the freedom of  
minority groups or of the individual under such a system, we can explain  
the Bahá’í principle of upholding the rights of minorities and fostering their  
interests. We can also point to the fact that no person is ever compelled to  
accept the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh and moreover, unlike the situation in certain  
other religions, each person has complete freedom to withdraw from the  
Faith if he decides that he no longer believes in its Founder or accepts His  
Teachings. In light of these facts alone it is evident that the growth of the  
Bahá’í communities to the size where a non-Bahá’í state would adopt the  
Faith as the State Religion, let alone to the point at which the State would  
accept the Law of God as its own law and the National House of Justice as  
its legislature, must be a supremely voluntary and democratic process.

201.23 As the Universal House of Justice wrote in its letter of 21 July 1968 to the  
National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of the United States:

201.23a It is not our purpose to impose Bahá’í teachings upon others by per-  
suading the powers that be to enact laws enforcing Bahá’í principles,  
nor to join movements which have such legislation as their aim. The  
guidance that Bahá’í institutions offer to mankind does not comprise  
a series of specific answers to current problems, but rather the illu-  
mination of an entirely new way of life. Without this way of life the  
problems are insoluble; with it they will either not arise or, if they  
arise, can be resolved.

201.24 Two quotations from the writings of the Guardian bear particularly on  
these principles of the rights and prerogatives of minorities and of individu-  
als. In *The Advent of Divine Justice* is a passage which is of fundamental  
significance for Bahá’í constitutional law:

201.24a Unlike the nations and peoples of the earth, be they of the East or  
of the West, democratic or authoritarian, communist or capitalist,  
whether belonging to the Old World or the New, who either ignore,  
trample upon, or extirpate, the racial, religious, or political minorities  
within the sphere of their jurisdiction, every organized community  
enlisted under the banner of Bahá’u’lláh should feel it to be its first  
and inescapable obligation to nurture, encourage, and safeguard every  
minority belonging to any faith, race, class, or nation within it.[[265]](#footnote-265)201-14

201.25 As for the protection of the rights of individuals, there is the follow-  
ing translation of a forceful passage which appears in a letter from Shoghi  
Effendi to the Bahá’ís of Iran, written in July 1925, in relation to a situation  
involving a Covenant-breaker:

201.25a … the mere fact of disaffection, estrangement, or recantation of  
belief, can in no wise detract from, or otherwise impinge upon, the  
legitimate civil rights of individuals in a free society, be it to the most  
insignificant degree. Were the friends to follow other than this course,  
it would be tantamount to a reversion on their part, in this century  
of radiance and light, to the ways and standards of a former age: they  
would reignite in men’s breasts the fire of bigotry and blind fanati-  
cism, cut themselves off from the glorious bestowals of this promised  
Day of God, and impede the full flow of divine assistance in this  
wondrous age.

201.26 All Bahá’ís, and especially those who make a profound study of the Cause,  
need to grasp the differences between the Bahá’í concepts of governance and  
those of the past, and to abstain from measuring Bahá’í institutions and  
methods against the faulty man-made institutions and methods hitherto  
current in the world. The Guardian graphically stressed these differences in  
his letter of 8 February 1934, known as “The Dispensation of Bahá’u’lláh”:

201.26a The Bahá’í Commonwealth of the future, of which this vast Ad-  
ministrative Order is the sole framework, is, both in theory and prac-  
tice, not only unique in the entire history of political institutions,

but can find no parallel in the annals of any of the world’s recognized  
religious systems. No form of democratic government; no system of  
autocracy or of dictatorship, whether monarchical or republican; no  
intermediary scheme of a purely aristocratic order; nor even any of  
the recognized types of theocracy, whether it be the Hebrew Com-  
monwealth, or the various Christian ecclesiastical organizations, or  
the Imamate or the Caliphate in Islam—none of these can be identi-  
fied or be said to conform with the Administrative Order which the  
master-hand of its perfect Architect has fashioned.[[266]](#footnote-266)201-15

201.27 Among the many complementary Teachings in the Faith which resolve  
the dilemmas of past societies are those of the unity of mankind on the  
one hand, and loyalty to the Covenant on the other. As already mentioned,  
no one in this Dispensation is compelled to be a Bahá’í, and the division  
of humankind into the “clean” and the “unclean,” the “faithful” and the  
“infidels,” is abolished. At the same time, anyone who does choose to be  
a Bahá’í accepts the Covenant of Bahá’u’lláh and, while free expression of  
opinion within the Bahá’í community is encouraged, this cannot ever be  
permitted to degenerate to the level of undermining the Covenant, for this  
would vitiate the very purpose of the Revelation itself.

201.28 One of the major concerns of the Universal House of Justice, as the  
Bahá’í Administrative Order unfolds, will be to ensure that it evolves in  
consonance with the spirit of the Bahá’í Revelation. While many beneficial  
aspects of human society at large can be safely incorporated into Bahá’í  
Administration, the House of Justice will guard against the corrupting influ-  
ence of those non-Bahá’í political and social concepts and practices which  
are not in harmony with the divine standard.

201.29 The House of Justice appreciates your concern about such a fundamental  
issue, and asks us to assure you of its prayers in the Holy Shrines for the  
confirmation of your services to the Cause of God.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

202  
Ruling of Supreme Court in India citing the Bahá’í  
teachings as a guideline for resolving disputes

5 MAY 1995

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

202.1 The Universal House of Justice was overjoyed to receive recently a copy  
of a judgment by the Supreme Court of India on a religious dispute be-  
tween the Hindus and Muslims in which the official decision of this highest  
judicial authority in India cited the Bahá’í Faith as an example and the  
Teachings of the Faith as guidelines for solving such disputes. As you may  
recall, the Babri mosque in the northern town of Ayodhya was razed by a  
group of Hindus because the mosque, built in 1528, had been erected on  
the spot where the Hindu god Rama is said to have been born thousands  
of years earlier. The destruction enraged Muslims and ignited a grave crisis  
in India. Muslim and Hindu mobs attacked each other’s houses of worship,  
homes and people in a number of cities, resulting in the death of hundreds  
and the destruction of property not only in India but in Pakistan, Bangla-  
desh, and even in Britain.

202.2 The relevant excerpt from the judgment of the Supreme Court of India  
dated 24 October 1994 is enclosed for your information.

202.3 The Faith has emerged from obscurity, thanks to the sacrifices of the  
Bahá’ís in Iran and the solidarity of the Bahá’í world in rallying around  
its institutions to support and protect the community of the Greatest  
Name in the cradle of the Faith. Many doors have been opened as a  
result of campaigns waged to reach government officials to familiarize  
them with the Faith and the deplorable situation of the Bahá’ís in Iran,  
as well as through the interaction of the friends in worthy causes for the  
benefit of their countrymen. Reports have been received that receptive  
members of governments are now using the life-giving Teachings and  
principles of the Faith in directing the affairs of their countries. The en-  
closed excerpt from the judgment is one such indication. The House of  
Justice is gratified by these accomplishments, and is confident that such  
efforts will be magnified in the future.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

**The Supreme Court of India  
Civil Original Jurisdiction  
Transferred Case (C) Numbers 41, 43 and 45 of 1993  
Writ Petition (Civil) Number 20b of 1993  
Transferred Case (C) Number 42 of 1993  
Writ Petition (C) Number 186 of 1994  
Excerpt from pp. 91–93 of the Judgment of the  
Supreme Court of India**

202.4 “As 1993 began, communal violence returned to India, sparked by  
the Controversy over a 16th century mosque said to stand on the ruins  
of an ancient Hindu temple honoring Lord Rama.” It may be said that  
‘fundamentalism and pluralism pose the two challenges that people of  
all religious traditions face’; and “to the fundamentalists, the borders of  
religious certainty are tightly guarded; to the pluralist, the borders are  
good fences where one meets the neighbor. To many fundamentalists,  
secularism, seen as the denial of religious claims, is the enemy; to plural-  
ists, secularism, seen as the separation of government from the domina-  
tion of a single religion, is the essential concomitant of religious diversity  
and the protection of religious freedom.” The present state may be sum-  
marized thus: “At present, the greatest religious tensions are not those  
between any one religion and another; they are the tensions between the  
fundamentalist and the pluralist in each and every religious tradition.”  
The spirit of universalism popular in the late 19th century was depicted  
by Max Muller who said, “The living kernel of religion can be found,  
I believe, in almost every creed, however much the husk may vary. And  
think what that means: It means that above and beneath and behind  
religions there is one eternal, one universal religion.”

202.5 The year 1993 has been described as the “Year of Interreligious Un-  
derstanding and Cooperation.” Is that century old spirit of conciliation  
and cooperation reflected in reactions of the protagonists of different  
religious faiths to justify 1993 being called the “Year of Interreligious  
Understanding and Cooperation?” (“Reflections on Religious Diversity”  
by Diana L. Eck September 1994). It is this hope which has to be  
realized in the future.

202.6 A neutral perception of the requirement for communal harmony is to be  
found in the Bahá’í faith. In a booklet, *Communal Harmony: India’s Greatest  
Challenge*, forming part of the Bahá’í literature, it is stated thus:

202.6a “… The spirit of tolerance and assimilation are the hall marks of this  
civilization. Never has the question of communal harmony and social  
integration raised such a wide range of emotions as today ….”

202.6b “Fear, suspicion and hatred are the fuel which feed the flame of com-  
munal disharmony and conflict. Though the Indian masses would  
prefer harmony between various communities, it cannot be estab-  
lished through the accommodation ‘separate but equal,’ nor through  
the submergence of minority culture into majority culture—whatever  
that may be ….”

202.6c “Lasting harmony between heterogeneous communities can only  
come through a recognition of the oneness of mankind, a realization  
that differences that divide us along ethnic and religious lines have  
no foundation. Just as there are no boundaries drawn on the earth of  
separate nations, distinctions of social, economic, ethnic and religious  
identity imposed by peoples are artificial; they have only benefited  
those with vested interests. On the other hand, naturally occurring  
diverse regions of the planet, or the country, such as mountain and  
plains, each have unique benefits. The diversity created by God has  
infinite value, while distinctions imposed by man have no substance.”

202.7 We conclude with the fervent hope that communal harmony, peace and  
tranquility would soon descend in the land of Mahatma Gandhi, Father of  
the Nation, whose favorite *bhajan* (hymn) was

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| ईश्वर अल्लाह तेरे नाम, सबको सन्मति दे भगवान | [Ishwar allah tere naam, sabko sanmati de bhagwaan] |

[two lines written in Hindi]

202.7a “Ishwar and Allah are both your names,  
Oh God! Grant this wisdom to all.”

202.8 We do hope that the people of India would remember the gospel he  
preached and practiced, and live up to his ideals. “Better late than never.” …

[Justice] J. S. Verma

[Justice] G. N. Ray

New Delhi

October 24, 1994

203  
The character of internet postings

19 MAY 1995

To an individual Bahá’í

Dear Bahá’í Friend,

203.1 The Universal House of Justice has consulted on your email message of  
4 April 1995 concerning the character of some of the postings on Bahá’í  
subjects in electronic discussion groups, and has asked us to convey to you  
the following.

203.2 Your concerns, in the context in which you have described them in the  
second paragraph of your message, are legitimate for a Bahá’í, and you  
should not hesitate to express them, as you wish, in a manner that is in-  
tended to illumine the exchange of ideas in any discussion in which you  
may participate.

203.3 The opportunity which electronic communication technology provides  
for more speedy and thorough consultation among the friends is highly  
significant. Without doubt, it represents another manifestation of a devel-  
opment eagerly anticipated by the Guardian when he foresaw the creation  
of “a mechanism of world intercommunication … embracing the whole  
planet, freed from national hindrances and restrictions, and functioning  
with marvelous swiftness and perfect regularity.”[[267]](#footnote-267)203-1

203.4 As you well appreciate, the extent to which such technology advances the  
work of the Faith depends, of course, on the manner in which it is used. As  
a medium for Bahá’ís to exchange views, it imposes on participants the same  
requirements of moderation, candor, and courtesy as would be the case in  
any other discussion. Likewise, those involved should avoid belittling the  
views of one another. In this regard, the House of Justice has noted your  
understandable repugnance at an apparent temptation to use misleading  
and invidious labels like “traditionalists” and “liberals,” which divide the  
Bahá’í community. To the extent that this divisive habit of mind may persist  
in the Bahá’í community, it is obviously a carryover from non-Bahá’í society  
and a manifestation of an immature conception of life. If Bahá’ís were to  
persist in this mode of thinking, it would bring to naught even the most

worthwhile intellectual endeavor, as has so conspicuously been the case with  
societies of the past.

203.5 Most important of all, as with any exploration by Bahá’ís of the beliefs  
and practices of their Faith, electronic discussion will serve the interests of  
the Cause and its members only as it is conducted within the framework  
of the Bahá’í Teachings and the truths they enshrine. To attempt to discuss  
the Cause of God apart from or with disdain for the authoritative guidance  
inherent in these Teachings would clearly be a logical contradiction. To take  
the first point mentioned in your letter, it is obvious that seeking to impose  
limits on the universality of the authority of God’s Manifestation would  
lead to the frustration of serious scholarly work and generate disharmony  
within an effort whose success depends precisely upon a spirit of unity and  
mutual trust. The standard is the one made clear by Bahá’u’lláh Himself:

203.5a The essence of belief in Divine unity consisteth in regarding Him  
Who is the Manifestation of God and Him Who is the invisible, the  
inaccessible, the unknowable Essence as one and the same. By this  
is meant that whatsoever pertaineth to the former, all His acts and  
doings, whatever He ordaineth or forbiddeth, should be considered,  
in all their aspects, and under all circumstances, and without any res-  
ervation, as identical with the Will of God Himself.[[268]](#footnote-268)203-2

203.6 With regard to the harmony of science and religion, the Writings of the  
Central Figures and the commentaries of the Guardian make abundantly  
clear that the task of humanity, including the Bahá’í community that serves  
as the “leaven” within it, is to create a global civilization which embodies  
both the spiritual and material dimensions of existence. The nature and  
scope of such a civilization are still beyond anything the present genera-  
tion can conceive. The prosecution of this vast enterprise will depend on a  
progressive interaction between the truths and principles of religion and the  
discoveries and insights of scientific inquiry. This entails living with ambi-  
guities as a natural and inescapable feature of the process of exploring real-  
ity. It also requires us not to limit science to any particular school of thought  
or methodological approach postulated in the course of its development.  
The challenge facing Bahá’í thinkers is to provide responsible leadership

in this endeavor, since it is they who have both the priceless insights of the  
Revelation and the advantages conferred by scientific investigation.

203.7 The ease and relative impersonality of the electronic medium require in  
some ways an even higher level of self-discipline than is the case in situa-  
tions where a spirit of unity is reinforced by the opportunity for direct per-  
sonal contact and social interaction. In the pursuit of such a spirit of unity,  
Bahá’ís will, without doubt, wish to assist the consultative processes by  
sharing and discussing relevant Bahá’í texts. This will itself have the further  
effect of drawing attention back to the framework of Bahá’í belief.

203.8 The House of Justice assures you of its prayers in the Holy Shrines on  
your behalf that the abundant confirmations of Bahá’u’lláh may ever sustain  
you.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

204  
Emergency contributions  
to Mount Carmel project funds

20 JUNE 1995

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

204.1 An emergency mission undertaken at our request by one of our mem-  
bers, accompanied by a member of the International Teaching Center and  
the Chief Financial Officer of the Bahá’í World Center, who visited the  
United States, Canada, and Europe and apprised the friends of the possible  
crisis that could affect the progress of the Mount Carmel Projects if the  
shortfall of US$40 million was not contributed by the end of the Three  
Year Plan, has just been completed. With deep satisfaction we are glad to  
announce that the total sum has been ensured through immediate contribu-  
tions, firm pledges, and donations in kind, enabling this vital enterprise,  
which is progressing at full force, to proceed without any need to interrupt  
the construction work. Heartfelt acknowledgement is due to all those from  
the areas visited and elsewhere who heroically stepped forward and made  
sacrificial offerings for the furtherance of this vast undertaking so highly  
extolled by the beloved Guardian.

204.2 From the conclusion of the Three Year Plan, approximately US$10 mil-  
lion annually will still be required until the end of the century, when the  
projects underway on Mount Carmel are expected to be completed.

204.3 If all pledges are duly honored, as anticipated, and more friends in the  
above-named areas, as well as the rest of the world, will continue to offer  
their loving contributions towards this historic undertaking during this last  
year of the Three Year Plan, the estimated amount of US$10 million of  
annual contributions mentioned above will correspondingly be reduced,  
enabling the World Center to direct its attention with less anxiety to the  
vital needs of the expansion, consolidation, and proclamation work of the  
Faith throughout all continents.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

205  
Homosexuality and the Bahá’í Faith

11 SEPTEMBER 1995

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of the United States  
Dear Bahá’í Friends,

205.1 The Universal House of Justice has considered your letters … in which  
you describe the impact of the changing sexual mores and the public debate  
on homosexuality on some of the members of the American Bahá’í com-  
munity who are homosexuals. We are instructed to provide the following  
guidance in response to the National Spiritual Assembly’s requests for a  
clarification of the Bahá’í law on homosexual practices and for assistance in  
guiding the believers.

205.2 It is important to understand that there is a difference between the Bahá’í  
attitude towards, on the one hand, the condition of homosexuality and  
those who are affected by it and, on the other, the practice of homosexual  
relations by members of the Bahá’í community.

205.3 As you know, the Bahá’í Faith strongly condemns all blatant acts of  
immorality, and it includes among them the expression of sexual love be-  
tween individuals of the same sex. With regard to homosexual practices,  
Bahá’u’lláh, in *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, paragraph 107, and Questions and An-  
swers, number 49, forbids pederasty and sodomy. The following extract  
from one of His Tablets reveals the strength of His condemnation:

205.3a Ye are forbidden to commit adultery, sodomy and lechery. Avoid  
them, O concourse of the faithful. By the righteousness of God! Ye  
have been called into being to purge the world from the defilement  
of evil passions. This is what the Lord of all mankind hath enjoined  
upon you, could ye but perceive it. He who relateth himself to the All-  
Merciful and committeth satanic deeds, verily he is not of Me. Unto  
this beareth witness every atom, pebble, tree and fruit, and beyond  
them this ever-proclaiming, truthful and trustworthy Tongue.[[269]](#footnote-269)205-1

205.4 In a letter dated 26 March 1950, written on his behalf, Shoghi Effendi, the authorized interpreter of the Bahá’í Teachings, further explicates the  
Bahá’í attitude towards homosexuality. It should be noted that the Guard-  
ian’s interpretation of this subject is based on his infallible understanding  
of the Texts. It represents both a statement of moral principle and unerring  
guidance to Bahá’ís who are homosexuals. The letter states:

205.4a No matter how devoted and fine the love may be between people  
of the same sex, to let it find expression in sexual acts is wrong. To say  
that it is ideal is no excuse. Immorality of every sort is really forbidden  
by Bahá’u’lláh, and homosexual relationships He looks upon as such,  
besides being against nature.

205.4b To be afflicted this way is a great burden to a conscientious soul.  
But through the advice and help of doctors, through a strong and  
determined effort, and through prayer, a soul can overcome this  
handicap.[[270]](#footnote-270)205-2

205.5 It is evident, therefore, that the prohibition against Bahá’ís’ engaging in  
homosexual behavior is an explicit Teaching of the Cause. The Universal  
House of Justice is authorized to change or repeal its own legislation as  
conditions change, thus providing Bahá’í law with an essential element of  
flexibility, but it cannot abrogate or change any of the laws which are explic-  
itly laid down in the sacred Texts. It follows, then, that the House of Justice  
has no authority to change this clear teaching on homosexual practice.

205.6 You mention that concern has been expressed by some of the friends that  
the unique identity of homosexual Bahá’ís is not sufficiently appreciated by  
the Bahá’í community. It is important to reflect on the fact that the Writings  
of the Faith not only acknowledge that each individual has a God-given  
identity, but they also set out the means by which this identity can achieve  
its highest development and fulfillment. Bahá’u’lláh attests that through the  
Teachings of the Manifestation of God “every man will advance and de-  
velop until he attaineth the station at which he can manifest all the potential  
forces with which his inmost true self hath been endowed.” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá  
observes that should man’s “natural qualities … be used and displayed in  
an unlawful way, they become blameworthy.”[[271]](#footnote-271)205-3 Shoghi Effendi, in a letter  
dated 25 May 1936, written on his behalf, identifies man’s “true self” with  
“his soul.” In describing the nature of “man’s inner spiritual self or reality,”  
he notes that the “two tendencies for good or evil are but manifestations  
of a single reality or self,” and that the self “is capable of development in  
either way.” Underlining the importance of education to the actualization  
of man’s potential, the Guardian concludes:

205.6a All depends fundamentally on the training or education which man  
receives. Human nature is made up of possibilities both for good and  
evil. True religion can enable it to soar in the highest realm of the  
spirit, while its absence can, as we already witness around us, cause it  
to fall to the lowest depths of degradation and misery.[[272]](#footnote-272)205-4

205.7 As a framework within which to consider the subject of homosexuality, it  
is important to acknowledge, with all due humility, that basic to the Bahá’í  
Teachings is the concept that it is only God Who knows the purpose of  
human life, and Who can convey this to us through His Manifestations.  
A distinguishing feature of human existence is that we have been given the  
capacity to know and love God and to consciously obey Him. Thus we  
also have the converse: the ability to turn away from God, to fail to love  
Him and to disobey Him. Indeed, left to himself, man is naturally inclined  
towards evil. Human beings need not only assistance in defining acceptable

behavior of one person towards another, but also guidance which will help  
them to refrain from doing that which is spiritually damaging to themselves.  
By responding to the Message of the Manifestation of God we learn how  
we should live and draw on the spiritual strength which comes with it.  
Through studying the Word of God and training ourselves to follow His  
commandments, we rise to the full stature that He has designed for us.

205.8 The material world, in relation to the spiritual world, is a world of im-  
perfections. It is full of dangers and difficulties which have been greatly ag-  
gravated by man’s neglect and misuse of his responsibilities. Human society  
itself, which exists in the material world, is in disastrous disarray.

205.9 Our appetites and inclinations are strongly influenced by the condition  
of our physical makeup, and our bodies are in varying degrees of health,  
depending upon factors such as heredity, environment, nourishment and  
our own treatment of them. Genetic variations occur, producing conditions  
which can create problems for the individual. Some conditions are of an  
emotional or psychological nature, producing such imbalances as quick-  
ness to anger, recklessness, timorousness, and so forth; others involve purely  
physical characteristics, resulting not only in unusual capacities but also in  
handicaps or diseases of various kinds.

205.10 Whether deficiencies are inborn or are acquired, our purpose in this life is  
to overcome them and to train ourselves in accordance with the pattern that  
is revealed to us in the divine Teachings.

205.11 The view that homosexuality is a condition that is not amenable to  
change is to be questioned by Bahá’ís. There are, of course, many kinds and  
degrees of homosexuality, and overcoming extreme conditions is sure to be  
more difficult than overcoming others. Nevertheless, as noted earlier, the  
Guardian has stated, that “through the advice and help of doctors, through  
a strong and determined effort, and through prayer, a soul can overcome  
this handicap.”[[273]](#footnote-273)205-5

205.12 The statistics which indicate that homosexuality is incurable are un-  
doubtedly distorted by the fact that many of those who overcome the prob-  
lem never speak about it in public, and others solve their problems without  
even consulting professional counselors.

205.13 Nevertheless there are undoubtedly cases in which the individual finds  
himself (or herself) unable to eliminate a physical attraction to members

of the same sex, even though he succeeds in controlling his behavior. This  
is but one of the many trials and temptations to which human beings are  
subject in this life. For Bahá’ís, it cannot alter the basic concept taught by  
Bahá’u’lláh, that the kind of sexuality purposed by God is the love between  
a man and a woman, and that its primary (but not its only) purpose is the  
bringing of children into this world and providing them with a loving and  
protective environment in which they can be reared to know and love God.  
If, therefore, a homosexual cannot overcome his or her condition to the  
extent of being able to have a heterosexual marriage, he or she must remain  
single, and abstain from sexual relations. These are the same requirements as  
for a heterosexual person who does not marry. While Bahá’u’lláh encourages  
the believers to marry, it is important to note that marriage is by no means  
an obligation. It is for the individual to decide whether he or she wishes to  
lead a family life or to live in a state of celibacy.

205.14 The condition of being sexually attracted to some object other than to  
a mature member of the opposite sex, a condition of which homosexuality  
is but one manifestation, is regarded by the Faith as a distortion of true hu-  
man nature, as a problem to be overcome, no matter what specific physical  
or psychological condition may be the immediate cause. Any Bahá’í who  
suffers from such a disability should be treated with understanding, and  
should be helped to control and overcome it. All of us suffer from imperfec-  
tions which we must struggle to overcome and we all need one another’s  
understanding and patience.

205.15 To regard homosexuals with prejudice and disdain would be entirely  
against the spirit of Bahá’í Teachings. The doors are open for all of humani-  
ty to enter the Cause of God, irrespective of their present circumstance; this  
invitation applies to homosexuals as well as to any others who are engaged  
in practices contrary to the Bahá’í Teachings. Associated with this invitation  
is the expectation that all believers will make a sincere and persistent effort  
to eradicate those aspects of their conduct which are not in conformity with  
Divine Law. It is through such adherence to the Bahá’í Teachings that a  
true and enduring unity of the diverse elements of the Bahá’í community is  
achieved and safeguarded.

205.16 When a person wishes to join the Faith and it is generally known that  
he or she has a problem such as drinking, homosexuality, taking drugs,  
adultery, etc., the individual should be told in a patient and loving way of  
the Bahá’í Teachings on these matters. If it is later discovered that a believer  
is violating Bahá’í standards, it is the duty of the Spiritual Assembly to

determine whether the immoral conduct is flagrant and can bring the name  
of the Faith into disrepute, in which case the Assembly must take action to  
counsel the believer and require him or her to make every effort to mend  
his ways. If the individual fails to rectify his conduct in spite of repeated  
warnings, sanctions should be imposed. Assemblies, of course, must exer-  
cise care not to pry into the private lives of the believers to ensure that they  
are behaving properly, but should not hesitate to take action in cases of  
blatant misbehavior.

205.17 The Spiritual Assemblies should, to a certain extent, be forbearing in  
the matter of people’s moral conduct, such as homosexuality, in view of  
the terrible deterioration of society in general. The Assemblies must also  
bear in mind that while awareness of contemporary social and moral values  
may well enhance their understanding of the situation of the homosexual,  
the standard which they are called upon to uphold is the Bahá’í standard.  
A flagrant violation of this standard disgraces the Bahá’í community in its  
own eyes even if the surrounding society finds the transgression tolerable.

205.18 With regard to the organized network of homosexual Bahá’ís mentioned  
in your letter, the Universal House of Justice has instructed us to say that,  
while there is an appropriate role in the Bahá’í community for groups of  
individuals to come together to help each other to understand and to deal  
with certain problem situations, according to the Bahá’í Teachings there can  
be no place in our community for groups which actively promote a style of  
life that is contrary to the Teachings of the Cause. It should be understood  
that the homosexual tendencies of some individuals do not entitle them  
to an identity setting them apart from others. Such individuals share with  
every other Bahá’í the responsibility to adhere to the laws and principles of  
the Faith as well as the freedom to exercise their administrative rights.

205.19 The Universal House of Justice will pray that, armed with the guid-  
ance contained in this letter, the National Spiritual Assembly will act with  
love, sensitivity and firmness to assist the believers both to gain a deeper  
understanding of their true and ennobling purpose in life and to make a  
strong and determined effort to overcome every handicap to their spiritual  
development.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

206  
Moral delinquency and hypocrisy

18 OCTOBER 1995

To an individual Bahá’í

Dear Bahá’í Friend,

206.1 … Turning first to the questions which you raised earlier, regarding the  
so-called “Tablet on Hypocrisy”: At item 39 of the compilation entitled  
*Trustworthiness* there appears an English translation of a Tablet revealed by  
Bahá’u’lláh which includes a reference to hypocrisy.[[274]](#footnote-274)206-1 This may be the  
passage to which you refer. It reads as follows:

206.1a Be thou of the people of hell-fire  
but be not a hypocrite.  
Be thou an unbeliever,  
but be not a plotter.  
Make thy home in taverns,  
but tread not the path  
of the mischief-maker.  
Fear thou God,  
but not the priest.[[275]](#footnote-275)206-2  
Give to the executioner thy head,  
but not thy heart.  
Let thine abode be under the stone,  
but seek not the shelter of the cleric.

206.1b Thus doth the Holy Reed intone its melodies, and the Nightingale  
of Paradise warble its song, so that He may infuse life eternal into  
the mortal frames of men, impart to the temples of dust the essence  
of the Holy Spirit and the heavenly Light, and draw the transient  
world, through the potency of a single word, unto the Everlasting  
Kingdom.[[276]](#footnote-276)206-3

206.2 In this connection we have been asked to make the following comments.  
There is an important distinction between hypocrisy on the one hand and,  
on the other, such attitudes as turning a blind eye to the faults of others, or of  
concealing one’s own faults through a feeling of shame. This distinction plays  
an important role in the attitude of Spiritual Assemblies towards the members  
of its community, as well as in the relationship between individuals.

206.3 Bahá’í standards of behavior are very high, and it is the task of Spiritual  
Assemblies to assist the friends in their communities to deepen their un-  
derstanding of the Teachings and to improve the quality of their lives in  
obedience to Bahá’í laws and principles. At the same time, it is recognized  
that individuals are imperfect and that we all fall short, in one way or an-  
other, of the exalted standard which Bahá’u’lláh has established. Spiritual  
Assemblies and individual believers alike are urged to recognize this fact,  
and to assume that each person is, in his own life, striving to overcome his  
imperfections. Thus, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá calls upon each individual to look at a  
person’s good qualities rather than the bad, even though there may be only  
one good one and ten bad ones. Such an attitude is in no way to be equated  
with hypocrisy.

206.4 A Spiritual Assembly, for its part, is instructed not to pry into the lives  
of the believers in its community. Before it takes action to caution a Bahá’í  
about his misconduct, such misconduct should be blatant and thus cre-  
ate a problem not only for the community and the individuals concerned,  
but also for the good name of the Faith. A Spiritual Assembly may be well  
aware that one of the members of its community has still not fully overcome  
the habit of drinking alcohol which he had before accepting the Faith, but  
chooses to say nothing about it. This is not hypocrisy on its part, it is the  
exercise of patience and wisdom in dealing with the problem. Nor is the  
fact that the believer in question drinks secretly necessarily an evidence of  
hypocrisy on his part, it may simply be a combination of weakness in the  
face of temptation and of shame at this weakness. If, however, a Bahá’í  
openly states that he holds the Bahá’í prohibition on drinking alcohol to  
be an anachronism, and brazenly drinks in public, such an attitude is not  
the opposite of hypocrisy, it is a blatant disdain for Bahá’í standards which  
would require the Spiritual Assembly’s intervention.

206.5 The same principles apply to other moral delinquencies. In the area of  
sexual morality, a Bahá’í may occasionally behave in a manner which is con-  
trary to Bahá’í standards, because he does not exercise the strength of will  
necessary to resist temptation. For individuals to gossip about such a lapse is

backbiting, which is itself condemned in the Faith. An Assembly would not  
normally intervene unless it has reason to believe that such lapses constitute  
a blatant disregard of Bahá’í law ….

206.6 Be assured of the continued prayers of the House of Justice at the Sacred  
Threshold on your behalf that you may be divinely assisted and guided in  
serving the Cause we love so well.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

207  
Appointment of Continental Counselors and increase  
in number of Continental Counselors

29 OCTOBER 1995

To the Bahá’ís of the World

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

207.1 The Day of the Covenant, 26 November 1995, marks the commence-  
ment of a new five-year term of service for members of the Continental  
Boards of Counselors for the Protection and Propagation of the Faith. We  
have decided to increase the number of these high-ranking officers of the  
Cause from seventy-two to eighty-one and are happy to announce the  
names of those now appointed.

207.1a **Africa (19 Counselors)**: George Allen, Beatrice Asare, Niaz Bushrui,  
Parvine Djoneydi, Mehraz Ehsani (Trustee of the Continental Fund),  
Shidan Fat’he-Aazam, Kobina Fynn, Ibrahim Galadima, Hizzaya  
Hissani, Firaydoun Javaheri, Zekrullah Kazemi, Eddy Lutchmaya,  
Abaineh Merhatsion, Muhammad Otmani, Daniel Ramoroesi, Edith  
Senoga, Lally Warren, Wingi Mabuku, Tiati à Zock.

207.1b **The Americas (19 Counselors)**: Eloy Anello, Stephen Birkland,  
Gustavo Correa, Rolf von Czékus, Jacqueline LHB Delahunt, Wilma  
Ellis, Tod Ewing, Linda Gershuny, ‘Abdu’l-Missagh Ghadirian, Peter  
McLaren (Trustee of the Continental Fund), Alejandra Miller, Ruth  
Pringle, Carmen Elisa de Sadeghian, Isabel de Sánchez, Errol Sealy,  
Arturo Serrano, Farhad Shayani, David Smith, Rodrigo Tomás.

207.1c **Asia (18 Counselors)**: Borhanoddin Afshin, Fadel Ardekani, Jabbar  
Eidelkhani, Bijan Farid, Elena Gruzkova, David Huang (Trustee  
of the Continental Fund), Nobuko Iwakura, Abbas Katirai, Kim  
Myung Jung, Lee Lee Ludher, Payman Mohajer, Perin Olyai, Zenaida  
Ramirez, Cyrus Rohani, Vicente Samaniego, Zena Sorabjee, George  
Soraya, Rosalie Tran.

207.1d **Australasia (11 Counselors)**: Ben Ayala, Beatrice Benson, Afemata  
Moli Chang, David Chittleborough (Trustee of the Continental  
Fund), Violette Haake, Betra Majmeto, Sírús Naráqí, Bruce Saun-  
ders, Heather Simpson, Erama Ugaia, Robin White.

207.1e **Europe (14 Counselors)**: Hooshidar Balazadeh, Uta von Both, Patri-  
cia Coles, Louis Hénuzet, Patrick O’Mara (Trustee of the Continental  
Fund), Nabil Perdu, Maija Pihlainen, Polin Rafat, Shapour Rassekh,  
Ilhan Sezgin, Nosrat Tirandaz, Larissa Tsutskova, Tiberiu Vajda,  
Sohrab Youssefian.

207.2 The following fifteen devoted believers are being released from the du-  
ties of membership on the Boards of Counselors: Sabir Afaqi, Hushang  
Ahdieh, Gila Michael Bahta, Friday Ekpe, Kamran Eshraghian, Kassimi  
Fofana, John Fozdar, Tinai Hancock, Foad Kazemzadeh, Gayle Morrison,  
Rose Ong, William Roberts, Paul Semenoff, Alan Smith, Shantha Sundram.  
These distinguished servants of Bahá’u’lláh have earned our abiding grati-  
tude for their impressive and self-sacrificing contributions to the progress  
of the Cause. Our fervent prayers surround them as they take up the next  
phase in their service to the Faith.

207.3 In the next stage of the Divine Plan, which will begin at Riḍván, the essen-  
tial role of the Counselors and their Auxiliary Boards in the operation of the  
Bahá’í Administrative Order will become more evident. During the crucial  
period ahead they will be required to direct their attention and energies in  
still greater measure to fostering the evolution of local and national Bahá’í  
institutions and to helping the rank and file of the believers to increase their  
devotion to Bahá’u’lláh, their ardor in teaching, and their ability to draw on  
the tremendous power latent in the unified action of Bahá’í communities.

207.4 The Counselors in all continents are being called to a conference at the  
World Center of the Faith from 26 through 31 December 1995, to deliber-  
ate on the tasks and opportunities of the years immediately ahead.

207.5 It is our heartfelt prayer that the exertions of the newly appointed Boards  
of Counselors may lend a tremendous impetus to the manifold activities of  
the friends throughout the world.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

208  
Message to the ASEAN Youth Conference

19 DECEMBER 1995

To The Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of Malaysia

208.1 Kindly convey the following message to the ASEAN Youth Conference  
which is to commence in Kangar, Perlis, on 22 December 1995:

208.1a As you gather for the second ASEAN Youth Conference, we re-  
member with pride the abundant fruit of the first such Conference  
held in October 1994 in Bangkok, Thailand, and attended by 220  
youth from eleven countries. Inspired by that gathering, some 90  
youth arose to pioneer or travel-teach in many parts of the region.

208.1b Throughout the early history of the Faith, young people were in  
the vanguard of service to the beloved Cause, becoming an inspiration  
to succeeding generations; many attained the glory of martyrdom.  
The services that Bahá’í youth are called upon to undertake in these  
times have their particular requirements but are no less demanding  
of dedication and zeal if the teaching efforts in every country and the  
building of Bahá’u’lláh’s New World Order are to be assured.

208.1c Receptive souls throughout Southeast Asia are waiting to hear the  
message of the Promised One, athirst for His life-giving Teachings.  
The time to emblazon the name of Bahá’u’lláh upon the hearts and  
minds of these souls is now. Let the few remaining years of the twen-  
tieth century witness monumental victories for the Faith, enhancing  
beyond imagination the strength of your various communities as they  
enter the new millennium.

208.1d Turn for your guidance to the Sacred Writings and dedicate your-  
selves to their systematic and daily study. As they permeate your hearts  
and minds, so may they strengthen you in your attempts to carry forth  
the Teachings of Bahá’u’lláh, the only source of the love and vision

necessary to bring about the unity of mankind. We urge you to arise  
for service, determined to ignite the hearts of young people through-  
out the region. We will pray ardently at the Holy Threshold for the  
confirmations of the Blessed Beauty to surround your conference, and  
your subsequent work for His Holy Cause.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

209  
Message to U.S. National Bahá’í Youth Conference

25 DECEMBER 1995

To the friends gathered at the National Bahá’í Youth Conference

in Dallas, Texas

Dear Friends,

209.1 We send you our warmest greetings and deepest love.

209.2 Your conference coincides with the Counselors’ Conference which has  
drawn 78 Counselors from the five continents to the Holy Land for discus-  
sions with the International Teaching Center concerning the provisions of  
the next global teaching and consolidation plan to be launched at Riḍván  
1996. You may well draw inspiration from this coincidence as you take ad-  
vantage of your togetherness to contemplate during the next few days the  
opportunities available to the Bahá’í youth both to bend their efforts towards  
great achievements in the teaching field during the remaining months of the  
Three Year Plan and to ensure through such achievements a fitting initiation  
for the new Plan, which will be in operation during the closing years of the  
unique Twentieth Century.

209.3 The threat of disintegration and chaos, on the one hand, and the  
promise of unity and peace, on the other, flash intermittently as pros-  
pects at this time of great transition for the entire human race. Unity  
and peace will triumph, we know; but until then humanity will surely  
experience trials and turmoil. Amid these can be found the countless  
opportunities to teach those, especially among your peers, who seek un-  
derstanding and hope. The perspective which enables us to see clearly  
during this time of great perplexity is provided in the Sacred Writings  
of our Faith and in the life and deeds of our true Exemplar, ‘Abdu’l-  
Bahá; these are abundant resources to which the followers of the Blessed

Beauty, young and old alike, can turn time and again for knowledge,  
inspiration and assurance.

209.4 May your collective and individual capacity for action increase as you  
take occasions such as this conference both to obtain a deeper understand-  
ing of your purpose and goal in life and to mobilize your efforts, in word  
and deed, to spread the glad tidings and demonstrate the revolutionizing  
effects of the appearance of the Lord of Hosts. Being among the ones who  
will increasingly be shouldering the responsibilities for the evolution of the  
Order of Bahá’u’lláh, the very pattern of future society, you, like the Bahá’í  
youth in every other land, can do no less than consider seriously what each  
and all of you will do now towards victoriously meeting the challenges and  
opportunities of these troubled but dynamic times.

209.5 We shall continue to pray ardently in the Holy Shrines for your success  
in every respect.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

210  
Message to the Conference  
of the Continental Boards of Counselors

26 DECEMBER 195

To the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counselors

Beloved Friends,

210.1 With great happiness we welcome you to this momentous conference,  
which is graced by the presence of three Hands of the Cause of God. It  
marks the opening of a period of intense activity as the twentieth century,  
hailed by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as “a century of life and renewal,”[[277]](#footnote-277)210-1 draws to a  
close, and a new century of enormous challenge for all mankind opens be-  
fore us. To guide the activities of the Bahá’í world during this period, we  
have decided to launch a Four Year Plan at Riḍván 1996. The provisions of  
that Plan are to be the focus of your consultations in the coming six days.

210.2 The Continental Boards of Counselors have been an integral part of the  
Administrative Order for over twenty-five years. Your institution has made  
an essential contribution to the strengthening and evolution of the Bahá’í

community, and your role in the protection and growth of the Cause will  
be of even greater consequence in the years ahead.

210.3 If there is any question of the speed with which history is unfolding,  
we need but recall the events, both within and without the Bahá’í commu-  
nity, which have transpired since the Counselors assembled in conference  
in 1985. The transformations of this remarkable first decade of the Fourth  
Epoch of the Formative Age of the Faith, seen in the light of the promises  
in our Sacred Scriptures, throw into sharp perspective the great range of the  
tasks before us. Can we have any doubt that events will henceforth move at  
a still more rapid pace and will change the world even more radically than  
have those of the past decade?

210.4 At this crucial point in the fortunes of humankind, your role and that  
of your Auxiliaries in calling forth the wholehearted endeavors of the fol-  
lowers of Bahá’u’lláh, in raising the level of their spiritual awareness, and  
in promoting the evolution of national and local Bahá’í institutions is of  
fundamental importance. In that realization we eagerly anticipate the fruits  
of your deliberations during the coming days. We shall offer fervent prayers  
at the Sacred Threshold that the confirmations of the Almighty will guide  
and reinforce your services both now and through the years to come.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

211  
Publication of a Persian edition of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas

28 DECEMBER 1995

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

211.1 The Universal House of Justice announces with great pleasure that a Per-  
sian edition of the Most Holy Book is expected to be available for distribu-  
tion by mid-January 1996.

211.2 The text of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas itself remains in the original Arabic. This  
has been written by a skilled calligrapher in Naskh script and appropriately  
illuminated. The other Sacred Writings comprised in the volume will be in  
the original language, Arabic or Persian, while the introduction, notes and  
other supplementary material of the English edition have been translated  
into Persian.

211.3 The Persian edition of 30,000 copies is being published by World Center  
Publications and will be distributed by Bahá’í Verlag, the German Bahá’í  
Publishing Trust. We enclose a copy of a letter from Bahá’í Verlag giving  
ordering and price details.

211.4 Kindly inform the friends in your community of the imminent release of  
this publication. To facilitate your communication of this important matter  
to the Iranian friends in your community, we enclose a translation of this  
letter into Persian.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

212  
Deliberations on the upcoming Four Year Plan  
at the Counselors’ Conference

31 DECEMBER 1995

To the Bahá’ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

212.1 In the wake of the dynamic spirit animating the six-day-long Counselors’  
Conference at the World Center, now in its final session as we address you,  
we take the occasion to announce our decision which has been the subject  
of their deliberations: At Riḍván 1996 a global plan of expansion and con-  
solidation will be launched, to end four years later at Riḍván 2000.

212.2 It is this anticipation that has focused the thoughts of the seventy-eight  
Counselors from the five continents, who have been conferring together in  
the presence of the Hands of the Cause of God Amatu’l-Bahá Rúḥíyyih  
Khánum, ‘Alí-Akbar Furútan and ‘Alí-Muḥammad Varqá, the members of  
the Universal House of Justice and the Counselor members of the Interna-  
tional Teaching Center. Their consultations on the challenges and prospects  
facing the Bahá’í world community have been of such caliber and content  
as to have emboldened our expectations of a mighty thrust in the growth  
and development of that community during the crucial years immediately  
ahead.

212.3 The whole Plan will be announced at Riḍván. However, we wish you to  
have some information about it now within the measure of the discussions  
which have been taking place at the Counselors’ Conference.

212.4 The Four Year Plan will aim at one major accomplishment: a significant  
advance in the process of entry by troops. This is to be achieved through  
marked progress in the activity and development of the individual believer,  
of the institutions, and of the local community. Keen attention to all three  
will ensure a greatly expanded, visibly united, vibrant and cohesive interna-  
tional community by the end of the twentieth century. The basic requisites  
can be summarized as follows.

212.5 The first calls for a vitality of the faith of each believer that is expressed  
through personal initiative and constancy in teaching the Cause to others,  
and through conscientious, individual effort to provide energy and resources  
to upbuild the community, to uphold the authority of its institutions, and to  
support local and regional plans and teaching projects. The second requires  
that local and national Bahá’í institutions evolve more rapidly into a proper  
exercise of their responsibilities as channels of guidance, planners of the  
teaching work, developers of human resources, builders of communities,  
and loving shepherds of the multitudes. The third, the flourishing of the  
community especially at the local level, demands a significant enhancement  
in patterns of behavior by which the collective expression of the virtues of  
the individual members and the functioning of the Spiritual Assembly is  
manifest in the unity and fellowship of the community and the dynamism  
of its activity and growth.

212.6 Towards these ends, the work of the Continental Counselors must as-  
sume new dimensions. Thus, at their conference, they have been deliberat-  
ing on such matters as:

212.6a – Developments in the mode of the functioning of the Continental  
Boards of Counselors.

212.6b – The process for the elaboration of the Plan through the formulation  
of derivative plans and strategies at the national, regional, and local  
levels. Joint consultations between the Continental Counselors and  
National Spiritual Assemblies will begin immediately after Riḍván,  
and the planning process will move quickly to the regional level,  
involving Auxiliary Board members, Local Spiritual Assemblies  
and committees.

212.6c – The development of human resources to meet the needs of a rap-  
idly expanding community. Large-scale growth necessitates sus-  
tained measures of consolidation. The urgent requirement is for  
formally conducted programs of training through institutes and  
other centers of learning, in the establishment and operation of

which the Counselors and Auxiliary Board members will become  
more intimately involved.

212.6d – Effective approaches to the raising up and consolidation of Local  
Spiritual Assemblies. In accordance with the objective of fostering  
the maturation of these Assemblies, a greater effort is required to  
uphold a vital principle, which is that the responsibility for electing  
a Local Spiritual Assembly rests primarily on the Bahá’ís in the  
locality. The Auxiliary Board members and their assistants are to  
increase their efforts to improve the general understanding of this  
principle and will devote more attention to assisting the develop-  
ment of Local Assemblies. As of Riḍván 1997, all Local Spiritual  
Assemblies throughout the world will have to be elected on the First  
Day of Riḍván.

212.6e – Further means for the development of local Bahá’í communities.  
The needs in this respect will be met in part by an immediate in-  
crease in the membership of the Auxiliary Boards for Protection  
to equal that of the Auxiliary Boards for Propagation, so that Pro-  
tection Board members can directly and systematically assist on  
a wide scale the fundamental activities of the community, such  
as the spiritual nurturing of individual believers, the participation  
of women in all aspects of community life, the observance of the  
Nineteen Day Feasts and Holy Days, the holding of children’s  
classes, the fostering of youth activities.

212.7 The seven objectives specified in previous Plans describe essential, in-  
teracting directions that must advance simultaneously into the foreseeable  
future. The Four Year Plan’s aim at accelerating the process of entry by  
troops identifies a necessity at this stage in the progress of the Cause and  
in the state of human society. With this perspective, the three inseparable  
participants in the evolution of the new World Order—the individual, the  
institutions, and the community—must now demonstrate more tangibly  
than ever before their capacity and willingness to embrace masses of new  
adherents, to effect the spiritual and administrative transformation of thou-  
sands upon thousands, and, above all, to multiply the army of knowledge-  
able, consecrated teachers of a Faith whose emergence from obscurity must  
be registered on the consciousness of countless multitudes throughout the  
earth. These are among the detailed considerations that have occupied the  
deliberations of the Continental Counselors, who, upon their return home

and in the course of their work, will have occasion to share the results of  
their conference with the friends.

212.8 An auspicious beginning for the new Plan will largely depend on the re-  
sults of the current one, which will end in just a few months. The adequacy  
of these results will owe much to the degree to which the Local Spiritual  
Assemblies and the friends carry out the directions of their National Spiri-  
tual Assemblies, the generals of every Plan. Time is slipping away. This  
reality should prod us all to maximum action. Hence, in preparation for  
what beckons us on the near horizon, we cannot, we must not, hesitate to  
expend every energy to bring the Three Year Plan to a successful conclusion.  
The urgency which intensifies our desire for such an outcome is not merely  
pride of victory, gratifying as that may be. There are divine deadlines to be  
met. Our work is intended not only to increase the size and consolidate the  
foundations of our community, but more particularly to exert a positive  
influence on the affairs of the entire human race. At so crucial a moment in  
world affairs, we must not fail in our duty to take timely action on the goals  
set before us in the Three Year Plan.

212.9 With the full fervor of our expectant hearts, we call upon you all, in-  
dividually and collectively, to arise to the summons of the Lord of Hosts  
to teach His Cause. Do so with love, faith and courage; and the doors of  
heaven will open wide to pour forth benedictions upon your efforts.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

213  
Preparations for the Four Year Plan

31 DECEMBER 1995

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

213.1 Further to its message of today’s date addressed to the Bahá’ís of the  
world, the Universal House of Justice has asked us to send you the enclosed  
copy of its message of 26 December 1995 addressed to the Conference of  
the Continental Boards of Counselors. This is intended to place in your  
hands, particularly for your own understanding and that of your commit-  
tees which you feel would benefit from it, the text of the guidance given by

the House of Justice to the Counselors so as to prepare them for their role in  
the execution of the forthcoming Four Year Plan. You need not publish this  
message, but you are free to do so if you wish.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

26 DECEMBER 1995

**The Four Year Plan**

To the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counselors

Dearly loved Friends,

213.2 Our deliberations on the Four Year Plan have benefited enormously from  
the analysis the International Teaching Center prepared for us of conditions  
in the Bahá’í world, based on its constant interaction with the Counselors in  
the field, and from our subsequent consultations with that body. It gives us  
great pleasure to share with you at the outset of this conference the general  
features of the Plan. We invite you to turn your attention in the coming days  
to issues related to implementation, drawing on the insights and knowledge  
gained from decades of experience around the world.

213.3 Certain elements of our decisions and comments on the Plan will have  
a direct bearing on your labors throughout your present term of service.  
These are: the principal focus of the coming Plan; the process we envisage  
for the elaboration of the Plan and your part in this process; developments  
in the mode of functioning of the Continental Boards of Counselors; the  
formulation of plans at the national, regional and local levels; the vital need  
for institutes to train believers and develop human resources; the intimate  
involvement of Counselors and Auxiliary Board members in the establish-  
ment and operation of these institutes; effective approaches to the raising  
up and consolidation of Local Spiritual Assemblies and the development of  
local Bahá’í communities; and the allocation of limited financial resources  
to the many challenges before the Bahá’í community.

213.4 At Riḍván 1996, the Bahá’ís of the world will embark on a global en-  
terprise aimed at one major accomplishment: a significant advance in the  
process of entry by troops. This is to be achieved through marked progress  
in the activity and development of the individual believer, of the institu-  
tions, and of the local community. That an advance in this process depends  
on the progress of all three of these intimately connected participants is  
abundantly clear. The next four years must witness a dramatic upsurge in

effective teaching activities undertaken at the initiative of the individual.  
Thousands upon thousands of believers will need to be aided to express  
the vitality of their faith through constancy in teaching the Cause and by  
supporting the plans of their institutions and the endeavors of their com-  
munities. They should be helped to realize that their efforts will be sustained  
by the degree to which their inner life and private character “mirror forth in  
their manifold aspects the splendor of those eternal principles proclaimed  
by Bahá’u’lláh.”[[278]](#footnote-278)213-1 An acceleration in the tempo of individual teaching  
must necessarily be complemented by a multiplication in the number of  
regional and local teaching projects. To this end the institutions should be  
assisted in increasing their ability to consult according to Bahá’í principles,  
to unify the friends in a common vision, and to use their talents in service to  
the Cause. Furthermore, those who enter the Faith must be integrated into  
vibrant local communities, characterized by tolerance and love and guided  
by a strong sense of purpose and collective will, environments in which  
the capacities of all components—men, women, youth and children—are  
developed and their powers multiplied in unified action.

Planning process

213.5 At the close of this conference, we intend to announce to the Bahá’í world  
our decision to launch a Four Year Plan at Riḍván 1996. The formulation of  
national plans is to begin in each country after Riḍván, allowing the friends  
to concentrate their energies in the intervening months on bringing the  
Three Year Plan to a successful conclusion.

213.6 The ideas expressed in the initial announcement will be elaborated fur-  
ther in the forthcoming Riḍván message. Moreover, we have decided to  
address messages to the believers in each continent of the globe, or parts  
thereof, exploring the implications of the Four Year Plan in the light of  
the particular conditions of their countries. Following Riḍván, it should  
be feasible to hold consultative meetings among the institutions and with  
active supporters of the Faith in every country and to formulate national  
plans within a period of a few months. Once consultations between the  
Counselors and a National Spiritual Assembly on the provisions of a plan  
have reached fruition, its implementation can begin. Approval of these  
plans from the Bahá’í World Center will not be necessary; copies should,  
nonetheless, be forwarded to it.

213.7 The seven objectives specified for the Six Year and Three Year Plans de-  
scribe interacting processes that must advance simultaneously over many  
decades. They will guide the institutions as they set goals in various areas of  
activity to further the aim of the Four Year Plan. National plans, however,  
will need to go beyond the mere enumeration of goals to include an analysis  
of approaches to be adopted and lines of action to be followed, so that the  
friends will be able to set out on their endeavors with clarity of mind and  
decisiveness.

Continental level

213.8 In the discharge of their vital responsibilities during the Four Year Plan, the  
Continental Boards of Counselors will have a wide range of possibilities  
available to them. The flexibility inherent in their functioning must be fully  
exploited at this time when events both within and outside the Bahá’í com-  
munity are moving at an accelerated rate.

213.9 Certain Counselor functions, including the supervision and guidance of  
the Auxiliary Board members in an area, are generally best performed by  
one Counselor on behalf of the Board. However, in the performance of  
other functions, there is great value in a diversity of approaches and in  
consultation among several Counselors. For example, in providing stimulus  
to National Assemblies, in promoting teaching among various strata of the  
population, and in counseling different components of the Bahá’í commu-  
nity, better results are achieved when the abilities of a number of Counsel-  
ors are used in a complementary fashion. Further ways and means should be  
devised by each Continental Board of Counselors to enable the Assemblies  
and communities to benefit, to the extent feasible, from the varied talents  
of the Counselors. This may well involve periodic in-depth consultation  
among a group of Counselors on the conditions and needs of countries in a  
specific part of the continent since, in general, circumstances do not allow  
such consultations to occur frequently among all members of the Board.

213.10 Fundamental to the work of the Counselors is the understanding that  
all members of the Continental Board are responsible for the entire conti-  
nent, and should, to the degree possible, endeavor to familiarize themselves  
with the conditions of the Cause in the countries therein. Through periodic  
reports from individual Counselors, the Board is kept abreast of develop-  
ments in all areas of the continent and is able to offer guidance to assist its  
members in the execution of their duties. Whereas no Counselor should be  
regarded as having exclusive responsibility for any one territory, the detailed

familiarity acquired by each through close interaction with the National  
Spiritual Assembly and Auxiliary Board members in a particular area is in  
fact a valuable asset to all the Counselors on the Board.

213.11 Another aspect of the work of the Counselors which merits further at-  
tention is the interaction between Counselors of different Boards who serve  
adjacent areas or areas which have a special relationship. Among the ex-  
amples which come to mind are the Russian Federation, located partly in  
Europe and partly in Asia; the circumpolar national Bahá’í communities;  
the countries bordering the Mediterranean Sea; the communities of North-  
eastern Asia and the Antipodes, referred to by the Guardian as constitut-  
ing a spiritual axis; the Arabic-speaking countries of North Africa and the  
Middle East; and French-speaking territories in various continents.

213.12 We hope that, while in the Holy Land, each Board will be able to give  
consideration to its mode of operation and explore effective means of inter-  
action among the Counselors. In this way, between the close of the confer-  
ence and Riḍván, groups of Counselors will be able to consult together  
about the planning process in a number of related countries and the role  
they and their auxiliaries are to play in it.

National and regional levels

213.13 In most countries, once the major elements of the national plan have been  
identified, it is desirable that the planning process move quickly to the re-  
gional level. The resulting plans should include provisions for the promo-  
tion of individual teaching, the launching of campaigns of various kinds,  
the holding of conferences, the establishment of local and regional projects,  
the strengthening of local communities, and the movement of traveling  
teachers. Moreover, the widespread distribution of literature and audiovi-  
sual materials must be given urgent attention, and, particularly in areas of  
large-scale expansion, human resource development must be a key compo-  
nent of national and regional plans.

213.14 During the Nine Year Plan, the Universal House of Justice called upon  
National Spiritual Assemblies in countries where large-scale expansion was  
taking place to establish teaching institutes to meet the deepening needs  
of the thousands who were entering the Faith. At that time, the emphasis  
was on acquiring a physical facility to which group after group of newly  
enrolled believers would be invited to attend deepening courses. Over the  
years, in conjunction with these institutes, and often independent of them,  
a number of courses—referred to, for example, as weekend institutes, five-

day institutes, and nine-day institutes—were developed for the purpose of  
helping the friends gain an understanding of the fundamental verities of  
the Faith and arise to serve it. These efforts have contributed significantly  
to the enriching of the spiritual life of the believers and will undoubtedly  
continue in the future.

213.15 With the growth in the number of enrollments, it has become apparent  
that such occasional courses of instruction and the informal activities of  
community life, though important, are not sufficient as a means of human  
resource development, for they have resulted in only a relatively small band  
of active supporters of the Cause. These believers, no matter how dedicated,  
no matter how willing to make sacrifices, cannot attend to the needs of  
hundreds, much less thousands, of fledgling local communities. System-  
atic attention has to be given by Bahá’í institutions to training a significant  
number of believers and assisting them in serving the Cause according to  
their God-given talents and capacities.

213.16 The development of human resources on a large scale requires that the  
establishment of institutes be viewed in a new light. In many regions, it  
has become imperative to create institutes as organizational structures dedi-  
cated to systematic training. The purpose of such training is to endow ever-  
growing contingents of believers with the spiritual insights, the knowledge,  
and the skills needed to carry out the many tasks of accelerated expansion  
and consolidation, including the teaching and deepening of a large number  
of people—adults, youth and children. This purpose can best be achieved  
through well-organized, formal programs consisting of courses that follow  
appropriately designed curricula.

213.17 As an agency of the National Spiritual Assembly, the training institute  
should be charged with the task of developing human resources in all or  
part of a country. The requirements of expansion and consolidation in the  
country or region will dictate the complexity of its organization. In some  
instances, the institute may consist of a group of dedicated believers with  
a well-defined program and some administrative arrangement that enables  
it to offer regular training courses. In many cases, in addition to a group  
of teachers associated with it, the institute will require part- and full-time  
staff, for whom assistance from the funds of the Faith may be necessary.  
The institute needs access to some physical facilities in which it can conduct  
courses and, at some stage of its development, may require a building of  
its own. Irrespective of whether or not an institute has its own physical  
facilities, its teachers must offer courses both at a central location and in the

villages and towns so that an appreciable number of believers can enter its  
programs. The complexity and number of courses offered by an institute, as  
well as the size of its staff and the pool of teachers from which it draws, may  
call for the appointment of a board to direct its affairs. When the region  
under the influence of an institute is large, it may have branches serving  
specific areas, each with its own administration.

213.18 For the new thrust in the establishment of institutes to succeed, the ac-  
tive involvement of the Counselors and Auxiliary Board members in their  
operation is essential. Such involvement will help the Counselors to kindle  
“the Fire of the Love of God in the very hearts and souls of His servants,”  
“to diffuse the Divine Fragrances,” “to edify the souls of men,” “to promote  
learning,” and “to improve the character of all men.”[[279]](#footnote-279)213-2 These institutes  
will provide the Counselors and Auxiliary Board members with immediate  
access to a formal means of educating the believers, in addition to other  
avenues available to them such as conferences, summer schools, and meet-  
ings with the friends. Institutes should be regarded as centers of learning,  
and since their character harmonizes with, and provides scope for the exer-  
cise of, the educational responsibilities of the Auxiliary Board members, we  
have decided that intimate involvement in institute operations should now  
become a part of the evolving functions of these officers of the Faith. The  
Counselors and National Spiritual Assemblies will need to consult on the  
details of the collaboration between the two arms of the Administrative Or-  
der in overseeing the budget and functioning of an institute and in planning  
program content, developing curricula, and delivering courses. If a board of  
directors is named, its membership should be decided upon by the National  
Spiritual Assembly in consultation with the Counselors and with their full  
support; Auxiliary Board members may serve on these bodies.

213.19 In addition to having a working relationship with Auxiliary Board mem-  
bers, the institute must necessarily collaborate closely with Local Assemblies  
and committees in charge of administering plans and projects of expan-  
sion and consolidation. This will ensure that the institute’s programs are  
designed to help raise up individuals who can contribute effectively to such  
plans. However, even if these administrative bodies have not yet developed  
the capacity to utilize the talents of those being trained, the programs of  
the institute should be regularly carried out. After all, the strengthening of

the institutions in a region depends, as do all other matters, on skilled and  
confirmed supporters of the Faith.

213.20 In developing its programs, the institute should draw on the talents of  
a growing number of believers and should also take advantage of its insti-  
tutional links to have access to resources worldwide. A newly established  
institute will often utilize materials created by institutes in other parts of  
the world. Gradually, those designing and delivering courses will learn how  
these materials might be supplemented to better suit their specific needs  
and will decide what new ones should be created. The curriculum of the  
institute at any given time, then, may well use a combination of materials  
created locally and those that have proven successful elsewhere. As institutes  
begin to flourish, a wide variety of curricula will be developed for vari-  
ous training needs. We hope that, with the assistance of the International  
Teaching Center, you will be able to assess the materials available from time  
to time and help the institutes in the communities you serve to select those  
most appropriate for their needs.

213.21 We are placing at the disposal of the Teaching Center funds specifically  
designated for the operation of institutes and intend to call on National  
Spiritual Assemblies, according to their circumstances, to pay particular at-  
tention to the development of institutes in their countries. It is our hope  
that significant progress in this direction will constitute one of the distin-  
guishing features of the Four Year Plan.

213.22 The development of the local community and the functioning of the  
Local Spiritual Assembly have been ongoing challenges to the Bahá’í world  
through successive Plans. At present, a few thousand Local Spiritual Assem-  
blies have attained at least a basic level of functioning. National and regional  
plans will clearly have to include provision for the adoption by such As-  
semblies of local plans of expansion and consolidation. To ensure that local  
plans contribute to the advancement of the process of entry by troops, you  
will need to call upon your Auxiliary Board members and their assistants to  
work closely with these Assemblies, both in the formulation of plans and in  
their execution, helping them to shoulder the responsibility of systematic  
growth in their own communities and in localities adopted as extension  
goals. The community must become imbued with a sense of mission and  
the Assembly grow in awareness of its role as a channel of God’s grace not  
only for the Bahá’ís but for the entire village, town or city in which it serves.

213.23 However, in those many communities where no organized activities are  
taking place, whether or not a Local Spiritual Assembly has been elected,

more basic challenges have to be addressed, and in this the Auxiliary Board  
members and their assistants must play a fundamental role. Concerted ef-  
fort must be made to help the individual believers, men and women alike,  
increase their love for Bahá’u’lláh and His Cause and to bring them together  
in the Nineteen Day Feast as well as periodic meetings aimed at raising their  
awareness of their identity as a community. In those localities where the  
participation of women in community affairs is lagging, determined steps  
have to be taken to foster such participation. Effective measures have to be  
adopted so that the Local Spiritual Assembly is properly elected year after  
year and consistent progress in its functioning is made. The regular holding  
of Bahá’í children’s classes should be given high priority. Indeed in many  
parts of the world this is the first activity in a process of community build-  
ing, which, if pursued vigorously, gives rise to the other developments. In  
all this, particular attention needs to be given to the youth, who are often  
the Faith’s most enthusiastic supporters. The establishment of these activi-  
ties defines a first stage in the process of community development, which,  
once attained, must be followed by subsequent stages until a community  
reaches a point where it can formulate its own plans of expansion and  
consolidation.

213.24 In this context, we feel that the Auxiliary Board members should take  
further advantage of the possibility of naming, where appropriate, more  
than one assistant to a given community, with the intention of assigning  
each to promote one or more of these fundamental community activities.  
We also urge you to consult with National Spiritual Assemblies on the expe-  
rience of past endeavors to assist such communities. Arrangements can then  
be made for the lessons learned from this experience to be discussed with  
the active supporters of the Faith in each region, helping them to identify  
the approaches and methods applicable to their specific conditions and to  
set in motion a systematic process of community development. This process  
should be one in which the friends review their successes and difficulties,  
adjust and improve their methods accordingly, and learn, and move forward  
unhesitatingly.

213.25 In general, we feel the functions of the Auxiliary Board members for  
Protection have to be clarified and their influence augmented. The deepen-  
ing of the friends and the proper functioning of the Local Spiritual As-  
sembly are essential to the healthy growth of the community and should  
be important concerns of the Auxiliary Board members for Protection. We  
are contemplating an increase in the membership of Protection Boards to

make the number equal to that of the Propagation Boards. It is our hope  
that Protection Board members will, in turn, name more assistants to focus  
on issues related to community development.

Election of Local Spiritual Assemblies

213.26 In developing the Administrative Order, the Guardian established the First  
Day of Riḍván as the day when all Local Spiritual Assemblies should be  
elected. During his own lifetime, this practice was followed as the number  
of Local Assemblies steadily grew to over one thousand.

213.27 In the subsequent two decades the Faith expanded greatly, especially in  
the rural areas of the world, often remote and difficult to reach. In view of  
this development, the Universal House of Justice decided in 1977 that, in  
certain cases, when the local friends failed to elect their Spiritual Assembly  
on the First Day of Riḍván, they could do so on any subsequent day of the  
Riḍván Festival. This permission did not apply to all localities, but to those  
that, in the judgment of the National Spiritual Assembly, were particularly  
affected by such factors as illiteracy, remoteness, and unfamiliarity with  
concepts of Bahá’í Administration. The House of Justice also gave permis-  
sion at the beginning of the Five Year Plan for Assemblies being formed for  
the first time to be elected at any point during the year.

213.28 These provisions have enabled the believers in a large number of locali-  
ties to receive assistance in electing their Local Spiritual Assemblies, and  
much experience has been gained in strengthening Local Assemblies under  
diverse conditions in a vast array of cultural settings. Nevertheless, in prin-  
ciple, the initiative and responsibility for electing a Local Spiritual Assembly  
belong primarily to the Bahá’ís in the locality, and assistance from outside  
is ultimately fruitful only if the friends become conscious of this sacred  
responsibility. As progress is made in the training of human resources and in  
the development of the entire range of Bahá’í community life, the capacity  
of the friends to elect their Local Spiritual Assemblies on their own will  
certainly grow.

213.29 With these thoughts in mind, we have decided that, beginning at Riḍván  
1997, the practice of electing all Local Spiritual Assemblies on the First Day  
of Riḍván will be reinstituted. We recognize that the immediate result may  
be a reduction in the number of Local Spiritual Assemblies at Riḍván 1997,  
but we are confident that subsequent years will witness a steady increase.

213.30 The National Spiritual Assemblies and their agencies on the one hand,  
and the Counselors and their auxiliaries on the other, clearly have a duty to

foster the establishment and development of Bahá’í communities, includ-  
ing their divinely ordained local institutions. This duty can be discharged  
mainly through sustained educational programs which create in the believ-  
ers the awareness of the importance of the Teachings in every area of their  
individual and social lives and which engender in them the desire and de-  
termination to elect and support their Local Spiritual Assemblies. These  
programs should take full advantage of the provision that has been made  
for the temporary formation of administrative committees of three or more  
members in localities where Local Assemblies are not elected, or where the  
members of a Local Assembly fail to meet.

Financial needs

213.31 The magnitude of the tasks the Bahá’í community is being summoned to  
perform during the Four Year Plan will call for a considerable outlay of  
funds. The pressing demands of the Arc Projects will continue to place  
severe constraints on the International Funds of the Faith. Yet, the Universal  
House of Justice will do its utmost to make available to the Counselors  
and the National Spiritual Assemblies the financial means necessary for the  
discharge of the tasks of expansion and consolidation in areas requiring as-  
sistance. This will include funds for the all-important work of the Auxiliary  
Boards.

213.32 As experience has shown, however, the expenditure of money does not,  
by itself, bring results. The challenge before you is to help develop in the  
various institutions and agencies involved in the execution of the Plan the  
capacity to expend funds in a judicious and effective manner. In addition,  
you must redouble your efforts to educate every member of the Bahá’í com-  
munity—the new and the old believer, the youth and the adult—on the  
spiritual significance of contributing to the Fund. We are confident that you  
will give special attention to this twofold challenge as you set out to help the  
friends in every continent to win victories for the Cause during these crucial  
years in the history of humanity.

213.33 Dear Friends, the few short years that separate us from the close of the  
century are a period of both spiritual potency and immense opportunity.  
Great responsibilities rest on your shoulders. During the first months of the  
Plan you will be making a decisive contribution to the formulation of plans  
that will inspire the friends to action and will guide them in their individual  
and collective endeavors. Throughout the Plan, you and your auxiliaries will  
encourage the friends, stimulate the spiritual powers latent in their hearts,

and assist them in fulfilling their duties towards a Cause so dear to them.  
As you take up these manifold tasks, you must constantly bear in mind that  
the realization of the aim of the Four Year Plan will depend on the rapid  
increase in the number of teachers of the Cause who will bring in the mul-  
titudes, nurture them, and infuse in them “so deep a longing” as to impel  
them “to arise independently” and devote their energies “to the quickening  
of other souls.”[[280]](#footnote-280)213-3

213.34 Be assured that we will remember each and all of you in the Holy Shrines.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

214  
Formation of two new National Spiritual Assemblies

15 FEBRUARY 1996

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

214.1 We take great joy in announcing the formation next Riḍván of two new  
National Spiritual Assemblies, one in Africa and one in Europe:

214.1a The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of São Tomé and Prín-  
cipe with its seat in São Tomé, whose inaugural National Convention  
is being organized by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís  
of Nigeria.

214.1b The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of Moldova with its  
seat in Chişinâu, whose inaugural National Convention is being orga-  
nized by the Regional Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of the Ukraine  
and Moldova.

214.2 The Regional Spiritual Assembly of the Ukraine and Moldova with its  
seat in Kiev will become the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of  
the Ukraine.

214.3 We are delighted by these further evidences of the extension of the insti-  
tutions of Bahá’u’lláh’s Administrative Order as the conclusion of the Three Year Plan approaches. May the friends throughout the world derive fresh impetus from these developments and, with confidence in the assurance of Bahá’u’lláh’s confirmations and assistance, concentrate their energies on spreading His redemptive Message.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

215  
No distinction between scholars and laymen

14 MARCH 1996

To an individual Bahá’í

Dear Bahá’í Friend,

215.1 … You express disquiet that attempts being made to introduce a dis-  
tinction between “Bahá’í laymen” and “Bahá’í scholars” with respect to the  
study of the Faith tend to generate a spirit of disunity among the friends.  
Your concern is fully justified. Such an approach to the study of the Cause  
would betray a fundamental misunderstanding of the pattern of Bahá’í so-  
ciety as set out in the Teachings of the Faith.

215.2 As you know, Bahá’u’lláh says that the pursuit of knowledge has been en-  
joined upon everyone, and knowledge itself is described by Him as “wings  
to man’s life” and “a ladder for his ascent.”[[281]](#footnote-281)215-1 Those whose high attainments  
in this respect make it possible for them to contribute in important ways to  
the advancement of civilization are deserving of society’s recognition and  
gratitude.

215.3 In the study of the Revelation of God, an individual’s proficiency in one  
of the physical or social sciences, in law, philology, or other fields of special-  
ization will often throw valuable light on issues being examined, and such  
contributions are greatly to be appreciated. The field of Near East studies,  
mentioned in your letter, is one that can assist in this way. However, no one  
specialization among the many branches of scholarly research can confer  
upon its practitioners an authoritative role in the common effort of explor-  
ing the implications of so staggering and all-encompassing a body of truth.

215.4 Collateral with His summons to the pursuit of knowledge, Bahá’u’lláh  
has abolished entirely that feature of all past religions by which a special  
caste of persons such as the Christian priesthood or the Islamic ‘ulamá came  
to exercise authority over the religious understanding and practice of their  
fellow believers. In a letter written in Persian on his behalf to the Spiritual  
Assembly of the Bahá’ís of Istanbul, the Guardian is at some pains to un-  
derline the importance of this marked departure from past religious history:

215.4a But praise be to God that the Pen of Glory has done away with the  
unyielding and dictatorial views of the learned and the wise, dismissed  
the assertions of individuals as an authoritative criterion, even though  
they were recognized as the most accomplished and learned among  
men, and ordained that all matters be referred to authorized centers  
and specified assemblies.

215.5 The Bahá’í Dispensation is described in the words of its Founder as  
“a day that shall not be followed by night.”[[282]](#footnote-282)215-2 Through His Covenant,  
Bahá’u’lláh has provided an unfailing source of divine guidance that will  
endure throughout the Dispensation. Authority to administer the affairs of  
the community and to ensure both the integrity of the Word of God and  
the promotion of the Faith’s message is conferred upon the Administrative  
Order to which the Covenant has given birth. It is solely by the process of  
free election or by unsought appointment that the members of the institu-  
tions of this Order are assigned to their positions in it. There is no profes-  
sion in either the teaching of the Faith or its administration for which one  
can train or to which a believer can properly aspire. Cautionary words of  
Bahá’u’lláh are particularly relevant:

215.5a Ever since the seeking of preference and distinction came into play,  
the world has been laid waste. It has become desolate ….

215.5b Indeed, man is noble, inasmuch as each one is a repository of the  
sign of God. Nevertheless, to regard oneself as superior in knowledge,  
learning or virtue, or to exalt oneself or seek preference is a grievous  
transgression.

215.6 The promotion of learning of every kind among the Faith’s members  
is an activity fundamental to the achievement of the community’s wide-  
ranging goals. Consequently, the encouragement of individual believers  
to acquire knowledge, the operation of Bahá’í schools, universities, and  
training institutes, the organization of study groups, and the work of task  
forces dedicated to relating the principles of the Revelation to the challenges  
facing humankind all represent activities with which both the Counselors  
and their auxiliaries, on the one hand, and National and Local Spiritual  
Assemblies, on the other, must concern themselves. In shouldering these  
demanding responsibilities, Bahá’í institutions everywhere find their efforts  
greatly enhanced by the assistance of believers whose intellectual pursuits,  
qualities of character, and devotion to the Cause particularly fit them to  
contribute their services.

215.7 A special responsibility in the matter rests on the Counselors because of  
the duty assigned to them to assist in releasing the potential of the individ-  
ual believer. The members of this institution, appointed for specific terms,  
have been given the task of carrying forward into the future the functions of  
the protection and propagation of the Faith conferred in the Will and Testa-  
ment of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá on the Hands of the Cause. Thus, the Counselors are  
called on to “diffuse the Divine Fragrances, to edify the souls of men, to  
promote learning, to improve the character of all men and to be, at all times  
and under all conditions, sanctified and detached from earthly things.”[[283]](#footnote-283)215-3  
Like the Hands, the Counselors have no interpretive authority, an authority  
conferred by the Covenant only on ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and the Guardian of the  
Faith. While some Counselors, like some of the Hands, will have pursued  
various academic or professional disciplines in their individual careers, their  
discharge of their duties is not dependent on proficiencies of this kind. All  
of them share fully in the vital task of encouraging believers everywhere in  
the acquisition of knowledge, in all its dimensions. All share, too, in the re-  
sponsibility assigned to the institution of which they are members to protect  
the Faith against its enemies, both external and internal, a concern to which  
both the Master and the Guardian attached preeminent importance ….

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

1996–2000

The Four Year Plan

216  
Riḍván Message 1996

RIḌVÁN 153

To the Bahá’ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

216.1 Our hearts overflowing with gratitude to the Blessed Beauty, we ac-  
knowledge the abundant manifestations of His grace during the Three Year  
Plan, which has run its course with the advent of this Riḍván Festival. The  
animating spirit of the Holy Year, which lent impetus to the launching of  
the Plan at Riḍván 1993, pervaded this period of concentrated endeavor,  
rendering our world community more consolidated, more resilient, more  
mature, and more confident than before. At the same time, the commu-  
nity’s prestige attained new heights. While this Plan has not ended on a  
note of dramatic, numerical expansion, even though significant growth of  
membership occurred in various countries, it has nonetheless resulted in a  
qualitatively enriched community—one prepared to exploit the immediate  
prospects for the advancement of the Faith.

216.2 The magnificent progress of the projects on Mount Carmel is preeminent  
among the measurable achievements of this period. Indeed, despite numer-  
ous difficulties, the stage of accomplishment anticipated in our message an-  
nouncing the Three Year Plan is entirely evident. All phases of construction  
have been initiated. The structural framework of the Center for the Study of  
the Texts and the Extension to the International Archives Building has been  
raised up and the work on these buildings has advanced towards initiation  
of the exterior and interior finishing work. The erection of the permanent  
seat of the International Teaching Center, the third structure currently be-  
ing built on the Arc, is progressing rapidly. Seven terraces below the Shrine  
of the Báb are now completed, foreshowing the unfolding splendor from  
the foot to the ridge of God’s Holy Mountain. A watchful public is awed at  
the tapestry of beauty spreading over the mountainside.

216.3 The physical reality of the progress thus far so marvelously realized is  
proof of an even more profound achievement, namely, the unity of purpose  
effected throughout our global community in the pursuit of this gigantic,  
collective enterprise. The intensity of the interest and support it has evoked  
has expressed itself in an unprecedented outpouring of contributions, re-  
flecting a level of sacrifice that bespeaks the quality of faith and generosity

of heart of Bahá’u’lláh’s lovers throughout the planet. That contributions  
towards the Mount Carmel Projects have met the three-year goal of seventy-  
four million dollars marks yet another measurable and exceptional achieve-  
ment, inspiring confidence that the necessary financial support for these  
projects will continue until their completion by the end of the century.

216.4 The signs of progress during the past three years were evident in a wide  
and varied field. The remarkable efforts to expand and consolidate the com-  
munity, the increased ventures in social and economic development, and  
the unprecedented thrust of the external affairs work combine to portray a  
community endowed with new capacities.

216.5 In the arena of teaching, there was a general increase of activity as indi-  
cated by the formation of twelve new National Spiritual Assemblies during  
the course of the Plan and by the surge of pioneering and travel-teaching.  
Believers in many countries were galvanized by the fresh approach suggested  
in the pioneer call released during the Plan. The number of pioneers from  
and to various countries was high, and there was a veritable flood of travel-  
ing teachers operating both at home and abroad. Systematic approaches  
to collective teaching activities and well-focused long-term teaching proj-  
ects were fruitful and were more evident than ever before in a number of  
countries.

216.6 The energy and creativity attendant to the various developments in ex-  
pansion and consolidation owed much to the spirit of enterprise shown  
by the International Teaching Center. Its constant direction and encour-  
agement of the Continental Boards of Counselors; its recommendation of  
new methods for the deployment of pioneers, as endorsed by the Universal  
House of Justice in the pioneer call released in the early months of the  
Plan, and its regular assistance to the Continental Pioneer Committees  
placed in its charge; its unflagging attention to the educational needs of the  
community as expressed in its interactions with Counselors concerning the  
inclusion in teaching projects of deepening programs for new believers, the  
devising of courses and workshops for training in different capacities, the  
training of children’s teachers, and the multiplication of children’s classes;  
its stimulation of efforts to establish training institutes in different parts of  
the world—all have produced resounding results. Major credit must also go  
to the Teaching Center for the influence it exerted through the Counselors  
on the adoption of core literature programs in an increasing number of  
countries. Through such programs a few titles essential to the propagation  
of the Faith and the deepening of the believers were selected, printed in large

quantities and made available at reduced prices. The outstanding progress  
in the evolution of this vital institution operating at the World Center was  
palpable in its preparation and conduct of the Counselors’ Conference last  
December which set the course for the work of these high-ranking officers  
of the Faith during the immediate years ahead.

216.7 A relevant development was the notable rise in the assumption of respon-  
sibility by indigenous believers for the teaching and consolidation work in  
their own countries. In greatly troubled areas, such as Angola, Cambodia,  
Liberia, Sierra Leone, the friends claimed important victories, whether in  
pursuing teaching activities which resulted in numerically significant enroll-  
ments, or in establishing and reactivating Bahá’í Assemblies, or in initiat-  
ing and sustaining development projects. In places with recently formed  
National Spiritual Assemblies, such as countries of the former Eastern  
Bloc, the friends have shown an admirable capacity for administering the  
affairs of the Cause. A highlight of this period was the upsurge of vigor,  
courage and creativity in Bahá’í island communities throughout the world.  
The categories of activity were wide-ranging, involving the raising up of  
local teachers, the training and dispatch of scores of traveling teachers to  
neighboring islands, the inauguration of primary schools, the multiple oc-  
casions for proclamation of the Faith, the sponsorship of events attended by  
high-ranking officials and influential persons. The fact that in recent years  
a number of government leaders of island nations have visited the Bahá’í  
World Center is indicative of the vitality of the activities of the believers in  
these small lands scattered throughout the seven seas. Taken together, all  
the foregoing examples of the attitudes and efforts of the friends in different  
settings demonstrate a heightened commitment to the teaching work and a  
growing maturity and resilience reflective of the depth of faith motivating  
Bahá’ís from diverse populations.

216.8 Consonant with these observations were the outstanding contributions  
of the youth to expansion and consolidation. Their activities took on added  
dimensions during the three-year period. Actuated by youth conferences  
and other gatherings attentive to their interests, youth throughout the world  
invested immense amounts of time, energy and zeal in the teaching work  
as traveling teachers within and outside their countries and as teams in  
collective teaching projects and, in so doing, they stimulated hundreds of  
new enrollments and the formation of many Local Spiritual Assemblies;  
involvement of youth in music and the arts as a means of proclaiming and  
teaching the Cause distinguished their exertions in many places; the spread

of dance and drama workshops was particularly effective; participation of  
youth in external affairs opened new possibilities for the Faith in this field;  
commitment to a year of service was more widely demonstrated; at the same  
time there was a notable increase in the number of youth acquiring formal  
training and achieving academic, professional and vocational excellence—  
altogether an indication that the youth are doing more in direct service to  
the Faith while at the same time contributing to the general development  
of society.

216.9 Signs of the consolidation of the community were also discernible in the  
greater involvement of the friends in social and economic development,  
particularly in the field of education. In one outstanding instance, a gov-  
ernment asked the Bahá’ís to take responsibility for the management of  
seven public schools, and they did so with the backing of the Office of  
Social and Economic Development at the World Center. Worthy of note  
is that in Africa Bahá’í communities in exile because of political unrest in  
their home country continued to develop farming and other projects that  
went far towards ensuring self-sufficiency. Efforts at improving the status  
of women gathered momentum in a number of countries where, in addi-  
tion to Bahá’í participation in projects sponsored by other organizations, the  
Bahá’í institutions set up committees and offices to attend to the interests  
of women. The Bahá’í International Community’s Office for the Advance-  
ment of Women emerged as a symbol of this upswing.

216.10 In a number of countries, too, there was significant Bahá’í participation  
in government-sponsored programs to improve health; in other instances  
Bahá’í groups initiated such programs and carried them out. The work in  
social and economic development was also distinguished by the firm estab-  
lishment and consolidation of a number of major projects and organiza-  
tions. Three pilot literacy projects were begun as a first step in a literacy  
campaign which the Office of Social and Economic Development intends  
to extend throughout the world. The Bahá’í initiation and involvement in  
development projects also resulted in proclamation of the Faith as they at-  
tracted the participation of the public and the interest of mass media.

216.11 A thrust in the external affairs work exceeding all previous records for a  
similar period boosted the proclamation of the Cause. A prodigy of effort  
in all parts of the world redounded to a much greater visibility of the Faith  
than obtained before and to a consequent rise in the prestige of the Bahá’í  
international community. The broad lines of progress were evident in the  
ease with which Bahá’í communities, large and small, sponsored or partici-

pated in public events; in the emergence of the Bahá’ís as a force in society  
recognized by governmental and non-governmental organizations and many  
prominent persons; in the ready accessibility of the media. Indeed, the wide  
coverage accorded Bahá’í events and interests by the print and electronic  
communications media was beyond calculation.

216.12 In the sweep of activities throughout the world, certain specific devel-  
opments stood out: the frequency with which high public officials would  
invite Bahá’ís to participate in or assist with events or projects; the successful  
initiatives of Bahá’ís in influencing government action; the establishment  
of Bahá’í academic programs and courses in colleges and universities and  
the adoption of curricular material for public schools; the use of the arts by  
Bahá’í institutions, groups and individuals in proclamation events.

216.13 During 1995, two major United Nations events exemplified the gather-  
ing momentum of an emerging unity of thought in world undertakings,  
and these engaged the active attention and participation of the Bahá’í com-  
munity. First, the World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen  
during March involved 250 friends from more than 40 countries who  
mounted an impressive effort to acquaint the summit participants and the  
related NGO Forum with the Teachings. It was on this occasion that the  
statement *The Prosperity of Humankind*, produced by the Bahá’í Interna-  
tional Community’s Office of Public Information, was first distributed and  
discussed. Follow-up activities all over the world included the holding of  
conferences and seminars, as well as the distribution of the statement. Sec-  
ond, the Fourth World Conference on Women and the concomitant NGO  
Forum held in Beijing during September drew the attendance of more than  
500 Bahá’ís from around the world, in addition to the official delegation of  
the Bahá’í International Community. In that same year, a third event, the  
observance of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the United Nations, prompted the  
Bahá’í International Community’s United Nations Office to produce and  
distribute a statement, entitled “Turning Point for All Nations,”[[284]](#footnote-284)216-1 contain-  
ing proposals for the development of that world organization.

216.14 Also of particular note among the external affairs activities were two oc-  
casions involving the prominent participation of Amatu’l-Bahá Rúḥíyyih  
Khánum. Last spring she headed the delegation of the four official Bahá’í

representatives to the Summit on the Alliance between Religions and  
Conservation, patronized by His Royal Highness Prince Philip and held  
at Windsor Castle. During October Rúḥíyyih Khánum was the keynote  
speaker at the Fourth International Dialogue on the Transition to Global  
Society held under the auspices of the United Nations Educational, Scien-  
tific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and organized by the Bahá’í  
Chair for World Peace and the Department of History at the University of  
Maryland.

216.15 Nor can we neglect to mention certain other significant marks of the  
period under review. An edition of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas in the original Arabic  
was published with, for the first time, notes in Persian, supplementing the  
text as in the English edition. The Law of Ḥuqúqu’lláh became more deeply  
rooted in the hearts of the believers throughout the world, and during the fi-  
nal year of the Plan, the Trustee of Ḥuqúqu’lláh, Hand of the Cause of God  
‘Alí-Muḥammad Varqá, took up residence in the Holy Land. This signifi-  
cant step also means that all three Hands of the Cause of God—Amatu’l-  
Bahá Rúḥíyyih Khánum, Mr. ‘Alí-Akbar Furútan, and Dr. Varqá—are now  
residing at the World Center, bringing inspiration to pilgrims and visitors,  
and to the friends serving at the World Center.

215.16 It is against such a background of heartening developments that we em-  
bark at this Riḍván upon a Four Year Plan that will carry us to Riḍván 2000.  
We earnestly and lovingly call upon our brothers and sisters of every land  
to join us in a mobilization of effort that will ensure to generations of the  
fast-approaching twenty-first century an abundant and lasting legacy.

216.17 The Four Year Plan aims at one major accomplishment: a significant  
advance in the process of entry by troops. As we have stated earlier, such  
an advance is to be achieved through marked progress in the activity and  
development of the individual believer, of the institutions, and of the local  
community.

216.18 The phrase “advance in the process of entry by troops” accommodates  
the concept that current circumstances demand and existing opportunities  
allow for a sustained growth of the Bahá’í world community on a large scale;  
that this upsurge is necessary in the face of world conditions; that the three  
constituent participants in the upbuilding of the Order of Bahá’u’lláh—the  
individual, the institutions, and the community—can foster such growth  
first by spiritually and mentally accepting the possibility of it, and then by  
working towards embracing masses of new believers, setting in motion the  
means for effecting their spiritual and administrative training and develop-

ment, thereby multiplying the number of knowledgeable, active teachers  
and administrators whose involvement in the work of the Cause will ensure  
a constant influx of new adherents, an uninterrupted evolution of Bahá’í  
Assemblies, and a steady consolidation of the community.

216.19 Moreover, to advance the process implies that that process is already in  
progress and that local and national communities are at different stages of it.  
All communities are now tasked to take steps and sustain efforts to achieve a  
level of expansion and consolidation commensurate with their possibilities.  
The individual and the institutions, while operating in distinctive spheres,  
are summoned to arise to meet the requirements of this crucial time in the  
life of our community and in the fortunes of all humankind.

216.20 The role of the individual is of unique importance in the work of the  
Cause. It is the individual who manifests the vitality of faith upon which  
the success of the teaching work and the development of the community  
depend. Bahá’u’lláh’s command to each believer to teach His Faith confers  
an inescapable responsibility which cannot be transferred to, or assumed  
by, any institution of the Cause. The individual alone can exercise those  
capacities which include the ability to take initiative, to seize opportunities,  
to form friendships, to interact personally with others, to build relation-  
ships, to win the cooperation of others in common service to the Faith and  
society, and to convert into action the decisions made by consultative bod-  
ies. It is the individual’s duty to “consider every avenue of approach which  
he might utilize in his personal attempts to capture the attention, maintain  
the interest, and deepen the faith, of those whom he seeks to bring into the  
fold of his Faith.”[[285]](#footnote-285)216-2

216.21 To optimize the use of these capacities, the individual draws upon his  
love for Bahá’u’lláh, the power of the Covenant, the dynamics of prayer,  
the inspiration and education derived from regular reading and study of  
the Holy Texts, and the transformative forces that operate upon his soul as  
he strives to behave in accordance with the divine laws and principles. In  
addition to these, the individual, having been given the duty to teach the  
Cause, is endowed with the capacity to attract particular blessings promised  
by Bahá’u’lláh. “Whoso openeth his lips in this Day,” the Blessed Beauty  
asserts, “and maketh mention of the name of his Lord, the hosts of Divine  
inspiration shall descend upon him from the heaven of My name, the All-

Knowing, the All-Wise. On him shall also descend the Concourse on high,  
each bearing aloft a chalice of pure light.”[[286]](#footnote-286)216-3

216.22 Shoghi Effendi underscored the absolute necessity of individual initiative  
and action. He explained that without the support of the individual, “at  
once wholehearted, continuous and generous,” every measure and plan of  
his National Spiritual Assembly is “foredoomed to failure,” the purpose of  
the Master’s Divine Plan is “impeded”; furthermore, the sustaining strength  
of Bahá’u’lláh Himself “will be withheld from every and each individual  
who fails in the long run to arise and play his part.”[[287]](#footnote-287)216-4 Hence, at the very  
crux of any progress to be made is the individual believer, who possesses  
the power of execution which only he can release through his own initiative  
and sustained action. Regarding the sense of inadequacy that sometimes  
hampers individual initiative, a letter written on his behalf conveys the  
Guardian’s advice: “Chief among these, you mention the lack of courage  
and of initiative on the part of the believers, and a feeling of inferiority  
which prevents them from addressing the public. It is precisely these weak-  
nesses that he wishes the friends to overcome, for these do not only paralyze  
their efforts but actually serve to quench the flame of faith in their hearts.  
Not until all the friends come to realize that every one of them is able, in his  
own measure, to deliver the Message, can they ever hope to reach the goal  
that has been set before them by a loving and wise Master …. Everyone is  
a potential teacher. He has only to use what God has given him and thus  
prove that he is faithful to his trust.”[[288]](#footnote-288)216-5

216.23 As for the institutions, entry by troops will act upon them as much as  
they will act upon it. The evolution of local and national Bahá’í Assemblies  
at this time calls for a new state of mind on the part of their members as well  
as on the part of those who elect them, for the Bahá’í community is engaged  
in an immense historical process that is entering a critical stage. Bahá’u’lláh  
has given to the world institutions to operate in an Order designed to cana-  
lize the forces of a new civilization. Progress towards that glorious realization  
requires a great and continuous expansion of the Bahá’í community, so that  
adequate scope is provided for the maturation of these institutions. This is  
a matter of immediate importance to Bahá’u’lláh’s avowed supporters in all  
lands.

216.24 For such an expansion to be stimulated and accommodated, the Spiritual  
Assemblies must rise to a new stage in the exercise of their responsibilities  
as channels of divine guidance, planners of the teaching work, developers  
of human resources, builders of communities, and loving shepherds of the  
multitudes. They can realize these prospects through increasing the abil-  
ity of their members to take counsel together in accordance with the prin-  
ciples of the Faith and to consult with the friends under their jurisdiction,  
through fostering the spirit of service, through spontaneously collaborating  
with the Continental Counselors and their auxiliaries, and through cultivat-  
ing their external relations. Particularly must the progress in the evolution  
of the institutions be manifest in the multiplication of localities in which  
the functioning of the Spiritual Assembly enhances the individual believers’  
capacity to serve the Cause and fosters unified action. In sum, the maturity  
of the Spiritual Assembly must be measured not only by the regularity of  
its meetings and the efficiency of its functioning, but also by the continuity  
of the growth of Bahá’í membership, the effectiveness of the interaction be-  
tween the Assembly and the members of its community, the quality of the  
spiritual and social life of the community, and the overall sense of vitality  
of a community in the process of dynamic, ever-advancing development.

216.25 The community, as distinguished from the individual and the institutions,  
assumes its own character and identity as it grows in size. This is a necessary  
development to which much attention is required both with respect to places  
where large-scale enrollment has occurred and in anticipation of more nu-  
merous instances of entry by troops. A community is of course more than the  
sum of its membership; it is a comprehensive unit of civilization composed  
of individuals, families and institutions that are originators and encouragers  
of systems, agencies and organizations working together with a common pur-  
pose for the welfare of people both within and beyond its own borders; it is a  
composition of diverse, interacting participants that are achieving unity in an  
unremitting quest for spiritual and social progress. Since Bahá’ís everywhere  
are at the very beginning of the process of community building, enormous  
effort must be devoted to the tasks at hand.

216.26 As we have said in an earlier message, the flourishing of the commu-  
nity, especially at the local level, demands a significant enhancement in  
patterns of behavior: those patterns by which the collective expression of  
the virtues of the individual members and the functioning of the Spiritual  
Assembly are manifest in the unity and fellowship of the community and  
the dynamism of its activity and growth. This calls for the integration of

the component elements—adults, youth and children—in spiritual, social,  
educational and administrative activities; and their engagement in local  
plans of teaching and development. It implies a collective will and sense of  
purpose to perpetuate the Spiritual Assembly through annual elections. It  
involves the practice of collective worship of God. Hence, it is essential to  
the spiritual life of the community that the friends hold regular devotional  
meetings in local Bahá’í centers, where available, or elsewhere, including the  
homes of believers.

216.27 To effect the possibilities of expansion and consolidation implied by en-  
try by troops, a determined, worldwide effort to develop human resources  
must be made. The endeavor of individuals to conduct study classes in their  
homes, the sponsorship by the institutions of occasional courses of instruc-  
tion, and the informal activities of the community, though important, are  
not adequate for the education and training of a rapidly expanding com-  
munity. It is therefore of paramount importance that systematic attention  
be given to devising methods for educating large numbers of believers in  
the fundamental verities of the Faith and for training and assisting them to  
serve the Cause as their God-given talents allow. There should be no delay  
in establishing permanent institutes designed to provide well-organized,  
formally conducted programs of training on a regular schedule. Access of  
the institute to physical facilities will of course be necessary, but it may not  
require a building of its own.

216.28 This matter calls for an intensification of the collaboration between the  
Continental Counselors and National Spiritual Assemblies. For the success  
of these training institutes will depend in very large measure on the active  
involvement of the Continental Counselors and the Auxiliary Board mem-  
bers in their operation. Particularly will it be necessary for Auxiliary Board  
members to have a close working relationship with institutes and, of course,  
with the Local Spiritual Assemblies whose communities will benefit from  
institute programs. Since institutes are to be regarded as centers of learning,  
and since their character harmonizes with, and provides scope for the exer-  
cise of, the educational responsibilities of the Auxiliary Board members, the  
intimate involvement in institute operations should now become a part of  
the evolving functions of these officers of the Faith. Drawing on the talents  
and abilities of increasing numbers of believers will also be crucial to the  
development and execution of institute programs.

216.29 As the term “institute” has assumed various uses in the Bahá’í commu-  
nity, a word of clarification is needed. The next four years will represent an

extraordinary period in the history of our Faith, a turning point of epochal  
magnitude. What the friends throughout the world are now being asked  
to do is to commit themselves, their material resources, their abilities and  
their time to the development of a network of training institutes on a scale  
never before attempted. These centers of Bahá’í learning will have as their  
goal one very practical outcome, namely, the raising up of large numbers  
of believers who are trained to foster and facilitate the process of entry by  
troops with efficiency and love.

216.30 “Center your energies in the propagation of the Faith of God,” Bahá’u’lláh  
thus instructs His servants, adding, “Whoso is worthy of so high a calling,  
let him arise and promote it. Whoso is unable, it is his duty to appoint him  
who will, in his stead, proclaim this Revelation ….”[[289]](#footnote-289)216-6 Just as one depu-  
tizes another to teach in one’s stead by covering the expenses of a pioneer  
or traveling teacher, one can deputize a teacher serving an institute, who is,  
of course, a teacher of teachers. To do so, one may make contributions to  
the Continental Bahá’í Fund, as well as to the Local, National and Interna-  
tional Funds, earmarked for this purpose.

216.31 In all their efforts to achieve the aim of the Four Year Plan, the friends are  
also asked to give greater attention to the use of the arts, not only for procla-  
mation, but also for the work in expansion and consolidation. The graphic  
and performing arts and literature have played, and can play, a major role  
in extending the influence of the Cause. At the level of folk art, this pos-  
sibility can be pursued in every part of the world, whether it be in villages,  
towns or cities. Shoghi Effendi held high hopes for the arts as a means for  
attracting attention to the Teachings. A letter written on his behalf to an  
individual thus conveys the Guardian’s view: “The day will come when the  
Cause will spread like wildfire when its spirit and teachings will be presented  
on the stage or in art and literature as a whole. Art can better awaken such  
noble sentiments than cold rationalizing, especially among the mass of the  
people.”[[290]](#footnote-290)216-7

216.32 While the friends and institutions everywhere bend their energies to  
implementing the requirements of the Plan, work on the great projects on  
Mount Carmel will continue towards their anticipated completion at the  
end of the century. By the end of the Plan at Riḍván 2000, the buildings

for the Center for the Study of the Texts and the Extension of the Archives  
Building will become operational; the International Teaching Center build-  
ing will have advanced to the final finishing stage. The section of the public  
road which now interrupts the path of the terraces above the Shrine of the  
Báb will have been lowered and a broad connecting bridge with its own  
gardens will have been built; five of the upper terraces will also have been  
completed. The remaining four upper terraces and the two at the foot of  
the mountain will be in an advanced stage of development. Other particular  
efforts will be pursued at the World Center as well. Attention will be given  
to such matters as the universal application of additional laws of the Kitáb-  
i-Aqdas, the preparation of a new volume in English of selected Writings of  
Bahá’u’lláh, the further development of the functions of the International  
Teaching Center, and the devising of measures for increasing the number of  
pilgrims and visitors to the World Center.

216.33 The Bahá’í world community will expand its endeavors in both social  
and economic development and external affairs, and thus continue to col-  
laborate directly with the forces leading towards the establishment of order  
in the world. By improving its coordinating capacity, the Office of Social  
and Economic Development will assist in building, as resources and op-  
portunity permit, on the progress already made with hundreds of devel-  
opment projects around the world. In the arena of external affairs, efforts  
will be aimed at influencing the processes towards world peace, particularly  
through the community’s involvement in the promotion of human rights,  
the status of women, global prosperity, and moral development. In the  
pursuit of these themes, the Bahá’í International Community’s United Na-  
tions Office will seek ways to reinforce the ties between the Bahá’ís and the  
United Nations. Similarly, the Office of Public Information will assist the  
Bahá’í institutions to utilize these themes towards greater proclamation of  
the Faith. Defense of the rights of the Bahá’ís in Iran and increased efforts  
to emancipate the Faith in that country and other countries where it is  
proscribed will constitute a vital part of our dealings with governments and  
nongovernmental organizations. In all such respects the Bahá’í friends and  
institutions are urged to be alert to the importance of activities in external  
affairs and to give renewed attention to them.

216.34 The formation this Riḍván of two National Spiritual Assemblies lends a  
propitious beginning to the Four Year Plan. We are delighted to announce  
that our two representatives to the inaugural National Conventions are the  
Hand of the Cause of God Amatu’l-Bahá Rúḥíyyih Khánum, Moldova;

and Mr. Fred Schechter, Counselor member of the International Teaching  
Center, São Tomé and Príncipe. Regrettably, due to circumstances entirely  
beyond their control, the National Spiritual Assemblies of Burundi and  
Rwanda cannot be reelected this year. The number of these institutions  
worldwide will consequently remain at 174.

216.35 Riḍván 2000, the point at which the Four Year Plan is to be conclud-  
ed, will come many months before the end of the twentieth century. At  
that juncture in time, the Bahá’í world will look back in appreciation at  
the extraordinary developments and dazzling achievements that will have  
distinguished the annals of the Cause of Bahá’u’lláh during that eventful  
period—a period which ‘Abdu’l-Bahá called the “century of light.”[[291]](#footnote-291)216-8 Not  
the least of the accomplishments then to be recognized will be the comple-  
tion of the current projects on Mount Carmel which, together with the  
other edifices on that holy mountain, will stand as a monument to the  
progress which the Administrative Order will have attained by that time in  
the Formative Age. The highlight of such appreciations will, God willing,  
be the holding at the World Center of a major event to mark the completion  
of the buildings on the Arc and the opening of the Terraces of the Shrine  
of the Báb to the public.

216.36 Beloved Friends, we enter this Plan amid the turbulence of a period  
of accelerating transition. The twin processes prompted by the impact of  
Bahá’u’lláh’s Revelation are fast at work, gathering a momentum that will,  
in the words of Shoghi Effendi, “bring to a climax the forces that are trans-  
forming the face of our planet.” One is an integrating process; the other is  
disruptive. Out of the “universal fermentation” created by these processes,  
peace will emerge in stages, through which the unifying effects of a growing  
consciousness of world citizenship will become manifest.[[292]](#footnote-292)216-9

216.37 Towards that end, recent world developments have, paradoxically, been  
both shocking and reassuring. On one hand, the disarray of human af-  
fairs produces a daily diet of horrors that benumb the senses; on the other,  
world leaders are often taking collective actions that, to a Bahá’í observer,  
signify a tendency towards a common approach by nations to solving world  
problems. Consider, for instance, the unusual frequency of the global  
occasions on which these leaders have gathered since the Holy Year four  
years ago, such as the one in observance of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the

United Nations, at which the attending heads of state and heads of govern-  
ment asserted their commitment to world peace. Noteworthy, too, are the  
promptitude and spontaneity with which these government leaders have  
been acting together in responding to a variety of crises in different parts of  
the world. Such trends coincide with the increasing cries from enlightened  
circles for attention to be given to the feasibility of achieving some form of  
global governance. Might we not see in these swiftly developing occurrences  
the workings of the Hand of Providence, indeed the very harbinger of the  
monumental occasion forecast in our Writings?

216.38 Even though the establishment of the Lesser Peace is not dependent on  
any Bahá’í plan or action, and although it will not represent the ultimate  
goal humanity is destined to reach in the Golden Age, our community has a  
responsibility to lend spiritual impetus to the processes towards that peace.  
The need at this exact time is to so intensify our efforts in building the  
Bahá’í System that we will attract the confirmations of Bahá’u’lláh and thus  
invoke a spiritual atmosphere that will accrue to the quickening of these  
processes. Two main challenges face us: one is to mount a campaign of  
teaching in which the broad membership of our community is enthusiasti-  
cally, systematically and personally engaged, and in which the activation  
of an extensive training program will ensure the development of a mass  
of human resources; the other is to complete the construction projects on  
Mount Carmel towards which every sacrifice must be made to provide a  
liberal outpouring of material means. These twin foci, if resolutely pursued,  
will foster conditions towards the release of pent-up forces that will forge a  
change in the direction of human affairs throughout the planet.

216.39 However short the path to peace, it will be tortuous; however promising  
the anticipated event that will set its course, it must mature through a long  
period of evolution, with its attendant tests, setbacks and conflicts, towards  
the moment when it will have emerged, under the direct influences of God’s  
Faith, as the Most Great Peace. In the meantime, people everywhere will of-  
ten face despair and bewilderment before arriving at an appreciation of the  
transition in progress. We who have been enlightened by the new Revelation  
have the sacred Word to assure us, a Divine Plan to guide us, a history of  
valor to encourage us. Let us therefore take heart not only from the Word we  
treasure, but also from the deeds of heroism and sacrifice which even today  
shine resplendent in the land in which our Cause was born.

216.40 For some seventeen years our persecuted brethren in Iran have demon-  
strated a constancy of faith and courage that has produced a vast proclama-

tion of the Faith, forcing it out of obscurity. Here then is living evidence  
in our own time of the potencies of crisis and victory. Please God, it may  
not be too long before our Iranian brethren are relieved of the yoke they  
bear and are ushered into the glories and wonders of a victory that only the  
Blessed Beauty can bestow. Their experience is a signal and an example to us  
all wherever we may live; for eventually, opposition, as the Master has told  
us, will rear its head on all the continents. Though it may be of a different  
character from place to place, it will no doubt be intensive. But, thanks to  
the strengthening grace of Bahá’u’lláh and the demonstration of steadfast-  
ness by these noble friends, we shall know how to meet the shafts of the  
enemy without fear. Indeed, the Lord of Hosts has promised to deliver to  
His people an overwhelming and decisive triumph.

216.41 As humanity is tossed and tormented by the ravages inflicted upon it by  
a civilization gone out of control, let us keep our heads and hearts focused  
on the divine tasks set before us. For amid this turmoil opportunities will  
abound that must be exploited “for the purpose of spreading far and wide  
the knowledge of the redemptive power of the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh and  
for enlisting fresh recruits in the ever-swelling army of His followers.”[[293]](#footnote-293)216-10  
This Plan to which we are now committed is set at one of the most critical  
times in the life of the planet. It is meant to prepare our community to cope  
with the accelerating changes that are occurring in the world about us and  
to place the community in a position both to withstand the weight of the  
accompanying tests and challenges and to make more visible a pattern of  
functioning to which the world can turn for aid and example in the wake  
of a tumultuous transition. Thus, this Plan acquires a special place in the  
scheme of Bahá’í and world history. Those of us who are alive to the vision  
of the Faith are particularly privileged to be consciously engaged in efforts  
intended to stimulate and eventually enhance such processes.

216.42 May you all arise to seize the tasks of this crucial moment. May each in-  
scribe his or her own mark on a brief span of time so charged with potenti-  
alities and hope for all humanity. Lest you become distracted or preoccupied  
with the drastic happenings of this age of transition, bear ever in mind the  
advice of our infallible guide, Shoghi Effendi: “Not ours, puny mortals that  
we are, to attempt, at so critical a stage in the long and checkered history of  
mankind, to arrive at a precise and satisfactory understanding of the steps

which must successively lead a bleeding humanity, wretchedly oblivious of  
its God, and careless of Bahá’u’lláh, from its calvary to its ultimate resur-  
rection …. Ours rather the duty, however confused the scene, however  
dismal the present outlook, however circumscribed the resources we dispose  
of, to labor serenely, confidently, and unremittingly to lend our share of  
assistance, in whichever way circumstances may enable us, to the operation  
of the forces which, as marshaled and directed by Bahá’u’lláh, are leading  
humanity out of the valley of misery and shame to the loftiest summits of  
power and glory.”[[294]](#footnote-294)216-11

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

217  
Supplementary message—Riḍván Message 1996—  
Latin America and the Caribbean

RIḌVÁN 153

To the Followers of Bahá’u’lláh in Latin America and the Caribbean

Dearly loved Friends,

217.1 As you contemplate the challenges awaiting you during these closing  
years of the century, you may draw confidence from the knowledge that  
your past endeavors have been abundantly blessed by divine confirmation.  
Some sixty years ago, when the Guardian had called for the establishment  
of at least one center in each of the Central and South American Republics,  
he wrote of “the strenuous and organized labors by which future genera-  
tions of believers in the Latin countries must distinguish themselves.”[[295]](#footnote-295)217-1  
Addressing the friends in the Caribbean some years later in a letter written  
shortly after the formation of the Spiritual Assembly of the Greater Antil-  
les, he urged them to exert “continuous and systematic effort,” to evince  
“unyielding determination” and to display “whole-hearted consecration.”  
Your achievements during the intervening decades have amply demon-  
strated your capacity to meet his expectations. You have proved by the spirit  
animating your efforts to be well deserving of such tributes as “staunch,”  
warm-hearted,” “eager,” “spiritually minded.”

217.2 The central concern of the plans that will guide your endeavors during  
the coming four years will be to effect a significant advance in the process  
of entry by troops. This challenge you will not be facing as novices. You  
have accumulated through successive plans valuable experience which must  
now be brought to bear on the aim of the Four Year Plan with clarity and  
single-mindedness. Your success will depend on the degree to which you  
can, on the one hand, intensify activity in the areas that have already wit-  
nessed large-scale expansion and, on the other, exploit the fresh opportuni-  
ties presented to you as a result of your growing involvement in the affairs  
of society.

217.3 Your numerical strength lies in those many regions where, over the  
decades, intense teaching activities have been undertaken among diverse  
populations. Through these exertions, large numbers from most of the in-  
digenous tribes—singled out by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to be the recipients of special  
favors and promises—as well as people of the African, Asian and European  
races, have enlisted under the banner of the Faith. As a result, your com-  
munity now boasts of a harmonious blend of groups from various ethnic  
and cultural backgrounds.

217.4 Plans focusing on these areas of large-scale expansion will necessarily seek  
to mobilize an appreciable number of believers within each population not  
only to labor diligently in their own local communities, but also to serve as  
long- and short-term pioneers and visiting teachers in other localities. Train-  
ing programs, with which many of your communities have considerable  
experience, constitute a most potent instrument for the accomplishment of  
such a vast mobilization. We call upon you, then, to support the work of  
the training institutes in your countries, the more experienced among you  
giving generously of their time as teachers so that courses can be offered  
widely and consistently. As you acquire new knowledge and skills through  
these programs, you will be able to put into practice with enthusiasm and  
zeal what you have learned, and arise to shoulder the manifold responsibili-  
ties that accelerated expansion and consolidation demand.

217.5 This mobilization will greatly facilitate the development of local commu-  
nities, a task that in the past has not been an easy one to accomplish. Your  
labors in this field of endeavor must now be systematically and vigorously  
multiplied, utilizing the valuable methods and approaches that have been  
devised in many of your countries in recent years. A host of dedicated work-  
ers is needed within each population who, supported by Auxiliary Board  
members, regional committees and institutes, focus their energies on the

strengthening of community after community. Let those of you who arise,  
even when you can find but a handful of believers in a locality, gather them  
together, broaden their vision, and raise their awareness of the greatness of  
the Cause they have embraced. Help the Local Spiritual Assembly to launch  
the community on a path of systematic expansion and consolidation, bring-  
ing in new recruits or revitalizing those who, having accepted the Faith  
years ago, have seen their enthusiasm wane. Remember, moreover, that in  
this process of community building the education of children—without  
which the victories of a whole generation may be lost—must be given due  
emphasis.

217.6 While paying close attention to areas of large-scale expansion, you  
should not lose sight of the fact that your nations have undergone profound  
change over the past decades, resulting in increased receptivity to the Faith  
in many sectors of society. You have, in each of your national communities,  
developed remarkable capacity to interact with society at large. Through  
your extensive work in social and economic development, especially in the  
area of education, through your discourse on issues such as the preserva-  
tion of the environment and the organization of social action, through your  
substantive interactions with leaders of thought, you are developing a keen  
understanding of the needs and aspirations of your peoples which enhances  
your ability to present the Faith to a wide range of interests.

217.7 Together with your increased involvement in the affairs of society, you  
will need to make a concerted effort to attract receptive souls from diverse  
groups, teaching them and confirming them in the Faith. In this respect, the  
climate of search prevailing among both the leaders and the masses in your  
countries, which has emerged following the ideological upheaval of recent  
years, is of special significance. Two sectors have been particularly and dif-  
ferently affected and are athirst for the life-giving waters of Bahá’u’lláh’s  
Revelation: on the one hand, the teachers in the national school systems  
and, on the other, university students and their professors. Historically,  
both have exerted widespread influence in your societies, and should you  
teach them systematically, you will certainly reap abundant fruits.

217.8 In all of this great endeavor—pursuing large-scale expansion and con-  
solidation, furthering the work of external affairs and carrying out activities  
of social and economic development—you must be driven by a passion to  
teach the Faith. Let regular study of the Writings feed the flame of your  
enthusiasm. Let His Words so shape your thoughts that the most pressing  
obligation of your lives becomes the sharing of His Message with others.

The designation given to the Latin American communities by the Guardian  
as the associates of the chief executors of the Divine Plan has defined for  
you a vast arena of service. As you take up the tasks of the Four Year Plan,  
keep in mind the words of the Guardian calling on the individual believer  
to “… shed, heroically and irrevocably, the trivial and superfluous attach-  
ments which hold him back, empty himself of every thought that may tend  
to obstruct his path, mix, in obedience to the counsels of the Author of His  
Faith, and in imitation of the One Who is its true Exemplar, with men and  
women, in all walks of life, seek to touch their hearts, through the distinc-  
tion which characterizes his thoughts, his words and his acts, and win them  
over tactfully, lovingly, prayerfully and persistently, to the Faith he himself  
has espoused.”[[296]](#footnote-296)217-2

217.9 We shall remember each and all of you in our prayers in the Holy Shrines  
and shall beseech Bahá’u’lláh to vouchsafe to you His unfailing protection  
and guidance, as you boldly go forth to conquer the hearts of men.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

218  
Supplementary message—Riḍván Message 1996—  
Indian Subcontinent and region

RIḌVÁN 153

To the Followers of Bahá’u’lláh in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands,

Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Sri Lanka

Dearly loved Friends,

218.1 With bright hopes and high expectations, we turn our thoughts towards  
you, who, serving in a region at the forefront of large-scale expansion, find  
yourselves poised to make a significant advance in the process of entry by  
troops, the central aim of the Four Year Plan. Your region, which claims a  
substantial percentage of the world’s people, has a Bahá’í population that  
already exceeds by far that of any other area of the globe.

218.2 By virtue of its immense natural and human resources, its magnificent  
history and the rich cultural diversity of its inhabitants, India plays a promi-

nent role in the shaping of human affairs. Throughout the history of the  
Faith, it has been the recipient of countless blessings and the arena of un-  
paralleled triumphs. Mentioned by the Báb in the first of His Writings, In-  
dia is eternally honored to have had one of its native sons numbered among  
the Letters of the Living, privileged to behold the first rays of the Dawn  
of a New Day. Bahá’u’lláh Himself selected and dispatched emissaries to  
propagate His Faith in India, and, under the direction of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and  
Shoghi Effendi, streams of teachers from both Iran and the West continued  
to flow to that land to help the believers carry forward the standard of Di-  
vine guidance.

218.3 In response to the bountiful favors conferred upon them over the decades,  
the friends in India have made sacrificial efforts for the progress of the Cause  
of Bahá’u’lláh and have achieved splendid victories in His Name. They first  
demonstrated their ability to initiate entry by troops as early as the closing  
years of the Ten Year Crusade when they enlisted thousands of receptive  
souls into the ranks of His followers. The sudden influx of new adherents  
to the Cause from all castes and creeds—clear evidence of the receptivity of  
that great nation—transformed a small body of believers into a vibrant and  
broadly based community which gradually learned to shoulder immense  
and inescapable responsibilities. Its valiant members, relying on the unfail-  
ing grace of Bahá’u’lláh, surmounted the obstacles before them, persevered,  
and sustained their efforts until India came to occupy a privileged place in  
the eyes of the Bahá’ís of the world.

218.4 The Indian Bahá’í community has gone from strength to strength. It has  
established the institutions of the Faith throughout the length and breadth  
of that vast country, including suitable agencies to administer the affairs of  
the Cause in each state; has undertaken countless projects and campaigns  
of expansion and consolidation; has produced and disseminated literature  
in a wide array of languages; has pursued numerous projects of social and  
economic development, especially in the field of education; and, aided by  
the power of attraction of its House of Worship, has proclaimed the Faith  
to many millions of people. From every standpoint—its administrative  
structure, its relations with the government, its experience in large-scale  
expansion, and the devotion of the active supporters of its programs and  
projects—the Indian community stands in an enviable position at the be-  
ginning of this, the Four Year Plan.

218.5 The Bahá’í community of Bangladesh, flourishing in the midst of a Mus-  
lim society, is a source of joy to the entire Bahá’í world. In recent years and

with astonishing rapidity, that community began to achieve extraordinary  
success in the teaching field, and throughout the Three Year Plan it has sus-  
tained consistently large-scale expansion. Its institutions have demonstrated  
their capacity to mobilize the human resources at their disposal, and those  
who have responded to the call for action have sacrificially and with the  
utmost devotion spread the Divine Teachings among the Muslim, Hindu  
and tribal populations of that country. The purity of their motives and  
the sincerity of their efforts to address the needs of society have won them  
recognition from government officials in the highest circles. Their exertions  
to promote love and unity among the majority Muslim and minority Hindu  
populations are bearing increasing fruit, a striking testimony to the potency  
of Bahá’u’lláh’s Revelation.

218.6 In the Himalayan Kingdom of Nepal, the believers have, through the  
integrity of their character and the excellence of their conduct, overcome  
in recent years restrictions on the expansion of the Cause. They are now  
held in high regard and are successfully engaged in presenting the Faith to  
the people as a unifying force which can contribute to the progress of the  
nation. As they grow in strength, they can begin to look beyond their own  
borders and assist in the propagation of the Faith in those areas to which  
they have such easy access.

218.7 In the Indian Ocean, the Bahá’í community of Sri Lanka, a nation with a  
predominantly Buddhist population, is addressing diligently the challenges  
of growth. In spite of a number of setbacks in the past, the friends have  
persevered and are using the power of their hard-won unity to respond to  
the needs of that sorely tried country, whose suffering people thirst for the  
vivifying waters of Bahá’u’lláh’s Revelation. Farther to the east, the Bahá’í  
community of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands has steadily grown over  
the years and is blessed with sincere and devoted believers, whose efforts  
won them the distinction of having their own National Spiritual Assembly.

218.8 Dear Friends, the receptivity of your peoples and the extraordinary ad-  
vances you have already made enable you to approach the challenges of  
entry by troops with vigor and optimism, and to give systematic attention  
to the tasks that must be diligently carried out to ensure accelerated growth.

218.9 Your past exploits were largely the result of the incessant labors of a com-  
paratively few consecrated believers who devoted their time and resources  
to the spread of the Cause in locality after locality. If you are to sustain  
rapid expansion and consolidation in the coming years, it is imperative that  
far greater numbers of dedicated and committed souls arise to promote

these twin processes. Training courses—widespread, regular and well-  
organized—constitute the most effective means to mobilize believers on  
the scale required. Depending on the conditions of your countries, such  
courses will be conducted by teachers associated with national, state or re-  
gional institutes, some of which may well have several branches. Although  
the programs of the institutes may vary according to the characteristics  
of the populations they serve, their essential functions will be the same.  
They should seek to develop in the participants a good understanding of  
Bahá’u’lláh’s essential Teachings and to help them acquire those skills and  
abilities that will enable them to serve the Faith effectively. They should also  
strive to imbue their hearts with a deep love for Bahá’u’lláh—a love from  
which stems a desire to submit oneself to His Will, to obey His laws, to  
heed His exhortations and to promote His Faith.

218.10 ‘While all the participants in these courses will naturally be directed to the  
field of teaching, a sufficient number will also have to acquire the ability to  
assist with the development of local communities. In a region of the world  
where villages constitute a major component of every nation, a concerted  
effort must be made to establish in them the patterns of Bahá’í community  
life on a firm basis. This can only be achieved through perseverance and  
constancy in working with the local communities. The friends in each local-  
ity must be helped to raise their awareness of the efficacy of the Teachings  
they have accepted and to broaden their vision of the tasks and opportuni-  
ties before them. The Local Spiritual Assembly must be helped to take up  
the challenges of community development and of expansion.

218.11 In this respect, we call upon you to give special attention to the advance-  
ment of women. In almost all of your region, women have traditionally  
played a secondary role in the life of society, a condition which is still re-  
flected in many Bahá’í communities. Effective measures have to be adopted  
to help women take their rightful place in the teaching and administrative  
fields. By teaching entire families, you can ensure that increasing numbers  
of women enter the Faith, thereby improving the balance in the composi-  
tion of your communities and beginning in each family, from the moment  
of acceptance, a process through which the fundamental principle of the  
equality between men and women can be realized.

218.12 Of course, your successes in the teaching field and in the development of  
local communities will only yield lasting results if you ensure the proper ed-  
ucation of children and youth. Youth will undoubtedly be the most enthu-  
siastic supporters of the programs of your institutes. They are eager to make

a significant contribution to the progress of their communities and have  
shown, time and again, their capacity to respond to the call to service. They  
can be trained to help shoulder the manifold responsibilities demanded by  
rapid expansion and consolidation. But it is especially important for large  
numbers of them to become capable teachers of Bahá’í children’s classes.  
As you are well aware, without the education of children it is impossible to  
maintain victories from one generation to the next.

218.13 All these tasks will require your concentrated attention. It is important,  
too, that you maintain the momentum which the activities of social and  
economic development have gained, especially in India. Within their own  
sphere of competence, the specialized institutes, the schools and other  
projects are each engaged in work critical to the development of human  
resources. We hope that those who benefit from such programs will gener-  
ously offer their talents to the institutions of the Faith in furthering the  
interests of the Four Year Plan.

218.14 As you respond to the requirements of the plans soon to be formulated  
by your institutions, you must ever bear in mind that you will contribute to  
the central aim of the Four Year Plan only if you teach persistently, prayer-  
fully, lovingly and wisely. You should endeavor to bring into your ranks  
individuals from every stratum of society as you vigorously advance in the  
process of entry by troops. Receptive souls should be sought among the af-  
fluent and the indigent, in the various circles of urban society and in schools  
and universities, in centers of industry and commerce and in the vast rural  
areas of your countries. You should also remember that your exertions are  
not to be limited to your own home fronts, but that from among you must  
continue to arise an increasing number of souls to serve as pioneers and  
traveling teachers in the international field.

218.15 In the coming years, enormous spiritual forces will be acting upon your  
peoples. You should be confident that your exertions will have a powerful  
effect on the course of their destinies. Let the words of the Guardian written  
during the first of the systematic plans to be launched in your region guide  
your endeavors: “You should at all times fix your gaze on the promise of  
Bahá’u’lláh, put your whole trust in His creative Word, recall the past and  
manifold evidences of His all-encompassing and resistless power and arise  
to become worthy and exemplary recipients of His all-sustaining grace and  
blessings.”[[297]](#footnote-297)218-1

218.16 May the confirmations of the Blessed Beauty be ceaselessly showered  
upon you, and His All-Powerful Spirit inspire and sustain you throughout  
the collective enterprise on which you now embark.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

219  
Supplementary message—Riḍván Message 1996—  
Southeast Asia

RIḌVÁN 153

To the Followers of Bahá’u’lláh in Cambodia, Hong Kong, Lao People’s  
Democratic Republic, Macau, Malaysia, Mongolia, Myanmar, Singapore,  
Taiwan, Thailand, and Vietnam

Dearly loved Friends,

219.1 Some four decades ago, in a message to the first Regional Convention  
of the Bahá’ís of Southeast Asia, the Guardian wrote of the “far-reaching  
influence” that area would exercise on the “future destinies of the world  
Bahá’í community.” He referred to the area’s “heterogeneous character” and  
“geographical position,” underscored “the spiritual receptivity of many of  
its inhabitants,” and drew attention to “the role they are destined to play in  
the future shaping of the affairs of mankind.” The remarkable progress of  
the Faith in Southeast Asia since that time, in a period of social and politi-  
cal upheaval, is but a prelude to the fulfillment of the Guardian’s promise.  
This, taken together with the recent accomplishments of the believers in  
the neighboring territories as far north as Mongolia, gives rise to a brilliant  
vision of future triumphs in the entirety of that vast region.

219.2 You now embark on the next stage of your endeavors, a Four Year Plan  
whose aim is to effect a significant advance in the process of entry by troops.  
Among your peoples, the majority of whom have been influenced by noble  
and high-minded teachings of Buddhism, are many who possess a profound  
sense of spirituality, which is reflected in the practices of their daily lives  
and in the quality of their relationships with one another, with nature, and  
with their social institutions. They have a keen understanding of the need  
for coherence between the material and the spiritual, and are disturbed by  
the effects of gross materialism on their societies in recent years. Your region  
represents a vast reservoir of potential promoters of the Cause waiting to be

tapped. The number and quality of the active supporters of the Faith with  
which it is already blessed bespeak the richness of that reservoir.

219.3 Systematic training programs constitute the most potent instrument at  
your disposal for realizing the potential of that highly promising region to  
contribute significantly to the human resources of the Faith. To this end,  
the establishment and strengthening of institutes will undoubtedly be a  
central component of the plans of all your countries. Your participation in  
institute programs, through which you will deepen your knowledge of the  
Faith, cultivate your inner spiritual lives and develop abilities of service, will  
enable you to intensify your individual and collective exertions in the teach-  
ing field and will result in a commensurate acceleration in the expansion  
of your communities. Varying patterns of growth, of course, will evolve  
according to the particular conditions in each country.

219.4 In Malaysia, large numbers of believers from among the Chinese, Indian  
and indigenous populations can be mobilized, and their energies directed  
towards the stimulation of activity at the local level. Many of the local  
communities are in a position to implement plans and projects under the  
direction of their Local Spiritual Assemblies, and they should be encour-  
aged and aided in their efforts to do so. The capacity to achieve rapid and  
simultaneous expansion and consolidation exists in Malaysia, but needs to  
be fully exercised. Such an undertaking must be complemented by concrete  
measures to broaden the range of activities in areas such as the advancement  
of women, the spread of literacy, and the promotion of moral education—  
areas in which the Malaysian community already has an impressive record.  
In addition to contributing to the progress of society, such activities will go  
far in winning the admiration and respect of the enlightened in government  
circles and, beyond that, in drawing the attention of leaders of thought  
throughout the region to the Teachings of the Faith.

219.5 The Bahá’í community of Myanmar, which traces its roots back to the  
time of Bahá’u’lláh, has in recent years been able to pay increasing attention  
to the expansion of the Faith. The results have been encouraging indeed.  
The large body of believers in Myanmar, faithful to the Covenant and with  
hearts filled with love for Bahá’u’lláh, who stand ready to serve His Faith,  
can be helped by the institute program now being established there to enter  
the field of teaching with confidence. The effects such an endeavor will  
have, in a land so receptive to the Divine Message, are incalculable.

219.6 The friends in Thailand may draw courage from the success of their  
efforts to help re-establish the Bahá’í community of Cambodia and resolve

to turn with the same vigor and determination to the tasks of expansion  
and consolidation in their homeland. There they have proved themselves  
capable of teaching among many strata of society and of bringing into their  
ranks people of diverse cultural and educational backgrounds. Setting aside  
all hesitation, and with unity of thought and purpose, let them dedicate the  
coming four years to the unflagging pursuit of a clearly defined course of  
action traced for them by their institutions.

219.7 In Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, where possibilities for growth exist  
in varying degrees, the sorely tried, steadfast and devoted friends need to  
demonstrate to the authorities and leaders of their countries that Bahá’ís,  
obedient and loyal to their governments, desire but the prosperity of their  
nations and the upliftment of their peoples. Through the spiritual enrich-  
ment of families in Vietnam, through the program of deepening in small  
groups now initiated in Laos, and through systematic plans for expansion  
and consolidation and for social and economic development in Cambodia,  
where the friends enjoy greater freedom, each of these communities can  
achieve substantial progress within the parameters defined for them by pre-  
vailing social and political conditions.

219.8 The manner in which the Bahá’í community of Mongolia, so young and  
so full of vitality, has taken its affairs in hand is exhilarating. In the span of  
seven years, the friends have ranged methodically across that vast land and  
have established the Faith on solid and enduring foundations. At the national  
level, they are becoming known for their high ideals, particularly as champi-  
ons of the rights of children. At the same time, their Bahá’í classes, open to  
children from Bahá’í and non-Bahá’í families alike, are being received with  
great enthusiasm, presenting them with extensive teaching opportunities.  
There is a spirit in the Mongolian people which must needs manifest itself  
in the efflorescence of a numerically strong, vibrant community.

219.9 The Bahá’í community of Singapore is energetic and dedicated. Its past  
experience demonstrates that focused attention on expansion invariably  
brings good results. What is required at this stage of the community’s devel-  
opment is an accelerating increase in the number of individual enrollments.  
Such an influx of new souls will continually strengthen the community  
which, although comparatively small, has demonstrated its ability to play  
an important role in the affairs of the Faith in the region.

219.10 Dear Friends, any attempt to present, no matter how briefly, an overview  
of the potentialities of your region must necessarily take into account the  
preponderating influence that the Chinese people are to exert on the des-

tiny of humankind. To them, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has referred as “truth-seeking”  
and “prompted with ideal motives.” From among them, He declared, can  
be raised “such divine personages that each one of them may become the  
bright candle of the world of humanity.” The progress of the Faith in Hong  
Kong, Macau and Taiwan, and the labors of the Chinese believers resident  
in other parts of the region, are early indications of that which is yet to  
come. We turn our expectant eyes towards the Chinese people, confident in  
their ability to become illumined with the light of Bahá’u’lláh’s Revelation  
and to apply His Teachings, with characteristic diligence, to the advance-  
ment of spiritual and material civilization. As larger and larger numbers  
become imbued with heavenly qualities, and as they make sincere exertions  
for the progress of their people, they shall, God willing, win the trust of  
fair-minded leaders and be able to broaden the scope of their endeavors in a  
land that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has designated “the country of the future.”

219.11 We shall pray ardently at the Sacred Threshold that the blessings of Bahá’u’lláh  
may sustain you and guide you in your noble services to His Cause.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

220  
Supplementary message—Riḍván Message 1996—  
North America

RIḌVÁN 153

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

Dearly loved Friends,

220.1 As members of the North American Bahá’í community, you enter the  
Four Year Plan with a brilliant record of progress in fulfilling the man-  
date 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 through-  
out the Formative Age and into the Golden Age of the Bahá’í Dispensation.

220.2 In your pursuit of the provisions of the Four Year Plan on national, re-  
gional and local levels, in conformity with the detailed plans to be formulat-  
ed 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 skeptic, will in due course quicken the souls of a multitude from  
every background in North America and dramatically increase the numeri-  
cal strength of your communities.

220.3 Training institutes and other centers of learning are an indispensable ele-  
ment of a sustained endeavor 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 pro-  
vided 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.

220.4 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.[[298]](#footnote-298)220-1 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.

220.5 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 reputa-  
tion 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.

220.6 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 be-  
havior, 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.

220.7 The community of the Greatest Name must increasingly become re-  
nowned for its social cohesion, and for. the spirit of trust and confidence  
which distinguishes the relationship between believers and their institu-  
tions. 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 centers of activity, upholding and promoting their  
interests with complete unanimity and contentment, with perfect under-  
standing, genuine enthusiasm, and sustained vigor. 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.”[[299]](#footnote-299)220-2 Realization of this longing requires  
that you commit yourselves to the wholehearted support of your institu-  
tions. 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 con-  
duct of their duties, and should strive continually to approach the exalted  
standard set out in the Teachings.

220.8 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.

220.9 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 conti-  
nent 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 sis-  
ters who are now poised on the threshold of great advances for the Faith of  
Bahá’u’lláh.

220.10 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 experi-  
ence, 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 endeavor 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.

220.11 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 institu-  
tions of His World Order throughout the American continent.”[[300]](#footnote-300)220-3 The  
invaluable contribution they have made to the establishment of the Faith in  
Siberia in recent years, together with their significant advances in strength-  
ening the home front, provide compelling evidence of their capacity to take  
full advantage of the opportunities before them in the Four Year Plan.

220.12 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,”[[301]](#footnote-301)220-4 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 defense of the Faith, in its propaga-  
tion 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.

220.13 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 beau-  
ty,”[[302]](#footnote-302)220-5 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.

220.14 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 succorers of the downtrodden, the needy and the fettered among  
its followers ….”[[303]](#footnote-303)220-6 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.

220.15 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 splendors 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,”[[304]](#footnote-304)220-7 are called upon to take  
full advantage of these favorable circumstances.

220.16 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 centers  
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 subarctic regions can powerfully re-  
inforce 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 fulfillment of the global  
mission conferred on the recipients of the Tablets of the Divine Plan.

220.17 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 con-  
stitute 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 at-  
tended your efforts in America may crown your endeavors 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.”[[305]](#footnote-305)220-8

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

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

221  
Supplementary message—Riḍván Message 1996—  
Europe

RIḌVÁN 153

To the Followers of Bahá’u’lláh in Europe

Dearly loved Friends,

221.1 Forty-three years ago, when the European Bahá’ís gathered at the confer-  
ence 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 com-  
munities 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 neighboring Turkey, was a small, struggling na-  
tional 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:

221.1a 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 civi-  
lizations; the mainspring of a civilization to some of whose features  
Bahá’u’lláh Himself paid tribute; on whose southern shores Chris-

tendom 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.”  
….[[306]](#footnote-306)221-1

221.2 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 travelers  
and scholars early responded to the dawning light of the Bábí Revelation,  
two of whose governments extended the hand of succor during the Heroic  
Age of the Faith, and whose nations, in recent years, have intervened so  
effectively in defense of the persecuted Bahá’ís in Iran, has amply demon-  
strated 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.

221.3 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 schol-  
ars of the Faith, musicians, artists, scientists and those concerned with the  
application of Bahá’í Teachings to economics and business. You have ex-  
erted 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 cen-  
tral purpose of taking the Message of Bahá’u’lláh to a spiritually famished  
population.

221.4 The first task of your National Spiritual Assemblies immediately after  
Riḍván will be to formulate, in consultation with the Counselors, 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.

221.5 Europe is a continent of great variety, and each of your National As-  
semblies 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 ter-  
ritory within which it is working, and areas of potential collaboration with  
other Bahá’í communities. Special attention will need to be paid to the at-  
tainment of official recognition in those countries where the institutions of  
the Faith are not yet legally incorporated, and to raising up National Spiri-  
tual 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.

221.6 There are areas which cry out for pioneers and traveling teachers; the  
mind turns, for example, to the work among the Sami and the other peoples  
of the Arctic and subarctic areas as far north as Spitsbergen. We contem-  
plate the significance of teaching the Faith in the islands of the Mediter-  
ranean, 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 centers 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 col-  
laboration with neighboring 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.

221.7 The central aim of the Four Year Plan, a significant advance in the pro-  
cess 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,[[307]](#footnote-307)221-2 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.

221.8 The establishment of training institutes in various locations is empha-  
sized 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 insti-  
tutes 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 Writ-  
ings. 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.

221.9 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 in-  
spiring 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 laboring 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, strength-  
ened 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.

221.10 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.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

222  
Supplementary message—Riḍván Message 1996—  
Africa

RIḌVÁN 153

To the Followers of Bahá’u’lláh in Africa

Dearly loved Friends,

222.1 You come to the Four Year Plan with an extraordinary history of achieve-  
ment, which indicates that you are well equipped spiritually and adminis-  
tratively, and in the inherent potential of your people, to respond success-  
fully to the Plan’s central aim to advance the process of entry by troops.  
In whatever direction south of the Sahara one may look—whether to the

eastern, western, central or southern region of the continent—portents of  
great, imminent expansion are evident. The torch of faith burns brightly  
in your hearts, setting our spirits aglow with gladness at the scale of your  
attainments and the magnificent possibilities that are now yours.

222.2 The bright hope inspired by such observations is justified by thrilling  
facts. The spiritual endowments of Africa derive naturally from the creative  
forces universally released by the Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh, but these have  
been marvelously enhanced by the continent’s direct associations with the  
Channels of such forces: the ship transporting the Blessed Beauty on His  
exile to the Holy Land touched briefly its northern shores; the Center of  
the Covenant spent extended periods in Egypt before and after His historic  
visit to the West. The continent was also twice crossed from south to north  
by the beloved Guardian. Bahá’u’lláh favored the black peoples by making a  
specific reference to them when, as the Master testified, He compared them  
to the “black pupil of the eye” through which “the light of the spirit shineth  
forth.”[[308]](#footnote-308)222-1

222.3 African Bahá’í history had its beginnings in Egypt, which was opened  
to the Faith during the period of the ministry of Bahá’u’lláh; it gathered  
momentum during the ministry of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá when Bahá’í localities  
were established in South Africa and Tunisia. But the early effects of these  
spiritual endowments became more obvious with the remarkable success  
of the two-year Africa Project (1951–53) when 16 territories were opened,  
bringing to 25 the total number of countries and islands in which Bahá’ís  
resided; this preceded the opening of the 33 virgin territories called for in  
the beloved Guardian’s Ten Year Global Crusade, a period of astonishing  
development in Africa that evoked the admiration and praise of Shoghi  
Effendi as many people from different tribes entered the Cause, a num-  
ber of administrative institutions were formed, and it became possible to  
raise up the Mother Temple of Africa in the heart of the continent. During  
the course of these rapid developments, the African believers themselves,  
through sacrificial effort as teachers and pioneers, arose to champion the  
Cause of God, manifesting the profundity of their response to the Message  
of the New Day.

222.4 In the countries lying to the north where programs of public teaching  
cannot now be pursued, the friends have continued for many years to  
maintain their posts with circumspection and heroic fortitude. Not only

have they kept the flame of faith alive in their hearts, they also endeavor to  
transmit the fire of the love of God to members of their families, including  
their children and youth, in anticipation of the day when freedom to openly  
proclaim their religion and conduct their community affairs is secured.

222.5 With immense gratification we now look back over just a few decades  
during which Africa attained the largest number of National Spiritual As-  
semblies of any continent; moreover, Africa’s Local Spiritual Assemblies  
amount to a substantial percentage of the world’s total. The prodigious out-  
put of energy devoted to expansion and consolidation has included major  
endeavors to train the believers and to mount and maintain development  
projects. As a result the African Bahá’í community can boast of notable  
progress in the establishment of a number of primary and secondary schools  
and training institutes. A source of much of this energy in recent times  
has been the African youth, who have increasingly demonstrated exemplary  
dedication and vigor in their Bahá’í activities. In the field of external af-  
fairs, the African community, whether in small or large states, has shown a  
boldness, a creativity, and a tenacity that have resonated in the worldwide  
proclamation of the Faith and the promotion of its vital interests.

222.6 Clearly, then, Africa is poised to register a victory for the Cause that  
will reaffirm its position among the front ranks of our world community.  
The time is critical, and you must act promptly to realize this prospect. We  
therefore urge our African brothers and sisters to take immediate account  
of their strengths, needs and opportunities, and then resolve to turn the  
challenge posed by these conditions into the means of success. You will  
of necessity give concentrated attention to various plans and programs of  
activity if you are to advance to new stages of entry by troops, but simul-  
taneously certain underlying requisites will claim your special vigilance and  
exertion. These are the elimination of tribal prejudice, the transformation  
of prevailing social practices, and the fostering of education.

222.7 Tribal conflict is one of the most pressing issues facing Africa. This must  
be dealt with in the heart of every faithful follower of Bahá’u’lláh and reso-  
lutely overcome through the collective will of every local and national Bahá’í  
community. Indeed, how can the lovers of the Blessed Beauty allow tribal  
prejudice and rivalry to be practiced in their midst when He has made unity  
the pivotal principle and goal of His Faith? Hatred and animosity based  
on tribe, like those based on race, blight the human spirit and arrest the  
development of the society that accommodates them. If outside the Bahá’í  
community in recent years influential persons and public officials have been

able to see the practical benefit of bringing diverse groups together towards  
unity, how much more should it be possible for those imbued with the  
spirit of our Teachings to strive to eliminate within the Bahá’í fellowship  
the unsavory characteristics of tribal division and disunity. It is impera-  
tive and urgent in the current state of society for the Bahá’ís so to practice  
genuine unity among themselves and in their relations to others that they  
may become renowned as a new people in the eyes of all Africans. Such a  
demonstration will attract divine confirmations and greatly reinforce their  
power to succeed in spreading the Teachings.

222.8 Much of what distinguishes African life is to be found in patterns of  
behavior displayed in the tribe and particularly in the family. Increasingly,  
urban life threatens to destroy the positive qualities of such patterns. Since  
change is inevitable if progress is to be made by any African society, a prima-  
ry challenge to Bahá’ís is to preserve and improve those wholesome aspects  
of tribal and family custom that are in accord with the Bahá’í Teachings  
and to dispense with those that are not. Such a challenge must be embraced  
with the understanding that the Book of God is the standard by which to  
weigh all forms of behavior. While unwavering action is necessary, wisdom  
and tact and patience must, of course, be exercised. Let it be understood,  
too, that Africans are not alone in the struggle to change certain age-old  
practices. People everywhere have customs which must be abandoned so  
as to clear the path along which their societies must evolve towards that  
glorious, new civilization which is to be the fruit of Bahá’u’lláh’s stupendous  
Revelation. Indeed, in no society on earth can there be found practices  
which adequately mirror the standards of His Cause. His own truth-bearing  
Words clarify the matter: “The summons and the message which We gave  
were never intended to reach or to benefit one land or one people only.  
Mankind in its entirety must firmly adhere to whatsoever hath been re-  
vealed and vouchsafed unto it. Then and only then will it attain unto true  
liberty. The whole earth is illuminated with the resplendent glory of God’s  
Revelation.”[[309]](#footnote-309)222-2

222.9 The acute inadequacy of plans and programs to educate Africa’s people  
poses a particular challenge to the followers of Bahá’u’lláh in that continent,  
for He has emphasized the importance of education for all; and individu-  
als ought to be taught at least to read and write. The education of which

Bahá’u’lláh spoke includes both spiritual and material aspects. The lack of  
such education affects the ability of people to achieve true progress. This  
matter should be of the keenest interest to all segments of the community.  
Parents have a special responsibility to see that their children, both boys and  
girls, receive an education; and they must take care that the girls are not left  
behind, since well-educated girls are a guarantee of the excellence of future  
society; indeed, preference should, if necessary, be given to their education.  
Closely linked to this concern is the principle of the equality of men and  
women taught by Bahá’u’lláh. It is also highly desirable for adults, both men  
and women, who are illiterate to participate in literacy programs, so that  
gradually all Bahá’ís will be able to read the Word of God for themselves.  
The Bahá’í community is not fully equipped to undertake what responsible  
authorities have neglected to do for the education of the people; however,  
the Bahá’í institutions at all levels are urged to give attention to these critical  
needs, as circumstances permit.

222.10 Bearing in mind these three foregoing considerations, you can move  
vigorously and wisely to tackle the manifold tasks implied by the Plan’s  
emphasis on advancing the process of entry by troops. An extension of your  
efforts to effect both expansion and consolidation on a wholly new scale  
is imperative. The one suggests a powerful outward thrust of your teach-  
ing activities to cover the length and breadth of your countries, reaching  
the remotest areas with the Divine Message. The other indicates a drive to  
consolidate and multiply your gains through an ever-deepening penetra-  
tion of spiritual knowledge of the Faith into the hearts of the believers, a  
systematic development of human resources, and a marked improvement in  
the functioning of your national and, particularly, your local institutions.

222.11 In all this exertion, the three components of the process—the indi-  
vidual, the institutions and the community—must assume their respective  
responsibilities. We especially expect you all to pursue every means at your  
disposal that will bring about the realization of an organic unity between the  
Local Spiritual Assembly and the community, and thereby establish a sharp  
contrast to the fragmentation of present-day social life. Thus, we long to see  
the individual African believers arise in greater numbers to claim the Faith  
of Bahá’u’lláh as their own and to take on the requisite tasks of teaching  
and administering a rapidly expanding Faith. And we look for accumulating  
evidence that the Spiritual Assemblies are taking to heart their God-given  
mandate and are conscientiously fulfilling their obligations to Bahá’u’lláh to  
foster the growth and development of vibrant communities in which adults,

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youth and children are more and more integrated and active. To fulfill these  
expectations is to demonstrate to a skeptical world the power of the Faith to  
hold aloft a new standard for the guidance of the nations, and eventually to  
attract the disillusioned masses to the security of God’s Faith.

222.12 What specific actions, you may well ask, would indicate that you are  
fulfilling the basic requirement of the Plan in Africa? A reply would include  
mention of the following. Whatever the state of expansion in a commu-  
nity, take the next steps to increase enrollments, deepen the believers and  
strengthen the teaching force. Where entry by troops is in progress, intensify  
your efforts to stimulate further increase in the number of believers, while  
at the same time conducting a program of training that will deepen the new  
believers and raise up new teachers on a continuing basis. Maximize action  
to bring families into the Faith by encouraging individuals in their duty to  
endeavor to lead as many of their family members as possible to the light of  
divine guidance. Regularize efforts to teach among the sub-Saharan Mus-  
lims. Proliferate the publication of Bahá’í literature and audiocassette tapes,  
especially in vernacular languages. Swell the number of Local Spiritual As-  
semblies elected by their communities without help from outside. Support  
more abundantly the Funds of the Faith. Orient believers from among the  
traditional rulers to the Teachings, so that they will find appropriate ways  
to serve the Faith.

222.13 Moreover, extend provisions for children regularly to attend Bahá’í classes  
for their spiritual training. Give consistent attention to involving the youth  
in the expansion and consolidation work and to opening channels of activ-  
ity suited to their talents and necessary for their development into mature  
Bahá’ís. Increase the number and effectiveness of observances of Nineteen  
Day Feasts. Expand the use of music and drama in the proclamation and  
teaching work, an effort in which Africa has already distinguished itself.  
Multiply plans and programs to raise the status of women and to encourage  
the active support of men in such endeavors. Extend the range of your exer-  
tions in the fields of external affairs and social and economic development.

222.14 You will readily appreciate, then, the emphasis placed on multiplying the  
number of training institutes; for without them it will be impossible to meet  
the needs of hugely expanding communities. In some places, the friends  
may find it possible to offer sites and facilities for these essential operations,  
which must be located in as many areas as necessary to provide regular and  
well-organized training to increasing numbers of believers. The programs of  
the institutes must be designed to instill in the participants a good under-

standing of the fundamental verities of the Faith and to help them acquire  
skills and abilities that will enable them to serve the Faith effectively.

222.15 Immediately after Riḍván your National Spiritual Assemblies will initiate  
efforts to formulate, in consultation with the Counselors, the details of the  
Four Year Plan, country by country. To ensure that the Plan is broadly based  
and responsive to the needs of all areas of a country, the participation of  
the Local Spiritual Assemblies and individuals, in evolving their own local  
plans and in following the lines of action to be clearly laid down, will be  
essential.

222.16 Dear Friends, we are acutely conscious of the crushing difficulties that  
afflict life in Africa: the conditions that have caused a flood of refugees on  
the continent, the horrors created by ethnic conflict, the political unrest, the  
economic distress, the high incidence of hunger and disease, the horrendous  
natural disasters. But, paradoxical as it may seem, there exist in all of these  
the very possibilities of your success. Your ability to endure and forge ahead  
is reinforced in the assurance given by the Divine Physician, Who antici-  
pated all these conditions and prescribed a sure remedy. His prescriptions  
have been placed in your hands.

222.17 Therefore, we remind you of the noble ambitions the beloved Guardian  
held for you as a people in a continent that has “a great contribution to make  
to the advancement of world civilization.” May such memories resound  
afresh in your hearts, quickening your will to fulfill the major aim of the  
Plan before you, and setting a pace for your actions like the urgent rhythm  
of drums pulsating throughout your immensely potent, far-stretching land.

222.18 Our ardent prayer at the Holy Threshold on your behalf is that the  
divine storehouses of heaven may pour out their bounties upon you all,  
healing your ills, magnifying your powers, and enabling you to achieve vic-  
tory upon victory.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

223  
Supplementary message—Riḍván Message 1996—  
Western and Central Asia

RIḌVÁN 153

To the Followers of Bahá’u’lláh in Western and Central Asia

Dearly loved Friends,

223.1 As a turbulent yet luminous century draws to a close, the Bahá’í com-  
munity is embarking on another campaign in the progressive unfoldment of  
the Divine Plan. The global enterprises thus far executed by the consecrated  
adherents of His Cause have systematically spread the light of Bahá’u’lláh’s  
Revelation to every corner of the earth and have firmly established the institu-  
tions of His Administrative Order. The Four Year Plan, whose primary aim  
is to effect a significant advance in the process of entry by troops, is being  
launched at a time when the Cause of God has emerged from obscurity, when  
its contributions to society are being increasingly acknowledged, and when  
humanity’s prolonged and continuous suffering has created an atmosphere of  
search for spiritual values and has raised the level of receptivity to the Cause.

223.2 We call upon our much-loved co-workers in the western and central parts  
of the Asiatic continent, the home of the oldest and most venerable Bahá’í  
communities, to rally round their divinely ordained institutions and to arise  
during these years to demonstrate once again the devotion, valor and deter-  
mination which have already conferred matchless distinction upon them.  
You have the honor of serving the Faith in a region above whose horizon the  
dawn of the Great Day of the Lord appeared, in whose bosom the infant  
Cause of God was nurtured, on whose soil so much sacred blood was shed,  
on whose western shores the Qiblih of the people of Bahá is established,  
within whose embrace the first Mashriqu’l-Adhkár was raised, and from  
which hosts of devoted and committed Bahá’ís have, in the past decades, set  
out to bear the banner of the Faith to every part of the globe.

223.3 Our thoughts turn first to the community of Bahá’u’lláh’s lovers in the  
land where His Faith was born. Although they are still denied the freedom  
to resume direct participation in the series of campaigns by which the Cause  
is steadily advancing throughout the world, their achievements constitute  
irrefutable proof of the creative power of the daily sacrifices they are mak-  
ing for the vindication of the Faith. What is becoming apparent, as this  
new global Plan opens, is that the build-up of spiritual strength within the

Iranian Bahá’í community—purified by suffering and steeled by adver-  
sity—represents a reservoir of energy that will, in God’s good time, bring  
incalculable benefits to the Cause. “Say: The springs that sustain the life of  
these birds are not of this world. Their source is far above the reach and ken  
of human apprehension.[[310]](#footnote-310)223-1

223.4 In the lands to the south and west of Iran, Bahá’ís live under restrictions  
which prevent them from teaching the Cause to their fellow-countrymen.  
Yet, by the outstanding contributions they have made to the progress of the  
Faith in other parts of the world, they have proved that their enthusiasm to  
spread the Divine Message cannot be dampened. It has been particularly  
heartening to witness the eagerness and rapidity with which, as soon as the  
barriers to teaching in the republics of Central Asia and the Caucasus were  
removed, they rushed to the aid of the small bands of believers who had  
persevered there for so many decades and helped them to build the vibrant  
communities now flourishing in these regions today. No doubt they will  
continue to lend valuable assistance to the communities in Central Asia and  
the Caucasus during the Four Year Plan.

223.5 In these republics, through the combined efforts of native and visiting  
teachers, extraordinary advances can be expected. A pattern for the rapid  
growth of the Cause has already been established in the region: locality after  
locality has been opened to the Faith and, because of the high receptivity of  
the people, the number of believers in each place has quickly risen, resulting  
in the election of a Spiritual Assembly to guide the affairs of the nascent  
community. Integral to this pattern, almost from the very outset, has been  
the holding of regular institute courses, which have assisted the friends in  
becoming strong promoters of the Cause. If the expansion and consolida-  
tion activities are vigorously pursued according to this same pattern in the  
coming years, the growth of the Faith will accelerate, greatly increasing the  
number of believers and centers.

223.6 To effect such accelerated growth, the friends in these countries must be-  
come so deepened in their understanding of the Faith as to take up, on their  
own initiative, the torch of guidance that will enlighten the multitudes.  
They should not be content with small communities, nor allow the tasks of  
administering their own community affairs to divert them from the essential  
purpose of bringing new members into their ranks. Each community, from

the earliest phases of its development, should be fired by a vision of the  
glory of the Cause and imbued with the zeal to achieve rapid and sustained  
expansion both in the locality itself and in the nearby towns and villages.

223.7 In Pakistan, where a well-grounded community traces its roots back  
some hundred years, the friends must make a mighty effort to increase their  
numbers significantly among people of every walk of life. The will and de-  
termination needed to sustain large-scale expansion and consolidation can  
be created through a consistent and widespread institute program aimed  
at exposing growing contingents of believers to the Creative Word, thus  
enhancing their spiritual capacities to diffuse the light of the Faith and to  
further the development of its institutions. Such a rapid process of growth  
requires that more and more women be enabled to move to the forefront  
of Bahá’í activity, in both the teaching and administrative fields. While ris-  
ing to the challenge of entry by troops in their homeland, the friends in  
Pakistan need also to pay special attention to their long-suffering Afghan  
neighbors, who cry out for the Healing Message of Bahá’u’lláh, the one true  
balm for their afflictions.

223.8 In all your countries, you must continue to give the highest priority  
to the education of children. Having seen the effects of the Teachings of  
Bahá’u’lláh on generation after generation, you well understand the value  
of Bahá’í education and of a proper spiritual upbringing. In those areas  
where activities are restricted, you are nevertheless able to teach the chil-  
dren of your own communities and help them to grow to become pillars of  
strength. In other areas, you have the possibility, nay the obligation, to open  
your classes to children of non-Bahá’í families and to become known as the  
educators of the coming generations of your peoples.

223.9 Dear Friends, the time is short, and weighty responsibilities have been  
placed on the shoulders of each and every Bahá’í. In His Most Holy Book,  
the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, the Blessed Beauty states:

223.9a Verily, We behold you from Our realm of glory, and will aid who-  
soever will arise for the triumph of Our Cause with the hosts of the  
Concourse on high and a company of Our favored angels.[[311]](#footnote-311)223-2

223.10 Be confident that your dedicated services will, like a magnet, attract  
the promised confirmations and that your hearts will be gladdened as you  
witness the successive triumphs of the Cause you hold so dear. We shall  
remember all of you in our prayers in the Holy Shrines and shall beseech  
Bahá’u’lláh to guide and assist you, as you face the many challenges of these  
spiritually potent closing years of the century.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

224  
Supplementary message—Riḍván Message 1996—  
Pacific region

RIḌVÁN 153

To the Followers of Bahá’u’lláh in Australia, the Cook Islands, the Eastern  
Caroline Islands, the Fiji Islands, French Polynesia, the Hawaiian Islands,  
Indonesia, Japan, Kiribati, Korea, the Mariana Islands, the Marshall Islands,  
New Caledonia and the Loyalty Islands, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea,  
the Philippines, Samoa, the Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, and  
the Western Caroline Islands

Dearly loved Friends,

224.1 You are privileged to live in a region of the world unique in the oppor-  
tunities it offers to advance the interests of the Faith during the course of  
the Four Year Plan. You constitute Bahá’í communities within, or on the  
fringe of, the vast Pacific Ocean, with which is associated this promise of  
Bahá’u’lláh: “Should they attempt to conceal His light on the continent, He  
will assuredly rear His head in the midmost part of the ocean and, raising  
His voice proclaim: ‘I am the life-giver of the world.’”[[312]](#footnote-312)224.1 At a time when  
the dear Bahá’í friends in the Cradle of the Faith yearn for the yoke of  
oppression to be lifted from their shoulders, you can compensate for their  
present and temporary inability to propagate the Faith if you undertake a  
sustained endeavor to convey the Divine Message to the peoples of your  
countries and multiply Bahá’í institutions throughout these lands.

224.2 Within your region is to be found a vast diversity of races, cultures,  
languages and religious traditions, illustrative of the major influences which

have shaped the affairs of humanity throughout history. One of this re-  
gion’s distinguishing features is described by the Guardian as “a spiritual  
axis, extending from the Antipodes to the northern islands of the Pacific  
Ocean—an axis whose northern and southern poles will act as powerful  
magnets, endowed with exceptional spiritual potency, and towards which  
other younger and less experienced communities will tend for some time  
to gravitate.”[[313]](#footnote-313)224-2 This emphasizes the vital role to be played by the Bahá’í  
communities of Northeastern Asia and of the Antipodes in the spiritual  
illumination of the surrounding areas.

224.3 Every country of the region must witness, in the course of the Four Year  
Plan, a significant advance in the process of entry by troops. It is essential  
that the plans formulated on national and local levels reflect this vital aim.  
The advancement of this process will require that greater attention be given  
not only to fostering individual initiative in the teaching work, but also to  
developing human resources through the establishment and efficient op-  
eration of training institutes and other centers of learning, and to vastly  
increasing the strength and quality of the functioning of the Local Spiritual  
Assemblies.

224.4 We direct a special appeal to the indigenous believers in all parts of the  
Pacific region, men and women alike, to intensify their efforts to acquire a  
deeper understanding of the Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh, and to strive for a  
position in the forefront of the promoters of the Faith through their teach-  
ing endeavors on the home front and their international cooperation in  
programs of the Ocean of Light. As the tensions and divisions of a declining  
social order increase, the believers throughout the Pacific Islands should pro-  
vide compelling testimony to the potency of the Bahá’í Teachings through  
their manifest unity transcending tribal, national or ethnic barriers. The  
desperate search for solutions to the social and economic problems afflict-  
ing these countries is tempting people, in increasing numbers, to indulge  
in partisan political activities; the indigenous Bahá’ís should refuse to be  
drawn into such divisive pursuits and should strive to acquire a more pro-  
found insight into the nature of the World Order of Bahá’u’lláh, which  
offers a pattern for a future society distinguished by justice and unity, far  
removed from the contention of competing political interests.

224.5 In many of the nations of your area, women have traditionally been  
restricted to a secondary role in the life of society. We call upon the

Bahá’í women of these countries, assured of the support and encourage-  
ment of all elements of the Bahá’í community, to demonstrate the trans-  
forming power of this Revelation by their courage and initiative in the  
teaching work and their full participation in the administrative activities  
of the Faith.

224.6 In much of the region, insufficient attention has been given to the educa-  
tion of children. Far more extensive programs should be initiated in those  
countries where the need exists, to ensure that Bahá’í children are nurtured,  
encouraged to acquire trained minds, illumined with a sound knowledge of  
the Divine Teachings, well-equipped to participate in the work of the Cause  
at all levels and to contribute to the arts, crafts and sciences necessary for  
the advancement of civilization. Such programs, when open to all children,  
Bahá’í or not, offer a potent means of extending the beneficial influences of  
Bahá’u’lláh’s Message to the wider society.

224.7 In Northeastern Asia, the progress of the Faith has been most encourag-  
ing, and a good foundation has been laid for the Bahá’ís of Japan and Ko-  
rea to magnify the size of their communities substantially during the Four  
Year Plan, while making a notable contribution to the work of the Faith in  
neighboring countries. Special attention should be given to the develop-  
ment of the Faith in the Ryukyu Islands and also to the exploration of any  
opportunities which might arise to carry the healing Message of Bahá’u’lláh  
to all parts of the Korean peninsula.

224.8 The dedication and vitality of the Bahá’í community in the Philippine  
Islands is a constant source of joy to us. We look to the Filipino believers to  
make a significant advance in the process of entry by troops during the Four  
Year Plan, while giving renewed attention to the strengthening of their Lo-  
cal Spiritual Assemblies and the development of community life. This will  
necessitate the intensive use of training institutes throughout the country,  
and the involvement of a larger number of believers in these training pro-  
grams. The members of this devoted Bahá’í community provide a welcome  
source of manpower for the reinforcement of Bahá’í endeavors elsewhere,  
particularly in the Asian and Pacific regions.

224.9 We are well aware of the restrictions which have long afflicted the mem-  
bers of the Indonesian Bahá’í community. Their staunchness of faith, and  
their initiative in taking full advantage of whatever opportunities are open  
to them, attract our admiration and gratitude. We urge them to continue  
their endeavors throughout the whole of Indonesia, with full confidence  
that their hopes will be fulfilled in the future.

224.10 A special responsibility must rest upon the believers in Papua New Guinea,  
constituting the largest body of Bahá’ís in Australasia, to strive unceasingly  
to build a vibrant community which embraces all strata of society and which  
is renowned as a dynamic and enlightened segment of their nation. We look  
forward, in the course of the Four Year Plan, to a greater participation of the  
Bahá’í men and women of this country in the development of the Faith in  
other parts of Melanesia and elsewhere throughout the Pacific Islands.

224.11 In Australia, New Zealand and Hawaii, there are well-established and  
soundly functioning Bahá’í communities, each characterized by an admi-  
rable record of accomplishments on the home front and by a notable con-  
tribution to the work of the Faith in other parts of the Pacific and beyond.  
We call upon the believers in these countries to strive for a fuller realization  
of their duty to advance the interests of the Faith on the home fronts and  
throughout the length and breadth of the Pacific region. In their own coun-  
tries, they should aspire to far greater attainments, marked by a substantial  
increase in the number of adherents and an enhanced public awareness  
of the distinctive character of the Bahá’í Faith and its followers. They can  
render invaluable assistance to other Bahá’í communities, not only in the  
Pacific region but in Southeast Asia and beyond, because of the experi-  
ence they have acquired in the teaching and administrative fields and the  
resources to which they have access. The believers from the Pacific Islands  
who have taken up residence in these three countries should be mindful of  
the responsibilities which rest upon them to devise means by which they  
can contribute to the strengthening of the Bahá’í communities in the island  
nations from which they have come.

224.12 Many of the valiant Bahá’í communities of the Pacific Islands are dis-  
tinguished by the fact that they constitute significant percentages of the  
populations of their countries. The believers in these island nations need to  
direct their attention, more than ever, to the propagation of the Faith. They  
should also concentrate on the development of a distinctive community  
life, based on an uncompromising adherence to the precepts of the Faith,  
and guided by well-functioning Local Spiritual Assemblies, which will  
demonstrate to the entire populations of their countries the unifying and  
transforming power of the Faith, and will attract to the Cause a multitude  
of new believers. Through this effort, they can make a vital contribution to  
enhancing the worldwide prestige of the Faith, and can lay the foundation  
for even more outstanding victories in the future. We urge them to give  
attention to sharply increasing their level of international cooperation in

pursuit of the goals of the Four Year Plan, including support of the estab-  
lishment of a strong Bahá’í community in French Polynesia as a basis for the  
future election of a National Spiritual Assembly there.

224.13 Almost four decades have passed since Shoghi Effendi described the Pa-  
cific region in which you live as “that vast area of the globe, an area endowed  
with unimaginable potentialities, and which, owing to its strategic posi-  
tion, is bound to feel the impact of world-shaking forces, and to shape to a  
marked degree through the experience gained by its peoples in the school of  
adversity, the destinies of mankind.”[[314]](#footnote-314)224-3 Since that time your nations have  
come ever more fully under the influence of the forces which are causing tur-  
moil and disorder to human society, while the followers of Bahá’u’lláh have  
labored, undeterred and with admirable dedication, to advance the Cause  
of their Lord and to establish His institutions. The Pacific area, where, as  
the Guardian stated, “Bahá’í exploits bid fair to outshine the feats achieved  
in any other ocean, and indeed in every continent of the globe …,”[[315]](#footnote-315)224-4  
now stands at the threshold of victories far greater than any yet won. We call  
upon you to go forward now as never before, assured of our ardent prayers  
in the Holy Shrines on your behalf, confident of your ultimate triumph.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

225  
Our sacred duty to teach the Faith  
and the role of the institutions

22 APRIL 1996

To an individual believer

225.1 Your email message … has been received at the Bahá’í World Center,  
and the Universal House of Justice has asked us to reply as follows to your  
question regarding teaching the Faith ….

225.2 In His Writings, Bahá’u’lláh states clearly the essential requisites for our  
spiritual growth, and these are reiterated and amplified by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in  
His talks and Tablets. They can be summarized briefly as prayer and medi-  
tation, the endeavor to conform one’s behavior to the exalted standard set

forth in the Bahá’í Teachings, participation in the life of the Bahá’í com-  
munity, teaching the Faith and contributing to the Bahá’í Fund. Different  
individuals, according to their natures, will follow these paths in varying  
ways, but all are essential to spiritual growth. The House of Justice points  
out that there can be no rigid formula on how to attain the right balance  
in our approach to spirituality, and that the best course here, as in so many  
things, is to follow the example of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.

225.3 Regarding, in particular, teaching the Cause of God, from a letter writ-  
ten on behalf of the beloved Guardian, we are reminded that it is a sacred  
obligation enjoined upon every believer.

225.4 Bahá’u’lláh has enjoined upon the Bahá’ís the sacred obligation of teach-  
ing. We have no priests, therefore the service once rendered by priests to  
their religions is the service every single Bahá’í is expected to render in-  
dividually to his religion. He must be the one who enlightens new souls,  
confirms them, heals the wounded and the weary upon the road of life, and  
gives them to quaff from the chalice of everlasting life—the knowledge of  
the Manifestation of God in His Day.

225.5 Further, Bahá’u’lláh exhorts us to “Teach thou the Cause of God with an  
utterance which will cause the bushes to be enkindled, and the call ‘Verily,  
there is no God but me, the Almighty, the Unconstrained’ to be raised  
therefrom.”

225.6 While living the Bahá’í life, good works and service to our fellow men are  
important aspects in exemplifying and promoting the Faith, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá  
emphasizes that these alone are not sufficient. He states:

225.6a It is at such times that the friends of God avail themselves of the  
occasion, seize the opportunity, rush forth and win the prize. If their  
task is to be confined to good conduct and advice, nothing will be  
accomplished. They must speak out, expound the proofs, set forth  
clear arguments, draw irrefutable conclusions establishing the truth of  
the manifestation of the Sun of Reality.[[316]](#footnote-316)225-1

The relevant guidance provided in messages and letters from the House  
of Justice can best be understood in light of the knowledge that teach-  
ing the Faith is each individual’s sacred duty, prescribed by God, and is

fundamental for the advancement of the Cause and our own spiritual prog-  
ress. In its 1995 Riḍván message, the House of Justice wrote, “For to teach,  
Bahá’u’lláh Himself affirms, is to do the ‘most meritorious of all deeds.’”  
In another Riḍván message, teaching is described as “the food of the spirit  
… it ensures the victory of the Covenant and brings those who give their  
lives to it the supernal happiness of attainment to the good pleasure of their  
Lord.”[[317]](#footnote-317)225-2 The emphasis on teaching which you perceive in these messages  
in no way diminishes the importance of the other requisites for spiritual  
growth, but rather should inspire the believers to submerge themselves yet  
deeper in prayer, meditation and study of the Word of God, and to strive  
more vigilantly to live the Bahá’í life and to be of service to their fellow man,  
as essential requirements to fulfilling their obligation to teach the Faith.

225.7 Regarding the distinctive roles of the institutions of the Faith and the  
individual believers in the spread of the Cause of Bahá’u’lláh, in the trans-  
formation of the individual and collective lives of peoples and the eventual  
establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth, they are described by the  
House of Justice as follows:

225.7a Though the institutions of the Faith are responsible for planning the  
goals and activities of the Cause, for stimulating and encouraging  
the believers to arise, and for supporting and unifying them in their  
services, it is, in the final analysis, through the spiritual decisions and  
actions of the individual believers that the Faith moves forward on its  
course to ultimate victory.[[318]](#footnote-318)225-3

You ask what you should do if you feel the institutions are not functioning  
according to the Sacred Writings. You will find it helpful in this respect  
to deepen your understanding of the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-  
Bahá on the subject of the Covenant, possibly by arranging to study with a  
believer who is clearly knowledgeable in the Faith. To question the actions  
or directions of a Bahá’í institution certainly does not in itself constitute a  
violation of the Covenant. One of the distinguishing features of the Bahá’í

Faith is the extent to which it liberates the individual to give expression to  
his understanding of the Bahá’í Teachings and to offer to the institutions  
of the Faith his views about the needs and opportunities which he perceives  
to exist. However, this remarkable freedom of thought is accompanied by  
the duty placed upon every believer to obey the Spiritual Assemblies, and to  
recognize that the wisdom of consultation by an Assembly may be regarded  
as yielding a greater understanding of an issue than that to which one indi-  
vidual has access.

225.8 You are assured of the loving prayers of the House of Justice in the Holy  
Shrines on your behalf, that you may achieve your desire for a deeper under-  
standing of the verities of the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh, and that your endeavors  
in the path of service to His Cause may be divinely guided and confirmed.

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

226  
Message to the Youth Forum, Ontario, Canada

5 MAY 1996

To the Youth gathered at the Youth Forum in Kingston, Ontario, Canada

Dear Friends,

226.1 We are delighted that, at this very early point in the Four Year Plan, you  
have gathered together in Kingston to chart your course for the extraordi-  
nary period of opportunity ahead between now and the end of the century.  
We send our heartfelt greetings to each and all of you.

226.2 At every stage in the growth of the Faith, young people have arisen to  
play a vital role in its propagation and consolidation. In this day, the oppor-  
tunities available for Bahá’í youth to contribute to the awakening of man-  
kind to the divine purpose of human existence are vast, and the privilege of  
leading not only your peers but all people towards the world civilization of  
Bahá’u’lláh is within your grasp. May this forum mobilize your energies and  
strengthen your ardor to spread the Divine Teachings, and reinforce your  
eagerness to assure that the standard of the Cause of God is raised in every  
province, territory, city and hamlet in Canada.

226.3 Although the task before you is great, do not hesitate. Equipped with the  
Sacred Writings for your guidance, and with complete trust in the unfailing

aid of the Blessed Beauty as your strength, you are assured of success in all  
that you endeavor on His behalf.

226.4 We shall remember you with love in our prayers at the Sacred Threshold.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

227  
The disintegration of society and the building up  
of the Bahá’í community

13 MAY 1996

To an individual believer

Dear Bahá’í Friend,

227.1 The Universal House of Justice has asked us to respond on its behalf to  
your thoughtful letter ….

227.2 The questions raised in your letter go to the heart of the issues facing  
Bahá’ís everywhere at this critical point in world history. We are witnessing  
the disintegration of the great civilization which has, for over two centu-  
ries, dominated world history and shaped the behavior and attitudes of the  
most influential sectors of modern society. The defining characteristic of  
this civilization has been a materialistic view of reality, the conviction that  
both human consciousness and human society are essentially the products  
of material forces and that it is to these forces that we must look for the  
resolution of the great problems facing our world.

227.3 Clearly, this world view reflects a profound error about the nature of  
humankind. It has demonstrated conclusively its impotence to solve any  
significant problem facing the world’s people today—political, social, eco-  
nomic, or moral. In the face of so massive a failure, a growing majority of  
people everywhere are being forced to reexamine fundamental assumptions.  
Speaking some fifty years ago of this accelerating breakdown, the Guardian  
of the Bahá’í Faith wrote:

227.3a A tempest, unprecedented in its violence, unpredictable in its course,  
catastrophic in its immediate effects, unimaginably glorious in its  
ultimate consequences, is at present sweeping the face of the earth.  
… Bewildered, agonized and helpless, [humanity] watches this great  
and mighty wind of God invading the remotest and fairest regions of

the earth, rocking its foundations, deranging its equilibrium, sunder-  
ing its nations, disrupting the homes of its peoples, wasting its cit-  
ies, driving into exile its kings, pulling down its bulwarks, uprooting  
its institutions, dimming its light, and harrowing up the souls of its  
inhabitants.[[319]](#footnote-319)227-1

227.4 As you have said, political calculations and partisan agendas that are  
based on the interpretation of reality that our world has inherited from the  
past hold no answers, whether socialist or capitalist, whether of the East or  
the West.

227.5 The question arises, therefore, on what basis can the advancement of civ-  
ilization and the development of human nature continue? It is Bahá’u’lláh’s  
answer to this question that poses the fundamental challenge of our age.  
In asserting that “this is the Day in which God’s most excellent favors have  
been poured out upon men”[[320]](#footnote-320)227-2 and that “the world’s equilibrium hath been  
upset through the vibrating influence of the most great, this new World Or-  
der,”[[321]](#footnote-321)227-3 Bahá’u’lláh points humanity to the fulfillment of the promise that  
has sustained our race throughout the past thousands of years of civilization.  
His words envision an entirely new relationship between the regeneration of  
the individual’s spiritual life and the reconstruction of society. Again, to cite  
the words of the Guardian:

227.5a The Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh, whose supreme mission is none other  
but the achievement of this organic and spiritual unity of the whole  
body of nations, should, if we be faithful to its implications, be re-  
garded as signalizing through its advent the COMING OF AGE OF  
THE ENTIRE HUMAN RACE. It should be viewed not merely as  
yet another spiritual revival in the ever-changing fortunes of man-  
kind, not only as a further stage in a chain of progressive Revelations,  
nor even as the culmination of one of a series of recurrent prophetic  
cycles, but rather as marking the last and highest stage in the stupen-  
dous evolution of man’s collective life on this planet.[[322]](#footnote-322)227-4

227.6 It is in this context, we believe, that you will, through your own medita-  
tions and your association with your fellow Bahá’ís, find the answers to the  
questions that concern you. Essentially, the Bahá’í community is “pioneer-  
ing” a new approach to the organization of society and the individual per-  
son’s relationship to it, one that is based on a spiritual conception of reality.  
This effort follows two parallel tracks. On the one hand, we do all we can  
as Bahá’ís to acquaint those around us, including the organizations of soci-  
ety, with the principles and concepts revealed by Bahá’u’lláh, in the hope  
that this guidance may be put to practical use in the life of humanity. On  
the other, we are slowly building a global community which demonstrates,  
beyond argument, that humanity, in all its diversity, can learn to live and  
work as a single people in a global homeland.

227.7 We cannot take on our consciences the responsibility for the way in  
which others respond. Nor can we afford to be diverted from our efforts by  
the accumulating evidences around us of the suffering and destruction that  
results from humanity’s present course of action. Merely to glance back over  
the past several decades is to realize how steadily and irresistibly Bahá’u’lláh’s  
vision of humanity’s destiny is being reflected in the objective experience of  
our world. This process is steadily gathering momentum, and the challenge  
to each Bahá’í, as an individual, is to become an instrument of this historic  
process.

227.8 We are, as you say, only a minority. But this has always been the case at  
any great turning-point in history. It is the Revelation of God that makes  
this minority a creative force in history and that brings to each of its active  
members the deepest sense of fulfillment that human life affords.

227.9 The Universal House of Justice has been touched by the sincerity of  
the spiritual search reflected in your letter, and assures you that it will pray  
ardently in the Holy Shrines that Bahá’u’lláh will surround you with His  
confirmation and blessing.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

FOR DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

228  
Elucidation on the role of the  
Universal House of Justice

14 JUNE 1996

To an individual believer

228.1 Your email message … has been received, and the Universal House of  
Justice has asked us to reply as follows to the questions perplexing you re-  
garding the House of Justice ….

228.2 Your first question stems from a statement made by an individual on  
an Internet Bahá’í discussion group which asserts that “Shoghi Effendi has  
allowed for the Universal House of Justice reaching a wrong decision.” In  
describing the House of Justice, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá states clearly,

228.2a Whatever will be its decision, by majority vote, shall be the real truth,  
inasmuch as that House is under the protection, unerring guidance  
and care of the one true Lord. He shall guard it from error and will  
protect it under the wing of His sanctity and infallibility. He who  
opposes it is cast out and will eventually be of the defeated.[[323]](#footnote-323)228-1

228.3 It is the exclusive sphere of the Universal House of Justice to “pro-  
nounce upon and deliver the final judgment on such laws and ordinances  
as Bahá’u’lláh has not expressly revealed.”[[324]](#footnote-324)228-2 It carries responsibility for the  
application of the revealed Word, the protection of the Faith, as well as the  
duty “to ensure the continuity of that divinely-appointed authority which  
flows from the Source of our Faith, to safeguard the unity of its followers  
and to maintain the integrity and flexibility of its teachings.”[[325]](#footnote-325)228-3 However,  
the Universal House of Justice is not omniscient, and the friends should  
understand that there is a difference between infallibility and omniscience.  
Like the Guardian, the House of Justice wants to be provided with facts  
when called upon to render a decision, and like him it may well change its  
decision when new facts emerge, or in light of changed conditions at some

point in the future. We have found nothing in the writings of Shoghi Ef-  
fendi which suggests that the House of Justice would on any occasion reach  
a “wrong decision.”

228.4 Regarding membership on the Universal House of Justice being restricted  
to men, you are correct in your understanding that Bahá’u’lláh was explicit  
about the matter, and consequently it is not within the power of the House  
of Justice to rule otherwise at this time or at any time in the future. As to  
the additional information on this matter which “has limited distribution”  
mentioned in the statement posted on the discussion group, it is unclear  
what this statement is referring to. In 1988, the attention of the House of  
Justice was drawn by the National Spiritual Assembly of New Zealand to an  
unpublished paper which was being widely circulated on this subject; the  
comments of the House of Justice on the subject were conveyed in a letter  
to the National Assembly of New Zealand, a copy of which is enclosed for  
your reference.[[326]](#footnote-326)228-4

228.5 We hope the above comments are helpful in relieving any confusion you  
may have felt related to these matters. You are assured of the loving prayers  
of the House of Justice at the Sacred Threshold, that the Blessed Beauty  
may guide and confirm all of your efforts on behalf of His Cause.

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

229  
Clarification on Bahá’í wills

1 JULY 1996

To an individual believer

Dear Bahá’í Friend,

229.1 Your email message … requesting clarification on various aspects of the  
subject of Bahá’í wills, was received at the Bahá’í World Center, and we  
have been asked to reply as follows ….

229.2 In your communication you pose five questions about Bahá’í wills. These  
will be addressed in the order set by you. The first question asks for confir-  
mation of your understanding that the writing of a will is one of the laws  
in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas which is currently binding on the friends. In a letter

dated 9 June 1974,[[327]](#footnote-327)229-1 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice  
to a National Spiritual Assembly, those laws listed in the “Synopsis and  
Codification of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas” but which are not binding on the friends  
at this time were delineated, and as the entry at item IV.D.1.o “The writ-  
ing of a testament” was not included in that letter, you are correct in your  
understanding. A copy of the letter is enclosed for your reference.

229.3 Furthermore, a memorandum dated 20 September 1994 from the Re-  
search Department of the House of Justice draws upon the Writings in  
regard to this subject and indicates the importance of every Bahá’í making a  
will (the attachment referred to is enclosed for your reference):

229.3a Bahá’u’lláh clearly establishes the making of a will as one of His laws.  
In the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, paragraph 109, He instructs: “Unto everyone  
hath been enjoined the writing of a will.” The importance of this  
law is not to be underestimated, as can be seen from a careful study  
of the attached compilation of newly translated extracts from Tab-  
lets revealed by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Not only is making a will a spiritual  
duty, “one of the binding laws of this mighty Dispensation,” but it  
allows the individual full discretion to specify how his or her prop-  
erty, including the residence, is to be disposed of, and it is conducive  
to unity and agreement. Failure to draw up a will is considered by  
‘Abdu’l-Bahá as “disobedience” to the command of Bahá’u’lláh and  
as “non-fulfillment of the divine obligation,” and it leads to the divi-  
sion of the individual’s property according to provisions of the laws  
of inheritance.

229.4 t is worth noting that the Bahá’í laws of inheritance apply only when the  
individual dies without making a will. Indeed, one of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Tablets  
seems to indicate that the very provisions of the Bahá’í law of intestacy are  
intended as an incentive to individuals not to neglect the duty of making a  
will early in life.

229.5 Your second question also focuses on the writing of a will being a require-  
ment; we believe that the above-quoted text sufficiently addresses that issue.

229.6 Your third and fourth questions concern the “spiritual” portion of a Bahá’í  
will, that is, that portion of a believer’s will which is a statement of faith,

rather than a statement about the material or, to use your word, “ordinary”  
aspects of a will, such as distribution of one’s possessions and provision for  
the upbringing of one’s children. It would seem that your understanding  
that the individual believer should draft the “spiritual” portion of his or  
her will, rather than asking a lawyer to do so, is in keeping with the same  
paragraph of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas referred to earlier, paragraph 109, which  
provides guidance as to the “spiritual” content and, additionally, makes a  
specification regarding how the individual should head the document:

229.6a Unto everyone hath been enjoined the writing of a will. The testa-  
tor should head this document with the adornment of the Most Great  
Name, bear witness therein unto the oneness of God in the Dayspring  
of His Revelation, and make mention, as he may wish, of that which  
is praiseworthy, so that it may be a testimony for him in the kingdoms  
of Revelation and Creation and a treasure with his Lord, the Supreme  
Protector, the Faithful.

229.7 Note 137 in “The Kitáb-i-Aqdas” adds clarification of the reference in  
this passage to the Most Great Name:

229.7a As explained in note 33, the Greatest Name of God can take various  
forms, all based on the word “Bahá.” The Bahá’ís in the East have  
implemented this injunction of the Aqdas by heading their wills with  
such phrases as “O Thou Glory of the All-Glorious,” “In the name of  
God, the All-Glorious” or “He is the All-Glorious” and the like.

229.8 Aside from these prerequisites stated in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, the friends  
are free to formulate the provisions of their wills as they please, and should  
compose their wills according to their own wishes.

229.9 Your fifth question centers on the provision for Ḥuqúqu’lláh in Bahá’í  
wills. Your understanding that the obligation to pay Ḥuqúqu’lláh arises dur-  
ing one’s lifetime and is normally to be carried out with lifetime giving is  
correct, although at the same time it is true that there may be cases where a  
believer dies without having made provision in his or her will for payment  
of the unpaid portion of Ḥuqúqu’lláh, if any. The event of death does  
not remove from a believer the obligation to pay Ḥuqúqu’lláh. Whatever  
portion is due to be paid is therefore a debt due from the believer’s estate  
at the time of his or her death. The cost of the funeral and burial, the pay-

ment of the debts of the deceased, and the payment of whatever portion  
of Ḥuqúqu’lláh remains due are prior charges on the estate which must be  
met before arriving at the amount of the property which has to be divided  
in accordance with the provisions of the law of inheritance. Thus, whether  
or not a person makes a will or, having made a will, whether he or she makes  
provision in it for the payment of Ḥuqúqu’lláh, the Ḥuqúqu’lláh should be  
paid, like all debts, before the rest of the estate is divided.

229.10 In light of this, it is certainly advisable for a believer to make the neces-  
sary arrangements for payment of Ḥuqúqu’lláh prior to his or her death, in  
order to avoid complications or confusions which could arise. It should be  
noted that the question of a legal wording to include provision in a will for  
the payment of Ḥuqúqu’lláh after a believer has died is dependent upon so  
many factors, that it would be preferable to seek legal advice so that wording  
which is appropriate and in accordance with the laws governing inheritance  
can be used. Obviously, unless the believer leaves a clear accounting of his  
or her property and payment of Ḥuqúqu’lláh to date, if any, it will not be  
possible for anyone to calculate accurately what remains to be paid at the  
time of death. While the application of the principles involved in payment  
of Ḥuqúqu’lláh may well require subsidiary legislation by the House of Jus-  
tice in the future, at the present time it falls to the executor or administrator  
of an estate to apply them to the extent possible, using his or her best judg-  
ment and taking into account the information available. Finally, while the  
payment of Ḥuqúqu’lláh is each individual’s own responsibility, a believer  
may be referred to the nearest Representative of the Trustee of Ḥuqúqu’lláh,  
who could advise him or her in the light of any specific circumstances.[[328]](#footnote-328)229-2

229.11 We hope that the foregoing will be of assistance to you in clarifying and  
strengthening your understanding of the relevant issues involved in the  
subject of Bahá’í wills. Your efforts to aid the friends in recognizing the im-  
portance of this document, and particularly in grasping its spiritual signifi-  
cance, are commended. Be assured of the prayers of the House of Justice in  
the Holy Shrines that your endeavors may attract bounteous confirmations  
from the Concourse on High.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

**EXTRACTS FROM FOUR TABLETS BY ‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ**

**Concerning the question of inheritance**

229.12 O ye the relatives of that servant of God!

229.13 Give thanks unto God that ye have been successful in distributing the  
inheritance in the manner laid down by Him. This is the first time in this  
great Cycle that an inheritance hath been so distributed. God willing, all  
will follow your example in carrying this law into effect.

229.14 In this connection, it should be noted that the question of the will is of  
extreme importance: everyone should devote the most serious attention to  
drawing up a will, so that there should be no one who doth not have a will.  
This is one of the binding laws of this mighty Dispensation. We ask God  
to bestow a blessing upon your affairs so that they may prosper abundantly.

229.15 Upon you be greeting and praise.

**[1]**

229.16 As for the question of inheritance which is occasioning perplexity: in  
truth, one is entirely free during his lifetime to make provision in his will for  
the division and distribution of his property amongst his heirs in whatso-  
ever manner he seeth fit, in order that his wishes may then be implemented  
after he hath passed away. The writing of a will is obligatory upon everyone;  
everyone, that is, must in his lifetime draw up a will that is firm, sound,  
and clear in its provisions; seal and hide it; and guard it in a very safe place.  
In drawing up his will the testator enjoyeth full discretion to dispose of his  
property as he seeth fit; his will is a binding instrument, having precedence  
over any other provision, and no one hath the power to either modify or  
change it. Under these conditions, should he bequeath his whole property  
to his children, he is but acting within his rights. In the event, however, of  
disobedience to this command, of failure to draw up a will, and of non-  
fulfillment of the divine obligation; likewise in the event of disappearance  
of the will itself, the testator’s property will be divided up according to the  
designated shares.

229.17 In truth, the wisdom of this perspicuous and most mighty ordinance  
is that no one should draw breath without a will. Observe how, in the  
absence of a will, the inheritance in its entirety is divided up, distributed  
and dispersed contrary to the wishes of the deceased; what difficulties and  
disagreements are thus engendered! The will, however, is the settler of every  
dispute, and the cause of ease for all, for in it the testator disposeth of  
his property in whatsoever manner he desireth. How agreeable it is for the

estate in its entirety to be disposed of in accordance with the testator’s will  
and pleasure! Observe ye how many people during their lifetime are fearful  
about what will happen when they pass away. Now, with this divine com-  
mandment—the obligation and religious duty of drawing up a will before  
one’s passing—all these difficulties are resolved.

**[2]**

229.18 As regards the holy verse, the intention of the reference to ‘male, not  
female,’ is the firstborn son, for in all the Divine Dispensations the first-  
born son hath enjoyed a special distinction. Refer ye to the Torah and the  
Gospel, and likewise to the traditions related from aforetime. Read ye the  
story of Esau, Jacob and the sons of Isaac in the Torah, that it may become  
apparent that in all the divine Dispensations the eldest son hath been given  
extraordinary distinctions. Even the station of prophethood hath been his  
birthright, let alone the vanities of this world. Even the just laws current  
amongst civilized states and peoples have also accorded to the firstborn son  
a special distinction.

229.19 Today the English state claimeth to be the most enlightened in the world.  
Among the characteristics of the English people is that they restrict the prop-  
erty in its entirety to the firstborn son. Their reasoning in this is that when  
an accumulation of wealth is divided up it is dispersed and lost. A certain  
individual, for instance, amasseth with untold pains a considerable fortune;  
then, upon his death, his fortune is divided up, and this division causeth it  
to be dispersed and scattered to the winds. If, however, it be restricted to the  
firstborn son, it is preserved intact, and he careth for others. For this reason  
there are at present among the English people many households in which,  
for four or five centuries, the family fortune hath remained intact without  
having been distributed and dispersed.

229.20 Our intention in this is not at all that it is commendable and praisewor-  
thy to restrict the inheritance to the firstborn son. Our intention is rather to  
show that in the laws of civilized countries the firstborn son hath likewise  
been accorded a special distinction. By ‘firstborn son’ is intended the eldest  
of the surviving male children. The aim of assigning the residence exclu-  
sively to him is that at least the home of the deceased may be preserved  
intact, so that whoever among his family should either reside or visit there  
may be put in mind of him, and seek God’s pardon and forgiveness for him.

229.21 All these matters, however, are of secondary importance. That which is  
of primary and fundamental importance, and constituteth, by the express

pronouncement of the holy text, a divinely established obligation, is the  
making of a will. Everyone must in his lifetime draw up a will, and dispose  
of his property in whatsoever manner he deemeth fit, while having due  
regard for the need to observe justice and equity. Under these conditions,  
there will be no one who hath not made a will, and inheritance will thus be  
dealt with according to the will of the deceased. The said provisions are ap-  
plicable only when someone dies without having made a will. The testator,  
then, is free to bequeath the residence to whomsoever he wisheth; or, if he  
desireth, he may devise it to all his heirs jointly. No room hath now been left  
for misunderstanding, and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá hath elucidated the intention of  
the divine law. Let whomsoever wisheth turn towards it; whosoever wisheth  
not will turn away from it. In any case, Our function is to elucidate the law  
of God, and to explain the meaning of the compendious verses.

**[3]**

229.22 The residence is under all conditions the property of the firstborn son,  
irrespective of whether or not the deceased should have left behind him  
other property as well. The firstborn son receiveth, moreover, his share of  
the remainder of the estate. This is that which God hath prescribed. The  
testator is, however, at liberty while still alive to dispose of his property in  
whatsoever manner he seeth fit. Likewise, the firstborn son must himself, for  
the sake of God, take into consideration the other heirs, and be just and fair  
to them. In truth, it is obligatory for everyone, by the express requirement  
of the divine text, to draw up a will, so that it may be implemented after he  
hath passed away. This, verily, is the perspicuous truth. If, God forbid, he  
disobeyeth the divine command—faileth, that is, to draw up a will—then  
his estate must be divided up in the stipulated manner.

**[4]**

230  
Maturation of individuals and institutions

17 JULY 1996

To a National Spiritual Assembly

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

230.1 Your email message of 24 June 1996 … regarding the distinction between  
maturation of Bahá’í institutions and of the members of those institutions,  
was forwarded to the Universal House of Justice, which has asked us to reply  
as follows.

230.2 Maturation should be regarded as a process of evolution which is destined  
to lead to the stage when the institutions become developed and capable  
of accomplishing the great tasks assigned them for achieving the ultimate  
unfoldment of the Bahá’í World Order.

230.3 There is, of course, a close link between the maturation of the indi-  
vidual members and that of the institutions. While the process of evolution  
which maturation entails is equally applicable to individuals, it should be  
remembered that even when all members may be highly developed in terms  
of Bahá’í virtues and spiritual qualities, the collective entity itself needs  
time to evolve and achieve maturity as an institution. This evolutionary  
process requires the unwavering support of individuals through consider-  
able courage and vigilance in demonstrating their love, respect and trust for  
the institutions, as well as loyal obedience to the decisions made by them.

230.4 Shoghi Effendi stated, in a letter written on his behalf to an individual  
believer, that difficulties and evidences of immaturity seem to be an inevi-  
table phase in the growth of the Bahá’í Administration, which is so much  
more perfect than the believers called upon to establish it.

230.5 We hope that the above thoughts will be helpful to you in obtaining the  
enlightenment sought by your Assembly on this important subject.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

231  
Financial requirements of the Training Institutes

6 AUGUST 1996

To the Bahá’ís of the World

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

231.1 We are greatly heartened by the news reaching us of the enthusiastic  
response of the friends to the Four Year Plan. Particularly encouraging are  
the efforts of National Spiritual Assemblies everywhere to establish training  
institutes and to systematically address the development of human resourc-  
es. The number of national and regional institutes is rapidly increasing,  
and indications are that there may be more than one hundred operating  
in the world by the close of the first year of the Plan. We cherish the hope  
that from each. of these centers of learning will issue forth ever-growing  
contingents of believers capable of carrying out a wide array of services to  
the Cause, creating thus in every country the capacity to sustain the process  
of entry by troops.

231.2 In some national communities, economic conditions are such that insti-  
tutes can be financially self-supporting from the outset. But the majority  
of communities cannot meet the expenses associated with the operation of  
their training institutes. These expenses include materials for courses, teach-  
ing and office supplies, communications, maintenance of equipment, and  
sometimes transport of students and their food and lodging.

231.3 The most crucial item in the budgets of the institutes of many countries,  
however, is financial support for full- and part-time staff to coordinate train-  
ing activities and to offer courses both at a central site and in the surround-  
ing towns and villages. With this latter need in mind, we drew attention in  
the Riḍván message to Bahá’u’lláh’s call that the believers should center their  
energies on the propagation of the Faith of God and to His injunction that:  
“Whoso is worthy of so high a calling, let him arise and promote it. Whoso  
is unable, it is his duty to appoint him who will, in his stead, proclaim this  
Revelation ….”[[329]](#footnote-329)231-1 We then stated that deputizing a teacher serving an  
institute would be one way of fulfilling this responsibility and indicated  
that the friends could contribute to the Continental Bahá’í Fund, as well as  
the Local, National and International Funds, for this purpose.

231.4 In order to lend impetus to this vital development, we have now made  
a contribution of US$300,000 to be divided among the five Continental  
Funds according to the circumstances in each continent. Although this con-  
tribution is but a fraction of the amount called for, it is our hope that the  
friends, especially those with means, will follow suit and will give adequate  
attention to this area of urgent need. Since financial requirements vary from  
country to country, the Continental Counselors will be the best source  
of information on the level of deputization required for various regions  
throughout the world. We are asking them to keep their Auxiliary Board  
members informed so that they can advise those who wish to contribute to  
this pressing worldwide enterprise.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

232  
Electioneering

18 AUGUST 1996

To an individual believer

Dear Bahá’í Friend,

232.1 The Universal House of Justice has received your fax letter of 2 May  
1996, and appreciates your clearly heartfelt concern that reports of As-  
semblies should be presented in ways which are in accordance with Bahá’í  
standards of propriety and that any suggestion of electioneering be avoided.  
It has asked us to send you the following reply.

232.2 Electioneering is a practice foreign to the spirit of Bahá’í administra-  
tion. However, it is necessary to distinguish between electioneering and  
those activities which should be entirely natural and normal in Bahá’í  
communities. Bahá’ís travel and teach the Faith, they go pioneering,  
they represent the Faith in relation to non-Bahá’í agencies, they serve in  
positions of responsibility. There is no reason why such services should  
be carried on anonymously. Bahá’í voters have to acquire the maturity  
to estimate the character and true capacities of their fellow-believers, to  
be able to distinguish between a person who is self-sacrificingly serving  
the Cause with all due modesty, and one whose activities are carried out  
with the primary purpose of bringing himself or herself to the attention  
of the friends.

232.3 Bahá’ís, nevertheless, are subject to all the pressures and standards of the  
prevalent culture of the society in which they live, and can only too easily  
be unconsciously influenced in their behavior by the accepted norms of that  
culture. One of our challenging tasks as Bahá’ís, however, is to establish,  
through our personal conduct and through the pattern of life in our com-  
munities and institutions, those cultural standards which Bahá’u’lláh wishes  
us to uphold. In a description of the characteristics of those who are called  
upon to serve in Bahá’í administrative institutions, Shoghi Effendi says:

232.3a They should never be led to suppose that they are the central orna-  
ments of the body of the Cause, intrinsically superior to others in  
capacity or merit, and sole promoters of its teachings and principles.  
They should approach their task with extreme humility, and endeav-  
or, by their open-mindedness, their high sense of justice and duty,  
their candor, their modesty, their entire devotion to the welfare and  
interests of the friends, the Cause, and humanity, to win, not only the  
confidence and the genuine support and respect of those whom they  
serve, but also their esteem and real affection.

(*Bahá’í Administration: Selected Messages 1922–1932* (Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1974), p. 64.)

232.4 As such attitudes and standards become, ever more clearly, the norm of  
Bahá’í society, the friends will have little difficulty in distinguishing among  
their fellow-believers those who are worthy of their votes.

232.5 With this understanding, the inclusion of the names of the members of  
the National Spiritual Assembly and of the members of its various com-  
mittees in its Annual Report is natural and has been a normal practice of  
National Spiritual Assemblies during the lifetime of Shoghi Effendi and  
ever since. Likewise it is normal, in writing reports in general, to include  
the names of believers who have rendered particular services, even though  
it is not possible to mention every person who has contributed to the  
achievement.

232.6 One of the believers wrote to the Guardian asking how the friends could  
know for whom to vote as delegates from their electoral district. In the reply  
written on behalf of the Guardian on 25 March 1949, his secretary said:  
“the friends, through regional newsletters, National News-Letter, confer-  
ences and association with each other, can get to know other Bahá’ís in their

state, and become familiar enough with their services and qualifications  
to vote for their delegates intelligently.” It can be seen from this that the  
Guardian expected the activities of the friends to be reported, and expected  
the Bahá’ís to be alert to the qualities and services of their fellow-believers.

232.7 The House of Justice trusts that these explanations have helped to as-  
suage your concern and assisted you in your evaluation of the activities of  
the various friends. It was very happy to note your eager response to the call  
of the Four Year Plan and asks us to assure you of its prayers in the Holy  
Shrines for the confirmation of your endeavors on behalf of the Cause.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

FOR DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

233  
Seventy-fifth anniversary of the Bahá’í Faith in Brazil

22 AUGUST 1996

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

233.1 It is with feelings of deep gratitude to Bahá’u’lláh that we share with the  
Bahá’í world the news of a historic event which has just transpired in Brazil.  
As representative of the Bahá’í World Center, the Hand of the Cause of  
God Amatu’l-Bahá Rúḥíyyih Khánum attended, as honored guest, a special  
session of the Brazilian Federal Chamber of Deputies called for the purpose  
of marking the 75th anniversary of the introduction of the Bahá’í Faith into  
that country. Glowing tribute was paid to the life and work of Amatu’l-Bahá  
herself, as a defender of the cause of world peace and unity, an advocate of  
the interests of indigenous peoples, and a promoter of the social develop-  
ment of the earth’s inhabitants and the safeguarding of the environment.

233.2 The session was attended by 90 Federal Deputies and was reported by  
both the press and the broadcast media. The addresses of the 14 Depu-  
ties who spoke included many appreciations of both the principles of the  
Faith and the benefits that their application has already brought to many  
localities in the country. Highly gratifying, too, was the recognition ex-  
pressed of the role of Leonora Holsapple Armstrong, the Bahá’í pioneer  
through whose sacrificial efforts the Cause of Bahá’u’lláh was established  
in Brazil.

233.3 Bahá’ís present were deeply touched when, at the invitation of the Dep-  
uty who had been asked by the Speaker to close the session with a Bahá’í  
prayer for unity, the entire company arose and stood in reverent silence as  
Bahá’u’lláh’s words were recited.

233.4 The following day, Amatu’l-Bahá had a cordial meeting with President  
Fernando Henrique Cardoso, Brazil’s Head of State.

233.5 This momentous acknowledgement of the transforming power of the  
Faith, so generously expressed by the governing institutions of one of the  
world’s major nations, demonstrates both the calibre of the Brazilian believ-  
ers and the growing receptivity of the world to the Message of the Cause.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

234  
Development of Local Spiritual Assemblies in light of  
the establishment of Training Institutes

29 AUGUST 1996

To an individual believer

Dear Bahá’í Friend,

234.1 The Universal House of Justice has considered your letter … and per-  
ceives therein a deep concern to uphold the best interests of the Faith and  
an earnest desire to labor for its advancement. We have been directed to  
reply to your letter as follows ….

234.2 You have asked a number of clearly formulated questions related to the  
development of Local Spiritual Assemblies. But, in fact, the essence of the  
answers to these questions is contained in many of your own statements.  
Therefore the House of Justice wishes merely to clarify, in brief, a few points  
you have raised.

234.3 It is true that the development of Local Spiritual Assemblies is of para-  
mount importance to the worldwide Bahá’í community. As you are aware  
from the messages written by the House of Justice regarding the Four Year  
Plan, the successful unfoldment of the Plan will depend upon the actions  
to be taken by three participants—the individual believer, the institutions,  
and the local community. It is to be expected, then, that the development  
of all three will have to be addressed by National Spiritual Assemblies every-

where. The manner in which this development occurs, however, may vary  
from region to region within a country, and even from locality to locality.

234.4 Awareness of particular needs and of the importance of applying certain  
principles is only one consideration, albeit a significant one, in devising  
programs of action. The resources available, the capacity of those who will  
carry the action out, the methods that have been discovered and refined at  
any given moment—these must also be taken into account when one is  
deciding what to do. That after so many years of constant effort throughout  
the Bahá’í world methods and approaches have been found to train at least  
a certain number of believers enrolled from among the receptive masses  
themselves—to deepen their knowledge of the Teachings of the Faith and  
to help them acquire skills and abilities to serve it effectively—is no small  
accomplishment, and these methods and approaches should now be fully  
exploited and utilized more extensively. Therefore, the emphasis on the es-  
tablishment and operation of training institutes in the Four Year Plan is not  
only the expression of a great need in the Faith but also an acknowledge-  
ment of the capacity within the worldwide Bahá’í community to meet it on  
a large scale.

234.5 Clearly this emphasis does not imply that the work of strengthening Lo-  
cal Spiritual Assemblies should be neglected. Care must be taken, however,  
that over-concern about the role of the Local Assembly in community affairs  
not inhibit the friends from doing those things that can be done and which,  
in the long run, will lead to the development of the local community and its  
institutions. The holding of Bahá’í children’s classes, which you mention, is  
a case in point. Naturally, the successful establishment of weekly children’s  
classes under the guidance of the Local Spiritual Assembly would be one  
of the outcomes of a comprehensive approach to community development.  
Yet the lack of the desired method at any given moment should not be used  
as an argument against pursuing programs that help individuals to establish  
children’s classes in the villages when this is perhaps their only developed  
skill. It should be remembered that, in the final analysis, all those activities  
carried out with a sincere desire to serve the Faith and with purity of heart  
will bring results and contribute to the development of dynamic Bahá’í  
communities.

234.6 During the years ahead, institutes in … and elsewhere will be training  
large numbers of believers to perform a wide range of services to the Faith.  
Those devising program content will teach methods, including those for

community development, known to them. As the number of active workers  
for the Faith increases and experience is gained, the content of the training  
itself will improve, and gradually the human resources will become available  
to help strengthen fledgling Local Assemblies in greater numbers. At this  
stage, the friends everywhere should not allow their anxieties, which arise  
only from their intense love for the Faith, to hamper them and should act  
with confidence.

234.7 The Universal House of Justice assures you of its prayers in the Holy  
Shrines on your behalf.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

FOR DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

235  
Pioneers and travel teachers  
for the Three and Four Year Plans

15 SEPTEMBER 1996

To the Bahá’ís of the World

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

235.1 In June 1993 we raised the call for pioneers, both long-term and short-  
term, and traveling teachers for the Three Year Plan. We are now happy  
to announce that some 10,600 friends arose to serve the Faith outside the  
bounds of their homelands during the three years, evoking our admiration  
and pride. Of particular significance was the number of youth who dedi-  
cated periods of service to the Faith.

235.2 The Bahá’í world is currently launched upon the Four Year Plan, deter-  
mined to advance the process of entry by troops. Pioneers and traveling  
teachers can make significant contributions to the furthering of this aim.  
Imbued with the spirit of humility, love and detachment, they can rein-  
force the work of the friends in every land in their efforts to increase the  
strength and influence of the Bahá’í community by the end of this century.  
National Spiritual Assemblies will soon be asked to adopt numerical goals  
for pioneers and traveling teachers to go forth from their countries to serve  
in the international field. We call upon the believers everywhere to ensure,  
through their enthusiastic response, that these goals are not only met but  
surpassed. Information about pioneer needs is contained in a document pre-  
pared by the International Teaching Center and is available to you through

the agencies of your National Assemblies and through the Auxiliary Board  
members and their assistants.

235.3 The prospect before us as the Plan unfolds is one to thrill every Bahá’í  
heart; the need of our fellow human beings for the Message of Bahá’u’lláh  
becomes more urgent day by day; ardent, willing and capable servants of  
the Cause are required in many lands and for many functions. That His  
eager followers in every community will arise with devotion, audacity and  
determination to advance His Cause is the longing of our hearts and the  
object of our fervent prayers at the Sacred Threshold.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

236  
Process of entry by troops

16 SEPTEMBER 1996

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of Austria

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

236.1 The Universal House of Justice was very pleased to receive your letter of  
30 July 1996 enclosing the announcement to all the friends in Austria of the  
goals you have adopted for the Four Year Plan. The clarity with which you  
have set them forth and your emphasis on the respective responsibilities of  
the institutions, the communities and the individual believers should greatly  
assist the friends in acquiring a vision of what is to be achieved, and their  
own part in the work.

236.2 You may still find that some believers have difficulty in accurately com-  
prehending the concept of entry by troops. It may help you, when you  
encounter such problems, to stress the point made by the Universal House  
of Justice in its various messages, namely that arriving at the point of entry  
by troops, and then fostering it, is a process. It is the advancement of this  
process that is the goal of the Four Year Plan, and the exact steps to be taken  
in each area will depend upon how far the process has already developed by  
now. An essential element of the process is the preparation of the Bahá’í  
communities and individual believers and their training in the knowledge,  
not only of how to prayerfully attract receptive souls and to bring entry by  
troops about but, equally important, how to consolidate the gains so that it  
becomes an enduring development. No doubt you have this aspect of the

Plan clearly in mind in the goal of establishing training institutes, which  
you have assigned to your own Assembly, and in which the Counselor and  
Auxiliary Board members will closely collaborate with you.

236.3 Certainly, characteristics of Bahá’í life such as a loving and understand-  
ing relationship between the individual believers and their Assemblies; a  
warm, welcoming and harmonious atmosphere in Bahá’í communities;  
and individuals who uphold Bahá’í standards in their everyday lives, are in  
themselves vital strengths in the advancement of the process. Such charac-  
teristics can help the friends, not only to attract others to the Cause, but  
also to manifest understanding, patience and encouragement in relation to  
the new believers.

236.4 The House of Justice was also very pleased to see that you have the aim  
of raising up National Spiritual Assemblies in the Federal Republic of Yu-  
goslavia, Macedonia and Bosnia. This is a major task, and the Universal  
House of Justice will pray for divine assistance to surround all who devote  
themselves to its achievement in such very difficult circumstances.

236.5 Indeed, the House of Justice will pray in the Holy Shrines that the  
friends throughout Austria will unitedly arise for the achievement of all the  
goals you have set before them in the Four Year Plan, and thus attract the  
confirmations of Bahá’u’lláh on their strenuous labors.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

FOR DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

237  
Acquisition of apartment in Paris, France  
where ‘Abdu’l-Bahá stayed

28 OCTOBER 1996

To the National and Regional Spiritual Assemblies in Europe

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

237.1 The Universal House of Justice has asked us to inform you all of the  
outstanding achievement recently accomplished by the National Spiritual  
Assembly of the Bahá’ís of France: the acquisition for the Cause of God  
of the apartment at 4, Avenue de Camoëns in Paris in which ‘Abdu’l-Bahá  
stayed during His historic visit to the city.

237.2 This marks the first step in the acquisition of sites sanctified by the resi-  
dence of the Master in the cities of Europe during the three visits He made

to that continent, between 1911 and 1913, for the purpose of spreading  
the Message of Bahá’u’lláh, sites which are second only in holiness to those  
places in Istanbul and Edirne where the Manifestation of God Himself  
blessed the soil of the European continent.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

FOR DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

238  
Message to the Arctic Teaching Conference and the  
inauguration of a Bahá’í Center in the Arctic region

NOVEMBER 1996

To the followers of Bahá’u’lláh gathered at the Arctic Teaching Conference  
and the inauguration of the Lapland Bahá’í Center in Inari

Beloved Friends,

238.1 The inauguration of a Bahá’í Center in Inari, in the heart of the home-  
land of the Sami peoples is an event of great significance for the advance-  
ment of the Cause of Bahá’u’lláh in the Arctic regions. This center is, at one  
and the same time, the Ḥaẓíratu’l-Quds of the Bahá’ís of Inari and a center  
for the study and activities of the Faith throughout a region which spreads  
across four countries from the Atlantic Ocean in the west to the ‘White Sea  
in the east, involving the active collaboration of four National Spiritual  
Assemblies.

238.2 May this Arctic Teaching Conference, held on so auspicious an occasion,  
give renewed vision and inspiration to all who take part. May your delibera-  
tions bring forth well-conceived plans and projects and cement the active  
collaboration of all Bahá’í institutions in the region. May each individual  
participant carry from it a bright light to illumine the hearts and minds of  
the inhabitants of the northlands and win victories that will excite the ad-  
miration and emulation of their fellow believers throughout the European  
continent and in all the Arctic lands.

238.3 We shall offer fervent prayers at the Sacred Threshold for divine bounties  
and confirmations to guide your steps and reinforce your every endeavor in  
the path of His Cause.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

239  
Four Bahá’í prisoners in Iran sentenced to death

28 JANUARY 1997

To selected National Spiritual Assemblies

239.1 The Universal House of Justice has received the disturbing news from  
Iran that Mr. Dhabíḥu’lláh Maḥramí and Mr. Músá Ṭálibí, both of whom  
had been condemned to death for apostasy and had appealed against their  
unjust sentences, have been notified that the Supreme Court of Iran has  
confirmed the death sentences imposed by the Revolutionary Courts.

239.2 This news was received by relatives of Mr. Maḥramí and Mr. Ṭálibí dur-  
ing prison visits. It has been the practice of the Iranian authorities to convey  
verdicts orally to prisoners, and not to give them a copy of the actual text  
of the court decision.

239.3 A worrying development is that Mr. Ṭálibí, until now in prison in Iṣfahán,  
has been transferred to the notorious Evin Prison in Ṭihrán. Similarly,  
Mr. Maḥramí has been moved within Yazd, from the prison of the Revo-  
lutionary Court to that of the Security and Information Department ….

239.4 Our letters of 2 April 1996 and 27 September 1996 give details of the  
cases of Mr. Maḥramí and Mr. Ṭálibí respectively, and the update on the  
situation in Iran sent by the United Nations Office of the Bahá’í Inter-  
national Community earlier this month provides further information. We  
have recently received the following personal details from the Friends in  
Iran. Mr. Maḥramí is married and has four children, three daughters, two  
married and one unmarried, and one unmarried son; Mr. Ṭálibí is in his  
mid sixties, is married and has a family of adult children, two of whom live  
in Canada, one in Australia and the others in the family’s home town of  
Víláshahr, Iṣfahán.

239.5 There are two more Bahá’ís presently under the death sentence in Iran  
because of their beliefs, Mr. Kayván Khalajábádí and Mr. Bihnám Mítháqí,  
who were first arrested in 1989, and have been kept in prison in suspense  
since that time.

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

240  
Call for contributions to the Bahá’í International Fund

4 FEBRUARY 1997

To National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

240.1 With the Four Year Plan successfully launched and the believers in all  
parts of the world engaged in the energetic pursuit of its objectives, the  
Universal House of Justice has decided that it is timely to inform you of the  
state of the international funds of the Faith. We have been asked to convey  
the following to you.

240.2 As you are well aware, the major focus of attention for the past several  
years has been the Arc Projects Fund, with the friends summoned to provide  
financial support for the largest project ever undertaken by the worldwide  
Bahá’í community. The response of the followers of Bahá’u’lláh in every  
part of the planet has been magnificent, resulting in a sacrificial outpouring  
of contributions of a magnitude far beyond that ever previously achieved.  
The House of Justice was pleased to be able to announce in its Riḍván 1996  
message the accomplishment of the Three Year Plan goal of 74 million U.S.  
dollars for that Fund.

240.3 It appears that the contribution of ten million dollars each year until the  
end of the century for the Arc Projects Fund, now being made by the believers  
in response to the call of the House of Justice set out in its letter of 20 June  
1995, will be sufficient to meet the needs for completion of this enterprise,  
although there always remains the possibility of unforeseen disturbances in  
the years ahead modifying this projection. The planning and execution of the  
vast undertaking on Mount Carmel is being carried out with careful atten-  
tion to economy, without compromising the high standards of construction  
befitting the edifices and terraces on the Mountain of God.

240.4 Even though there has been a striking increase in the total amount re-  
ceived at the World Center during the past several years, the level of contri-  
butions to the Bahá’í International Fund itself has diminished during that  
period, in which attention was centered on a strenuous endeavor to meet the  
needs of the Arc Projects Fund. In reaction to this diminution of support  
to the Bahá’í International Fund, the House of Justice enforced stringent  
economy at the Bahá’í World Center and also felt compelled to limit the  
funds available to meet the needs of the Faith in other parts of the world.

240.5 The Bahá’í International Fund provides assistance to Bahá’í communities  
in those countries where the believers lack the means to exploit adequately  
the opportunities for the expansion of the Faith and for the diffusion of its  
spirit. As the Cause of God moves irresistibly forward in every sphere of its  
manifold activities, propelled by the mysterious spiritual forces which are ad-  
vancing humanity through a turbulent age of transition, the calls made on it  
can only increase. The Fund will be required to support the development of  
human resources, an indispensable element of the rapidly advancing process  
of entry by troops. With the emergence of new opportunities to increase the  
influence of the Faith on the affairs of humanity, the necessary means must be  
provided to expand the work of the Bahá’í International Community at the  
United Nations, the representation of the Faith at international conferences  
of non-governmental organizations, and the number of social and economic  
development projects scattered over the surface of the planet.

240.6 The work at the World Center, which is carried out with the support of  
the Bahá’í International Fund, includes the preservation and classification of  
the Sacred Texts, and the administrative functions performed here to meet  
the needs of a worldwide community expanding in both the magnitude and  
scope of its activities. An important aspect of this work is that of restoring  
and maintaining the Holy Places, providing facilities for pilgrims and an in-  
creasing number of visitors, and caring for the gardens which beautify the  
environs of the Holy Shrines. With the expansion of high-density urban  
development in the Holy Land, it is essential that properties be acquired close  
to the Shrines and other Holy Places, to protect them from disturbance; the  
favorable conditions now developing for such property acquisitions may not  
recur until the far distant future, and a substantial proportion of the resources  
of the Fund will be required for this purpose in the years immediately ahead.

240.7 Fully aware of the sacrificial response of the believers to every call ad-  
dressed to them in the past, the House of Justice will continue to guide  
the friends in proceeding energetically along every avenue available for the  
advancement of the Faith and its interests. It will do so in full confidence  
that the dearly loved followers of Bahá’u’lláh will remain ever conscious of  
their privilege and duty to attend to the needs of the Cause, and will not  
suffer the onward march of the Faith to be retarded through an inadequacy  
of resources. It will offer its supplications in the Holy Shrines that their  
consecrated endeavors may attract the blessings of their Beloved.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

FOR DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

241  
Passing of Hushang Ahdieh,  
former Continental Counselor

6 FEBRUARY 1997

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of Canada

241.1 PROFOUNDLY GRIEVED PASSING DEARLY LOVED SERVANT FAITH, HUSHANG AH-  
DIEH. HIS INDEFATIGABLE PIONEER SERVICES AFRICA, INCLUDING OVER TWO  
DECADES MEMBERSHIP CONTINENTAL BOARD COUNSELORS THAT CONTINENT,  
AND TRUSTEE ITS FUND UNFORGETTABLE. HIS SELF-EFFACEMENT, HIS CAPACITY  
PROMOTE CONCORD, AND HIS WISDOM COMBINED WITH LOVE EXEMPLIFIED IN  
DISCHARGE HIS SACRED RESPONSIBILITIES WILL REMAIN SOURCE INSPIRATIONS HIS  
COLLEAGUES AND FELLOW WORKERS GOD’S HOLY CAUSE.

241.2 CONVEY HIS BELOVED WIFE AND DEAR CHILDREN DEEPEST SYMPATHY AND AS-  
SURANCE OUR FERVENT PRAYERS IN HOLY SHRINES PROGRESS HIS RADIANT SOUL  
ABHÁ KINGDOM.

241.3 ADVISING NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY UGANDA HOLD MEMORIAL GATH-  
ERING HIS HONOR IN HOUSE WORSHIP KAMPALA, AND NATIONAL ASSEMBLIES  
THROUGHOUT AFRICA HOLD BEFITTING GATHERINGS THEIR COMMUNITIES.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

242  
Message to the Seminar on the Spiritual Axis,  
Sydney, Australia

12 FEBRUARY 1997

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of Australia

242.1 We convey our warmest greetings to the friends from Australia, Japan  
and other countries of the Pacific who have come together at the Seminar  
on the Spiritual Axis being held in Sydney under the auspices of the Na-  
tional Spiritual Assemblies of Australia and Japan.

242.2 This meeting is being convened at a time when the creative energies  
released by Bahá’u’lláh are giving rise to fundamental changes in the condi-  
tion of humanity in your region, breaking down age-old barriers to the  
spread of the Faith and propelling the believers forward to gather the harvest

from seeds sown as long ago as the concluding years of the Apostolic Age  
of the Cause.

242.3 The spiritual axis with which your deliberations will be concerned lies  
in an area of great strategic value to the future progress of the Faith. It  
is positioned at the interface between the largest and most populous land  
mass in the world and an ocean extending over no less than one third of  
the surface area of the planet, within which are scattered island groups  
of diverse cultures. Sustained pursuit of the teaching work will not only  
immensely reinforce the human resources available to the Cause, but will  
also, in due course, attract worldwide attention to the Faith through the  
influence of the Teachings on the peoples of the small island nations of  
the Pacific.

242.4 It is our hope that, at this meeting, you will consolidate the basis for  
collaboration in the years and decades ahead through consultation on the  
challenges and opportunities which now lie before you, and through further  
reinforcement of the bonds of love and fellowship which unite you in your  
services to the Faith. By the formulation of plans for cooperative endeavors  
aimed at strengthening the national communities of this region and fulfill-  
ing the needs of the Four Year Plan, you can lay the foundation for dazzling  
victories in the future.

242.5 Our prayers will be offered in the Holy Shrines for the success of your  
consultations.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

243  
Clarification on the role of  
Continental Counselors in  
pioneering and travel teaching

6 MARCH 1997

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of Canada

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

243.1 We have been asked by the Universal House of Justice to respond as  
follows to your email message of 14 February 1997 on the subject of “Clari-  
fication on role of Continental Counselors in international pioneering and  
traveling teaching.”

243.2 As was indicated in the 27 June 1993 letter from the House of Justice  
to the Bahá’ís of the World,[[330]](#footnote-330)243-1 reference to which was made in your own  
letter, the launching of the Three Year Plan marked the beginning of a  
new stage in the administration of the international pioneering work. The  
implications were spelled out further in a letter of 30 June 1993, written on  
behalf of the House of Justice to all National Spiritual Assemblies:

243.2a As the friends respond to the pioneer call, the National Spiritual  
Assemblies and their appropriate agencies will, of course, exert their  
utmost to offer the administrative support to facilitate their move.  
However, the approach adopted for the Three Year Plan should free  
the institutions from the pressure of filling specific goals and allow  
them to focus their energies on the spiritual preparation of the friends  
for this vital field of service.[[331]](#footnote-331)243-2

243.3 Accordingly, a Bahá’í is entirely free to arise for pioneer or travel-teacher  
service wherever and for whatever term he or she considers best. In reaching  
such a decision, the individual is free to consult with his or her National  
Spiritual Assembly and its executive agencies or with a Counselor or Auxil-  
iary Board member. Any of these agencies are similarly free to initiate such  
consultation, including the suggesting of possible goals, leaving the final  
decision in the matter to the individual concerned. Alternatively, a prospec-  
tive pioneer may be moved to write directly to the Continental Pioneer  
Committee of the region which interests him or her.

243.4 All of this, of course, represents a major advance from the earlier stage  
when National Spiritual Assemblies were obliged to place pioneers in speci-  
fied goal areas. It was to this earlier period that the letters excerpted in para-  
graph four of your recent message referred ….

243.5 We trust that this responds to the questions which concern you and have  
been asked by the House of Justice to assure you of its fervent prayers in the  
Holy Shrines for the confirmation of the greatly appreciated efforts you are  
making to promote the vital pioneer work of the Plan.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

244  
Acquisition of property for terraces  
on Mount Carmel

11 MARCH 1997

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

244.1 With joyful and thankful hearts we announce the successful acquisition  
after many years of difficult negotiations and the subsequent demolition a  
few days ago of the building which stood as the last obstacle to the comple-  
tion of the first two terraces of the Shrine of the Báb at the foot of Mount  
Carmel.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

245  
Role of National Spiritual Assembly in private  
businesses run by Bahá’ís

17 MARCH 1997

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of New Zealand

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

245.1 The Universal House of Justice has received your letter of 24 January  
1997 and has asked us to respond as follows.

245.2 The House of Justice commends you for the careful thought you have  
given to the issues raised about the relationship between the institutions of  
the Faith and those business enterprises which appear to be helpful in the  
attainment of Bahá’í objectives. Your account of the present understanding  
of the National Spiritual Assembly indicates that you are in a good position  
to offer suitable guidance to any believers who have concerns over these  
matters.

245.3 In drawing attention to private businesses set up by believers, and in  
encouraging the Bahá’ís to give serious consideration to availing themselves  
of such services, a National Assembly should not be regarded as endorsing  
these businesses, if that is understood to imply some form of guarantee  
about the efficacy of the service provided by any such business. The analogy  
of the books produced by Bahá’í publishers used in your letter is quite apt;  
in publicizing a book or article from such a publisher, there is no implicit

assurance that the document is free from error or even that the National  
Assembly is entirely in agreement with every point made therein. However  
the National Assembly can well conclude that the product of a business  
conducted by Bahá’ís (or even non-Bahá’ís) is useful in the advancement  
of the interests of the Faith and can properly decide to convey information  
about it to the believers.

245.4 Turning now to your question about a development trust becoming  
involved in the establishment of private business enterprises, no general  
ruling is appropriate at this stage in the development of the Faith. Every  
case should be considered on its merits. There is a vast difference between  
the institutions of the Faith becoming involved in a private business set up  
with the principal purpose being simply the accumulation of profit, and the  
institutions fostering and supporting individual and group business initia-  
tive aimed at the uplifting of people who have historically been deprived or  
suppressed. Other factors to be considered include the stage of development  
of the Bahá’í community, the resources at its disposal, the preservation of  
its reputation and the legal restrictions imposed by its incorporation. As  
specific matters arise in the future, you are welcome to turn to the House of  
Justice for guidance on issues you feel unable to resolve through your own  
consultation or through advice from the Counselors.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

246  
Music and dance at Bahá’í Centers

24 MARCH 1997

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of Côte d’Ivoire

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

246.1 The Universal House of Justice has received your faxed letter dated 21  
February 1997 in which you raise various questions about the use of music  
and dance at Bahá’í Centers and we have been asked to respond as follows.

246.2 As you may know, in many parts of the world there are certain tribal  
and traditional dances which are performed in glorification of God, and it  
is perfectly acceptable for a prayer to be interpreted in the form of move-  
ment or dance. However, to avoid that such expressions of prayer become  
gradually ritualized, or that certain gestures and movements become ha-

bitual accompaniments to prayers, it is preferable that they not accompany  
the reciting of words of the prayers. Through the revealed prayers, we seek  
communion with God, hence they must be offered with the utmost rever-  
ence and dignity. Each individual Bahá’í should be free to pray as he wishes,  
for there is no set form for prayer except for those few which have special  
instructions for observance upon their recitation.

246.3 In your second question, you ask regarding the performance of drama  
and cultural dances in Bahá’í Centers. Provided that the underlying themes  
or stories are noble and that they are performed in a way which does not  
elicit base feelings, there is no objection to choreographed dances and  
dramas, which are intended to illustrate Bahá’í principles, being held in  
a Bahá’í Center. This same principle would apply to traditional dances or  
dance movements associated with the expression of a culture. As long as  
care is exercised to ensure that the themes of such dances are in harmony  
with the high ethical standards of the Cause and the qualities of dignity and  
grace are upheld, there is no objection to their use.

246.4 With regard to what kind of music can be played at events in Bahá’í  
Centers, there is no particular type of music which Bahá’ís should or should  
not use. In this respect, a Bahá’í may well be best guided by the words of  
Bahá’u’lláh in the Most Holy Book, where He makes it clear that music  
can be both “a means whereby [the soul] may be lifted up unto the realm  
on high” and “as wings to self and passion,” and warns against allowing  
music to “cause you to overstep the bounds of propriety and dignity.” In the  
planning of Bahá’í events, it is left to those responsible for the program to  
determine “the bounds of propriety and dignity” and ensure that the music  
chosen is befitting the purpose and solemnity of the occasion, in view of  
what is most suited to the country’s culture and customs.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

247  
Importance of upholding the prohibition  
on alcoholic beverages

30 MARCH 1997

To all National Spiritual Assemblies in Africa

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

247.1 Ever since the launching of the Four Year Plan, the Universal House  
of Justice has noted, with deep satisfaction, the manner in which Bahá’í  
institutions and communities of the African continent have welcomed the  
spirit and letter of the broad lines of activity set forth in the Plan, and have  
particularly taken to heart its Riḍván message for 153 B.E. to the followers  
of Bahá’u’lláh in Africa. As a supplement to that message, the Universal  
House of Justice wishes to convey the following comments to your National  
Spiritual Assemblies, and through you, to the body of believers in that  
continent.

247.2 The development of the teaching work in Africa has always been char-  
acterized by the receptiveness with which the truths of the Revelation of  
Bahá’u’lláh have been accepted and valued by the peoples of that vast con-  
tinent, by the joy stemming from the pure hearts of the African believers as  
reflected in their radiant faces, and by their growing maturity in appreciat-  
ing the importance of adherence to Bahá’í laws and ordinances.

247.3 One of these ordinances is the clear prohibition in the Writings of  
Bahá’u’lláh of the consumption of alcoholic drinks. This has been explicitly  
revealed in His Most Holy Book, the Kitáb-i-Aqdas. He states, “It is inad-  
missible that man, who hath been endowed with reason, should consume  
that which stealeth it away. Nay, rather it behooveth him to comport himself  
in a manner worthy of the human station, and not in accordance with the  
misdeeds of every heedless and wavering soul.”[[332]](#footnote-332)247-1 In other Tablets, we read  
from His glorious Pen, “Beware lest ye exchange the Wine of God for your  
own wine, for it will stupefy your minds, and turn your faces away from  
the Countenance of God, the All-Glorious, the Peerless, the Inaccessible.  
Approach it not, for it hath been forbidden unto you by the behest of God,  
the Exalted, the Almighty.”[[333]](#footnote-333)247-2

247.4 ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, adding His voice to that of the Blessed Beauty, has written,  
“The drinking of wine is, according to the text of the Most Holy Book,  
forbidden; for it is the cause of chronic diseases, weakeneth the nerves, and  
consumeth the mind.”[[334]](#footnote-334)247-3 He has also written, “Regarding the use of liquor:  
according to the text of the Book of Aqdas, both light and strong drinks are  
prohibited.”[[335]](#footnote-335)247-4 He further states, “Intellect and the faculty of comprehen-  
sion are God’s gifts whereby man is distinguished from other animals. Will  
a wise man want to lose this Light in the darkness of intoxication? No, by  
God!”[[336]](#footnote-336)247-5

247.5 In answer to questions, Shoghi Effendi’s elucidations, written on his be-  
half, provide further guidance on this subject. In these letters the habit of  
drinking is described as a “great misery” and a “great evil.”

247.6 It was the policy of Shoghi Effendi, upheld by the House of Justice, that,  
in the early stages of the teaching work in countries whose people have for  
centuries been accustomed to the use of alcohol, the institutions should be  
patient and lenient, educate the friends, and allow time for them to extricate  
themselves from this pernicious habit before applying sanctions. This educa-  
tion has been an ongoing process. Regretfully, however, it has been seen that  
in some cases, even among certain prominent believers, the friends have not  
freed themselves from this practice. Some may have wrongly thought that  
light alcoholic drinks, if taken irregularly, were permitted, without real-  
izing the detrimental effect that their example was having on others. It is  
always most unfortunate when Bahá’ís of long standing, and even members  
of institutions at the national level, partake of alcoholic beverages, thus  
damaging themselves, harming the good name of the Faith in the eyes of  
non-Bahá’ís, and setting a bad example for the rank and file of the believers.

247.7 The Universal House of Justice feels that it is vital, for the sound develop-  
ment of the Cause of God in those communities where there remains any  
doubt among the friends as to the importance of obedience to this law,  
that the National Spiritual Assemblies ensure that all believers are clearly  
informed of it. Of course, the Assemblies should not pry into the lives of  
individual believers; but in the case of any Bahá’í who blatantly violates the  
law, he should be counseled, assisted to overcome the habit, warned repeat-

edly of the consequences of continued disobedience, and ultimately, if he  
does not respond positively, be deprived of his administrative rights.

247.8 Furthermore, in order to protect the interests of the Faith, the Universal  
House of Justice has decided that, henceforth, any believer who occupies a  
Bahá’í administrative or teaching position on the national level and is seen to  
be consuming alcoholic beverages, should not only be counseled but should  
be removed from office during the process of the correction of his failing. If  
he does not give up drinking, he should lose his administrative rights; if he  
changes his ways, and the National Assembly is satisfied that he is obeying  
the law, he would regain his full rights. The positions the House of Justice  
has in mind are those occupied by members of the National Spiritual As-  
sembly or any committee under its aegis, whether national or regional, by  
Bahá’ís who serve at the national office or in the training institutes at any  
level, and by traveling teachers and pioneers serving under the direction of  
the National Assembly or its subsidiary agencies.

247.9 It is the hope of the House of Justice that such a step will give a signal  
to the entire community that, whatever the inherited cultural practices or  
tribal customs may be, every effort should be made by each conscientious  
believer to obey the sacred law of God which forbids the drinking of alcohol.  
The friends must become aware that there are certain essentials of Bahá’í  
conduct that they cannot continue to disregard with impunity. Continued,  
blatant disobedience to this law will, in the case of any believer, lead to  
consideration of deprivation of his voting rights. The friends should also  
realize that refusing to comply with this requirement will not only harm the  
offender and injure his family but will certainly impede his spiritual devel-  
opment and lead to the cessation of the confirmations of Bahá’u’lláh—con-  
firmations and blessings without which his life will eventually be brought  
down to misery.

247.10 Love for God is best exemplified not through words, but through deeds.  
“Let deeds,” Bahá’u’lláh says, “not words, be your adorning.”[[337]](#footnote-337)247-6 By obeying  
His laws we demonstrate our love for Him. He has also written: “My love  
is My stronghold; he that entereth therein is safe and secure, and he that  
turneth away shall surely stray and perish.”[[338]](#footnote-338)247-7

247.11 The guideline that Shoghi Effendi gave at the outset of the Ten Year  
Crusade, setting forth the manner in which the Bahá’í law on the need to  
abstain from alcoholic drinks should be explained while teaching the Faith  
to the people of Africa, is as applicable today as it was in 1953 when the  
Guardian’s secretary gave the following advice on his behalf:

247.12 The question of impressing upon the Africans who are seeking enroll-  
ment the necessity of not drinking is a delicate one. When enrolling new  
believers, we must be wise and gentle, and not place so many obstacles  
in their way that they feel it impossible to accept the Faith. On the other  
hand, once accorded membership in the Community of the followers of  
Bahá’u’lláh, it must be brought home to them that they are expected to live  
up to His Teachings, and to show forth the signs of a noble character in  
conformity with His Laws. This can often be done gradually, after the new  
believer is enrolled.

247.13 Every effort should thus be made by the institutions of the Faith, as well  
as by those who are directly engaged in the expansion and consolidation  
work, to make conscious and determined efforts to assist the new believers  
to realize the grave consequences of disobedience to God’s laws, and to ap-  
preciate the bounties that flow from growing spiritually under the shadow  
of His Holy Cause.

247.14 We are to assure you of the prayers of the Universal House of Justice at  
the Sacred Threshold, that you may be guided in the stewardship of your  
community as you strive to promote the vital interests of the Faith.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

FOR DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

248  
Message to the Iranian believers—  
March/April 1997

BAHÁ 154 B.E.

248.1 To the Lovers of the Most Great Beauty, beloved and faithful Friends,  
The tremendous forces latent in the inmost reality of this precious Faith  
exert daily a fresh influence in the contingent world and shine forth with  
greater intensity. Through the outpourings of Bahá’u’lláh’s bounties, and as

a result of dictates of the time as well as the mighty efforts exerted by the  
followers of His Beauty, the Faith’s life-giving Teachings are taking root in  
the world of being, increasing its prestige and manifesting evermore its power  
to solve the problems confronting humanity. The blessed Divine Tree, we  
must know, is firmly rooted in the ground, while its branches and offshoots  
are growing heavenward. All this has been possible through the interaction  
and cooperation of two mighty, dominant forces which, in compliance with  
God’s Will, are at work simultaneously, enabling the blessed Tree to grow, put  
forth its leaves and blossoms and, at the appointed time, offer to humankind  
its choicest fruits. One of the generating powers of this spiritual springtime is  
tempestuous and soul-stirring in nature; causing lightning and thunder, high  
winds, torrential rain, and roaring floods. These in turn cause the orchards  
and fields to become verdant and fruitful. The other is the inherent capac-  
ity for growth latent in the blessed seed. It is this capacity that causes the  
seed to grow as an essential necessity. The rays of the Sun of Truth and the  
sprinklings of the cloud of bounty help it to grow and become a mighty and  
fruit-bearing tree, providing a celestial retreat for the guided birds of the field.  
The overall divine design which leads humanity to spiritual maturity is not  
within our control; it is well guarded in God’s hidden treasure house and its  
realization is dependent on His Will. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says:

248.1a In this wondrous Age, at this time when the Ancient Beauty, the Most  
Great Name, bearing unnumbered gifts, hath risen above the horizon  
of the world, the Word of God hath infused such awesome power into  
the inmost essence of humankind that He hath stripped men’s human  
qualities of all effect, and hath, with His all-conquering might, uni-  
fied the peoples in a vast sea of oneness.[[339]](#footnote-339)248-1

248.2 The duty of the people of Bahá is to tread the path of servitude to the  
Divine Threshold, it is to spread God’s Teachings and establish a spiritual  
civilization. Praised be God, the loved ones of God throughout the world  
have, for such a long time, hearkened to the directives of the Center of  
the Cause and, guided by the divinely ordained institutions of the Faith  
and according to specific plans, have advanced step by step to hoist the

banner of the Most Great Name in every corner of the globe. The last in  
the chain of systematic successes achieved was the Three Year Plan which  
ended last Riḍván and produced heartwarming results. During those three  
years twelve new National Spiritual Assemblies were established, raising the  
number of National Assemblies to 174. Also, during that short span of  
time a considerable number of Bahá’ís, like unto a gentle breeze, passed  
through other countries and lands, engaging in the spreading of divine  
fragrances, enlisting a number of new believers under the banner of the  
Cause of Bahá’u’lláh, and deepening their understanding of the tenets of  
the Faith. These achievements paved the way for the formulation of the  
present Four Year Plan which outlines the duties of the people of Bahá to  
the end of the twentieth century and mobilizes them to forge ahead and  
accelerate the process of fulfillment of divine prophecies. These teaching  
plans, which have successively set the worldwide Bahá’í community on the  
move and broadened the boundaries of the Faith, are the product of the  
creative power of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Tablets of the Divine Plan. Over eighty  
years ago He summoned the followers of the Abhá Beauty to the spiritual  
conquest of the planet and gave them this responsibility. Thus, the teaching  
plans will continue until the Golden Age.

248.3 The collective duty and responsibility of the believers during the next  
four years has been spelled out in our last Riḍván message and the new  
Plan’s prominent features explained. The believers have subsequently been  
actively engaged in carrying out its provisions. The focus of the present  
message is the Iranian Bahá’ís, who, when the dawn of guidance broke,  
turned their faces to the Sun of Truth and like unto birds of the dawn sang  
the songs of welcome and allegiance to Him, taking the joyful tiding of  
reunion to the people of every land in accordance with this celestial melody:

248.3a Announce unto yourselves the joyful tidings: “He Who is the Best-  
Beloved is come! He hath crowned Himself with the glory of God’s  
Revelation, and hath unlocked to the face of men the doors of His  
ancient Paradise.” Let all eyes rejoice, and let every ear be gladdened,  
for now is the time to gaze on His beauty, now is the fit time to hear-  
ken to His voice. Proclaim unto every longing lover: “Behold, your  
Well-Beloved hath come among men!”[[340]](#footnote-340)248-2

248.4 The Iranian believers were not content just with spreading the divine  
Call; they rallied around the Promised One and arose to render Him as-  
sistance in whatever way they could. Life in hand and rank upon rank they  
hastened to the field of martyrdom. The memory of their sacrifices has been  
perpetuated by the Supreme Pen. The account of their heroism is too vivid  
in the minds of those of us who are the physical and spiritual offspring of  
such valiant and intoxicated lovers of the Blessed Beauty to need repetition  
here. Suffice it to say that we need be on our guard to preserve with our life  
the inestimable bounty bestowed upon us, lest ingratitude snatch the honor  
from our hands.

248.5 The historical background which has conferred upon the friends from  
Bahá’u’lláh’s land the privilege of being the first to believe in Him and made  
them distinct in many respects has focused upon them the attention of  
Bahá’ís all over the world. Furthermore, in recent times when the gallant  
believers in the Cradle of the Faith were again persecuted by the people of  
malice, they defended, protected and proclaimed the Cause of God with  
the shield of detachment, reliance on God, heroism and certitude. This  
redoubled the degree of the worldwide Bahá’í community’s expectation of  
the Iranian Bahá’ís who are scattered throughout the free world. They must,  
therefore, emulate the example of those lions of the field of steadfastness  
and learn from them the lesson of servitude. Consider the time when the  
tempest of ordeals started to blow in Iran again, how the spark of belief in  
the hearts of the members of the community, dormant in some cases under  
the ashes of worldly attachments, suddenly turned into a brilliant flame and  
wiped out the dust of complacency and heedlessness. The warning sound  
of the thunderbolt of events awakened them. They became mindful and, in  
the joyful gathering place of nearness to God, drank the brimful chalice of  
calamity. Oblivious of self, they laid down their heads at the feet of the Best  
Beloved. They faced depredation and dismissal from jobs with aloofness  
and detachment from worldly goods. When the relentless enemy leveled  
false, trumped-up charges against them to justify their evil doings, with a  
godly demeanor and heavenly behavior the friends frustrated the adversar-  
ies’ designs and demonstrated the absurdity of their accusations, thereby  
proving their innocence in the eyes of broad-minded Iranians. The people  
of malice deprived the Bahá’í youth in Iran of higher education. The youth,  
however, did not sit idle. They busied themselves with the acquisition of hu-  
man perfections. They endured every discomfort and persevered until in the  
realm of knowledge they excelled their peers. The attainment of this high

station and honor became possible when the friends in Iran, old and young,  
women and men, even very young children, realized that the remedy of all  
their ills was the remembrance of God. They started to study the Writings  
regularly and systematically. It was through their study that the outpourings  
of the Holy Spirit, enshrined in every Word of the Sacred Writings, came to  
their assistance and made of that community a new creation in whose eye  
the world and whatever it contains is worth nothing when compared with  
servitude to the Divine Threshold, attainment of Bahá’u’lláh’s good pleasure  
and eternal life in every one of God’s worlds. Therefore, they patterned their  
lives on the life-giving Teachings contained in the Sacred Writings. Conse-  
quently, they became the glory of this world and of the next, succeeding in  
promulgating the Cause of God in the far corners of the world and among  
the highest institutions of humankind.

248.6 The beloved friends from Iran who are scattered throughout the free  
world must never forget the grave responsibility they bear. For, the expect-  
ant eye of everyone is turned towards them, waiting to behold in the mir-  
ror of their deeds the splendors of God’s Teachings. Consider the beloved  
Guardian’s appeal to those dear friends:

248.6a … the beloved friends and members of the Assemblies should, in  
the manifold circumstances of their lives and in all their multifarious  
dealings and pursuits, by their deeds, their bearing and demeanor,  
seek to demonstrate to their fellow-countrymen the excellence of  
this sacred Cause, to vindicate its truth, and give living testimony to  
its potency and the sublimity of its spirit. It is thus that the friends  
should proceed, not confining themselves to the delivery of the mes-  
sage, to explanations, expositions and elucidations. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, the  
Chief Interpreter of the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh, has written: “Wherefore  
it is incumbent upon all Bahá’ís to ponder this very delicate and vital  
matter in their hearts, that, unlike other religions, they may not con-  
tent themselves with the noise, the clamor, the hollowness of religious  
doctrine. Nay, rather, they should exemplify in every aspect of their  
lives those attributes and virtues that are born of God and should  
arise to distinguish themselves by their goodly behavior. They should  
justify their claim to be Bahá’ís by deeds and not by name. He is a  
true Bahá’í who strives by day and by night to progress and advance  
along the path of human endeavor, whose most cherished desire is so  
to live and act as to enrich and illuminate the world, whose source of

inspiration is the essence of divine virtue, whose aim in life is so to  
conduct himself as to be the cause of infinite progress. Only when he  
attains unto such perfect gifts can it be said of him that he is a true  
Bahá’í. For in this holy Dispensation, the crowning glory of bygone  
ages and cycles, true faith is no mere acknowledgement of the unity of  
God, but rather the living of a life that will manifest all the perfections  
and virtues implied in such belief.” See how firm and strongly-worded  
is this statement of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s, and how demanding its require-  
ments! Notwithstanding, it is only when the Bahá’ís are able fully and  
befittingly to distinguish their characters by the adornment of these  
divine virtues that they will appear before the eyes of the world in a  
worthy and appropriate manner and that the name of Bahá’u’lláh will  
set the universe ablaze. The chosen ones of God in Iran should not  
look at the depraved condition of the society in which they live, nor  
at the evidences of moral degradation and frivolous conduct which  
the people around them display. They should not content themselves  
merely with relative distinction and excellence. Rather they should fix  
their gaze upon nobler heights by setting the counsels and exhorta-  
tions of the Pen of Glory as their supreme goal. Then it will be readily  
realized how numerous are the stages that still remain to be traversed  
and how far off the desired goal lies—a goal which is none other than  
exemplifying heavenly morals and virtues. Therefore, as the treaders  
of the path of salvation, we should strive with all our might and in  
every moment of our life to vindicate by deeds and words the reviv-  
ing power enshrined in Bahá’u’lláh’s Teachings. In our association and  
conversation with others, in our transactions, performance of duties,  
our aims, and in major and minor undertakings we should so appear  
as to proclaim and prove to all that other than the unifying power of  
Bahá’u’lláh’s Spirit nothing can transform the hearts of people and  
make of them a new race of men. This is the only means for the salva-  
tion and victory of the Cause of God.

248.7 The lovers of the Blessed Beauty in Iran, assisted by the promise which  
says, “This is the only means for the salvation and victory of the Cause of  
God,” saw clearly how astonished the enemies were when they witnessed the  
fortitude of the friends under trials and their deeds which complied com-  
pletely with divine exhortations. It was such behavior that turned strangers  
into friends and supporters of the wronged ones. It is certain that tests are

not confined to the Iranian friends; the ordeals which confront the believ-  
ers in the free world, although different in nature, will be as severe and  
deceitful. If they do not face such tests with the aid of a prayerful attitude  
and constant engagement in service, they are likely to be submerged in the  
ocean of bewilderment, confusion and remorse, wasting away the short  
days of their lives and leaving this world with empty hands. Of particular  
importance is the training of the youth to enable them to stand firm against  
the perils of the society in which they live. They should be encouraged  
to participate in Bahá’í activities, while pursuing their education in fields  
which benefit humanity.

Bahá’u’lláh says:

248.7a ‘Whosoever attaineth Divine love at the earliest stages of youth, that  
one is accounted among the dwellers of the highest Paradise. Strive  
that from thee mayest appear that which will cause the exaltation of  
the Faith.

Also:

248.7b O thou who art young in age! May the confirmations of the Merci-  
ful enable thee to attain unto His bountiful bestowals. Since thou  
wert adorned with the recognition of the Daystar of Revelation when  
thou wert in the prime of youth, beseech thou God to enable thee  
to achieve that which will be immortalized in the book of existence.  
Mortality overtaketh everything except what is uttered and carried out  
for God’s sake; such [words and deeds] are deathless. Strive that thou  
mayest drink of the wine of immortality and attain unto the Kawthar  
of steadfastness.”

248.8 We ardently hope that Bahá’í youth who have their roots in the Cradle  
of the Faith will, in all affairs, stand out among their peers. The youth  
who received Bahá’í education have, undoubtedly, reached the stage when  
they can fend for themselves and face the tempestuous tests of the present  
day world with valor, confidence and self-assurance. The Bahá’í youth who  
have distinguished themselves and stood out in the non-Bahá’í world are a  
testimony to the truth of this statement.

248.9 The persecuted Bahá’ís of Iran are deprived of the bounty of teaching the  
Cause of God. The effect of this deprivation, which they regret immensely,

is mitigated when they hear that friends in other countries are carrying out  
teaching work on their behalf, or have arisen to execute a project in their  
name or in the name of the precious martyrs of that land. Such glad tidings  
prompt the Iranian friends to offer loving prayers for the success of the  
efforts of their faithful comrades in other parts of the world. We now join  
our eager voice to that of these Iranian believers and appeal to the friends  
from Bahá’u’lláh’s birthplace in every part of the globe to arise in accordance  
with the requirement of faithfulness and make mighty and effective efforts  
to teach the Cause of God on behalf of their long-suffering brothers and  
sisters. For, teaching the Faith is a spiritual obligation from which no one is  
exempt; it is the magnet that attracts divine confirmations, it is the cause of  
the revival of hearts and souls. The Supreme Pen says:

248.9a Center your energies in the propagation of the Faith of God. Whoso is  
worthy of so high a calling, let him arise and promote it. Whoso is un-  
able, it is his duty to appoint him who will, in his stead, proclaim this  
Revelation, whose power hath caused the foundations of the mighti-  
est structures to quake, every mountain to be crushed into dust, and  
every soul to be dumbfounded.[[341]](#footnote-341)248-3

He also says:

248.9b In one of the Tablets this exalted Word hath been revealed from the  
Supreme Pen: “Whoso is unable to teach should appoint a deputy.”

248.10 Praised be God, this munificent banquet is now spread for the enjoy-  
ment of all. The Four Year Plan provides guidance to each and every one  
involved with the achievement of the teaching goals. In some cases, when  
people are unable to directly teach the Cause, they have been exhorted to  
deputize someone to carry out this duty on their behalf. Should they be  
unable to deputize one person, they can, in accordance with their financial  
ability, make contributions earmarked for deputization through local, na-  
tional, continental and international funds of the Faith. In brief, all means  
have been provided for everyone to participate in the teaching work which,  
according to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, is the foremost duty, leaving no room for any

excuse. Moreover, the people of the world who are weary and helpless in the  
face of present-day ordeals are more than ever ready to embrace the Cause of  
God. Failure to take advantage of this opportunity would indeed be a grave  
loss, for it would deprive the aching body of humanity of a remedy placed  
freely in the hands of the people of Bahá. This is the day on which, accord-  
ing to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, “The cry of ‘where are Bahá’í teachers’ is raised from  
every corner of the world ….” Blessed are the ones who have hearkened  
and responded with heart and soul. This appeal is particularly significant  
these days because, according to the Four Year Plan, in the concluding years  
of this century the number of teachers should so increase as to hasten the  
entry of troops under the shadow of God’s Cause. The dearly loved Iranian  
believers, wherever they reside, must not deprive themselves of the bounty  
of participation in Bahá’í activities. They should rather arise unitedly with  
the native friends and join forces with them to offer befitting service under  
the direction of Bahá’í institutions. Nay, they should even take the lead and  
become renowned in servitude to the Divine Threshold.

248.11 Another matter of great import which the Iranian believers cannot af-  
ford to neglect is the instruction of children in spiritual attributes, human  
perfections and heavenly character. In this, too, they can learn from the ex-  
ample of the sacrificial friends of Iran who train their children from infancy  
under their loving care, adorn them with the ornaments of a praiseworthy  
character, and help them to advance in the acquisition of knowledge and  
understanding of spiritual truths, thus exemplifying this exhortation from  
‘Abdu’l-Bahá:

248.11a … exert every effort to educate the children, so that from infancy they  
will be trained in Bahá’í conduct and the ways of God, and will, even  
as young plants, thrive and flourish in the soft-flowing waters that are  
the counsels and admonitions of the Blessed Beauty.[[342]](#footnote-342)248-4

Also:

248.11b It is incumbent upon Bahá’í children to surpass other children in the  
acquisition of sciences and arts, for they have been cradled in the grace  
of God.

Whatever other children learn in a year, let Bahá’í children learn in a  
month. …[[343]](#footnote-343)248-5

And again:

248.11c While the children are yet in their infancy feed them from the breast  
of heavenly grace, foster them in the cradle of all excellence, rear them  
in the embrace of bounty. Give them the advantage of every useful  
kind of knowledge. Let them share in every new and rare and won-  
drous craft and art. Bring them up to work and strive, and accustom  
them to hardship.[[344]](#footnote-344)248-6

Consider carefully the following statement revealed by the Pen of the An-  
cient Beauty:

248.11d The parents must exert every effort to rear their offspring to be reli-  
gious, for should the children not attain this greatest of adornments,  
they will not obey their parents, which in a certain sense means that  
they will not obey God. Indeed, such children will show no consider-  
ation to anyone, and will do exactly as they please.[[345]](#footnote-345)248-7

248.12 Nowadays in many countries people are rebellious and careless, morally  
corrupt and afflicted with various problems. At a time like this, obedience to  
the above ordinances is more vital than ever before. The friends in Iran have  
successfully put these ordinances to work and learned through experience  
that one of the immediate results of this endeavor is to empower their pre-  
cious children at an early age to confront difficulties in school, on the street  
and in the market-place and to show forth heroism, thereby preserving their  
integrity and safeguarding the reputation of the Faith. The friends in other  
parts of the world should do likewise. For, should the children be deprived  
of a spiritual foundation, their protection from the onslaught of destructive  
temptations will be compromised.

248.13 One of the laudable services which the Iranian Bahá’ís everywhere can  
pledge to perform is initiating work on establishing character training classes

for children and rendering assistance in maintaining them. Those friends  
who were the pupils of these classes and have enjoyed the sweetness of  
the fruits of such education should actively participate in this great service,  
which is the cause of strengthening every Bahá’í community, and provide  
for children’s Bahá’í education everywhere.

248.14 Furthermore, the Bahá’í parents from Iranian background should en-  
deavor to teach their children the Persian language, for Persian is one of the  
two languages of revelation in this glorious Dispensation. Bahá’u’lláh says:  
“In this Day when the Sun of Knowledge hath appeared and is resplendent  
from the firmament of Iran, it is fitting to praise this language as much  
as one can.” He also says: “The Desire of the world speaks in the Persian  
language. It would be praiseworthy to Him, if His loved ones also converse  
and write in this language.”

248.15 It would be a great service if, in every city and hamlet where a number  
of Iranian Bahá’ís reside, some Persian friends would exert special effort to  
teach this language to the children and youth, study together the Writings in  
Persian, and drink their fill from the billowing source of the Creative Word  
and Sacred Writings. We praise God for having enabled some Bahá’í institu-  
tions abroad to devise ways and develop programs useful for teaching the  
Persian language to those Iranians who live away from their homeland. Such  
programs can be put to good use for the achievement of this blessed service.

248.16 The valued friends of Iran have always been and continue to be at the  
forefront in rendering worthy services to the Cause of God. We need not  
review the record of sacrifices made in the arena of faithfulness by the he-  
roes of the Apostolic Age. A careful look at the early stages of the Formative  
Age will enlighten us about the historic and crucial services of the Iranian  
believers in glorifying the Cause of God and its establishment throughout  
the world, and will evoke our admiration and praise. In the Ten Year Plan,  
which the beloved Guardian called the World Spiritual Crusade, a consid-  
erable number of Iranian Bahá’ís succeeded in opening up countries and  
territories to the light of the Faith. The names of these Knights have been  
recorded in the Roll of Honor. Also, numerous are those who have contrib-  
uted generously to the establishment of essential and significant institu-  
tions. Recently, when monetary donations for the construction of buildings  
on the Arc became a necessity, the Iranian friends living abroad considered  
it unbecoming to lag behind others. As before, they stepped forth with high  
endeavor and participated as much as possible in providing the financial  
needs of those mighty institutions.

248.17 O friends of God, it is certain that the cloud of divine bounty and bestow-  
al rains equally upon all humanity. However, we each partake of it according  
to our capacity. Although potentialities differ in accordance with degrees,  
not a single soul is completely bereft of capacity. Indeed, people’s progress  
in this world is dependent on that preordained measure and the manner in  
which they fulfill their God-given potentiality. Accordingly, our responsibil-  
ity is commensurate with our capacity, as it is said: “God will not burden  
any soul beyond its capacity.” It is our ardent hope that the lifelong lovers  
of the Divine Beauty will, in the privacy of their conscience and in the pres-  
ence of God, thoroughly assess their ability, judge their situation, and decide  
what kind and extent of service they can render in the path of the love of  
Bahá’u’lláh, then offer it in fulfillment of a vow of faithfulness, that they may  
attain the bounty of reunion in the everlasting world and reap the harvest of  
their existence. Otherwise, if they think only of their own comfort in this  
mortal life and be heedless of the purpose of creation, undoubtedly they will  
bring loss and regret upon themselves. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says:

248.17a Of what benefit to humanity is the body’s comfort which consists  
of the night’s rest, the day’s talk, the gathering of provisions in the  
morning, enjoyment of the fireplace in the evening, and the pleasure  
of a highly comfortable and extravagant bed made of finest silk and  
brocade! A considerable time is wasted in idle talk. Once it comes to  
an end, it is loss upon loss and manifest perdition.

How penetrating is Bahá’u’lláh’s Utterance which exhorts His faithful ser-  
vants thus:

248.17b Night hath succeeded day, and day hath succeeded night, and the  
hours and moments of your lives have come and gone, and yet none  
of you hath, for one instant, consented to detach himself from that  
which perisheth. Bestir yourselves, that the brief moments that are  
still yours may not be dissipated and lost. Even as the swiftness of  
lightning your days shall pass, and your bodies shall be laid to rest  
beneath a canopy of dust. What can ye then achieve? How can ye  
atone for your past failure?[[346]](#footnote-346)248-8

248.18 O beloved and faithful friends from the land of Bahá’u’lláh’s birth! Our  
longing, nay our hope and expectation of those valued friends is this: that  
in obedience to Divine commandments and exhortations, you become like  
unto morning stars, shining from the horizon of guidance and leading the  
way, thereby attaining unto that which the Peerless Beloved has desired and  
ordained for you.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

249  
Riḍván Message 1997

RIḌVÁN 154

To the Bahá’ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

249.1 We acclaim with grateful hearts the eager response on all continents to  
the Four Year Plan launched last Riḍván.

249.2 Consultations of the Continental Counselors and National Spiritual  
Assemblies started an extensive planning process, also involving Auxiliary  
Board members and Local Spiritual Assemblies. Through such a process the  
national and regional character of the derivative plans took shape. But this  
world-encompassing exercise did more than yield distinctive schemes for the  
different countries; it also boosted the collaborative relationship of the two  
arms of the Administrative Order, a most welcome portent of the victories  
yet to come.

249.3 A sign of the immediate impact of the Plan was the speed with which  
steps were taken to establish nearly two hundred training institutes during  
the last twelve months. Many of these have gone far beyond the point of  
designing their organization; they are actually in operation and have offered  
their first courses. Moreover, in the movement of homefront and interna-  
tional pioneers and traveling teachers; in the increased attention given by  
individuals to deputizing teachers; in the preparations made to ensure the  
formation of Local Spiritual Assemblies only on the first day of Riḍván; in  
the increasing endeavors to hold regular devotional meetings; in the widen-  
ing efforts to make use of the arts in the teaching work and community  
activities—in all these respects could be discerned the friends’ keen aware-  
ness of the importance of concentrating on the requirements of the major

aim of the Plan, which is to effect a significant advance in the process of  
entry by troops.

249.4 Nor can we neglect to recognize other developments during the past year  
which confirmed the high merit of the manifold efforts being exerted by our  
world community and the results being achieved. Among these, to mention  
a few, were: the acquisition of the apartment at 4 Avenue de Camoëns in  
Paris where the beloved Master, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, resided during His historic  
visit to the city; the special session on 14 August of the Federal Chamber  
of Deputies in Brazil to mark the 75th anniversary of the introduction of  
the Bahá’í Faith into that country—a unique, official occasion at which  
Amatu’l-Bahá Rúḥíyyih Khánum was present as the honored guest; the  
launching last July of the Bahá’í International Community’s site on the  
World Wide Web, entitled “The Bahá’í World,” which to date has received  
from more than 90 countries and territories over 50,000 visits, averaging  
some 200 per day.

249.5 Hardly outpaced by such accomplishments, the construction projects  
on Mount Carmel maintained a dazzling momentum highlighted by the  
completion of the marble colonnade of the Center for the Study of the  
Texts, by the rise of the International Teaching Center building towards its  
seventh level, and by the ongoing emergence of the far-stretching features  
of the Terraces of the Shrine of the Báb. In this connection must be men-  
tioned the partial lowering of the section of the public road over which the  
line of terraces will pass, and the acquisition and subsequent demolition of  
the building at the foot of the mountain which stood as the last obstruction  
that had to be overcome to make possible the completion of the lower ter-  
races through which the glorious pathway rises up towards the sacred Edifice  
and beyond it to the crest of the Hill of God.

249.6 Also of acute relevance to the progress thus described was the mainte-  
nance of a level of contributions to the Arc Projects Fund which fulfilled  
the goal for the last year. Clearly, the financial demands in this regard are  
being met with incessant heroism by rich and poor alike, and must be sus-  
tained over the remaining years. At the same time, however, a parallel effort,  
equally strenuous and sustained, should be simultaneously exerted by the  
Assemblies and friends throughout the world to fill the critical needs of the  
Bahá’í International Fund.

249.7 Such an auspicious beginning to the Four Year Plan as has been experi-  
enced cannot but inspire confidence in the hearts of the members of our

worldwide community that they are fully equipped to execute its require-  
ments as outlined in the messages that launched it, and as elaborated in the  
plans adopted by their respective Assemblies. A further and especially ap-  
preciated encouragement as we enter this second year is that circumstances  
have made it feasible for the reestablishment this Riḍván of the National  
Spiritual Assembly of Rwanda. This victory over crisis will bring to 175 the  
number of National Spiritual Assemblies that will be eligible to participate  
in the Eighth International Bahá’í Convention to be held next Riḍván at  
the Bahá’í World Center. How dearly we hope that by then, at the very  
midpoint of the Plan, the Bahá’í world will have made a major leap forward  
in the multiplication of its human resources, the maturation of its Spiritual  
Assemblies, and the evolution of its local communities!

249.8 The opportunity offered by the brief span of time before the century  
ends is precious beyond all telling. Only a united and sustained effort by  
the friends everywhere to advance the process of entry by troops can be-  
fit such a historic moment. Responsibilities urgent and inescapable press  
upon every institution, every member of a community striving towards its  
God-promised destiny. As there is only a short period in which to achieve  
a great deal, no time must be spared, no opportunity lost. Rest assured,  
dear friends, that the hosts of the Abhá Kingdom stand ready to rush to  
the support of anyone who will arise to offer his or her acts of service to the  
unfolding, spiritual drama of these momentous days.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

250  
Formation of Regional Bahá’í Councils

30 MAY 1997

To National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

250.1 The expansion of the Bahá’í community and the growing complexity of  
the issues which are facing National Spiritual Assemblies in certain countries  
have brought the Cause to a new stage in its development. They have caused  
us in recent years to examine various aspects of the balance between cen-  
tralization and decentralization. In a few countries we have authorized the  
National Spiritual Assemblies to establish State Bahá’í Councils or Regional

Teaching and Administrative Committees. From the experience gained in  
the operation of these bodies, and from detailed examination of the prin-  
ciples set forth by Shoghi Effendi, we have reached the conclusion that the  
time has arrived for us to formalize a new element of Bahá’í administration,  
between the local and national levels, comprising institutions of a special  
kind, to be designated as “Regional Bahá’í Councils.”

250.2 Regional Bahá’í Councils will be brought into being only with our per-  
mission and only in countries where conditions make this step necessary.  
Nevertheless, we find it desirable to inform all National Spiritual Assemblies  
of the nature of this historic development, and to make clear its place in the  
evolution of national and local Bahá’í institutions.

250.3 The institutions of the Administrative Order of Bahá’u’lláh, rooted in  
the provisions of His Revelation, have emerged gradually and organically, as  
the Bahá’í community has grown through the power of the divine impulse  
imparted to humankind in this age. The characteristics and functions of  
each of these institutions have evolved, and are still evolving, as are the  
relationships between them. The writings of the beloved Guardian expound  
the fundamental elements of this mighty System and make it clear that  
the Administrative Order, although different in many ways from the World  
Order which it is the destiny of the Bahá’í Revelation to call into being,  
is both the “nucleus” and “pattern” of that World Order. Thus, the evolu-  
tion of the institutions of the Administrative Order, while following many  
variants to meet changing conditions in different times and places, should  
strictly follow the essential principles of Bahá’í administration which have  
been laid down in the Sacred Text and in the interpretations provided by  
‘Abdu’l-Bahá and the Guardian.

250.4 One of the subtle qualities of the Bahá’í Administrative Order is the  
balance between centralization and decentralization. This balance must be  
correctly maintained, but different factors enter into the equation, depend-  
ing upon the institutions involved. For example, the relationship between  
a National or Local Spiritual Assembly and its committees is of a different  
nature from that between National and Local Spiritual Assemblies. The  
former is a relationship between a central administrative body and “its as-  
sisting organs of executive and legislative action,”[[347]](#footnote-347)250-1 while the latter is a  
relationship between national and local levels of the House of Justice, each

of which is a divinely ordained institution with clearly prescribed jurisdic-  
tion, duties and prerogatives.

250.5 Regional Bahá’í Councils partake of some, but not all, characteristics  
of Spiritual Assemblies, and thus provide a means of carrying forward the  
teaching work and administering related affairs of a rapidly growing Bahá’í  
community in a number of situations. Without such an institution, the  
development of a national committee structure required to cover the needs  
in some countries would run the danger of over-complexity through adding  
a further layer of committees under the regional committees, or the danger  
of excessive decentralization through conferring too much autonomy on  
committees which are characterized by the Guardian as “bodies that should  
be regarded in no other light than that of expert advisers and executive  
assistants.

250.6 The distinguishing effects of the establishment of Regional Bahá’í Coun-  
cils are the following:

250.6b • It involves the members of Local Spiritual Assemblies of the area  
in the choice of the members of the Council, thus reinforcing the  
bond between it and the local believers while, at the same time,  
bringing into public service capable believers who are known to the  
friends in their own region.

250.6c • It establishes direct consultative relationships between the  
Continental Counselors and the Regional Bahá’í Councils.

250.6d • It offers the possibility of forming a Regional Bahá’í Council in  
an ethnically distinct region which covers parts of two or more  
countries. In such a situation the Council is designated to work  
directly under one of the National Assemblies involved, providing  
copies of its reports and minutes to the other National Assembly.

250.6e • The greater degree of decentralization involved in the devolution  
of authority upon Regional Bahá’í Councils requires a correspond-  
ing increase in the capacity of the National Spiritual Assembly  
itself to keep fully informed of what is proceeding in all parts of  
the territory over which it has ultimate jurisdiction.

250.7 For those National Spiritual Assemblies which have already established  
Regional Bahá’í Councils or Regional Teaching and Administrative Com-

mittees, we enclose a document which outlines the various policies govern-  
ing the formation and functioning of Regional Bahá’í Councils. For the  
sake of simplicity, we have used the designation “Regional Bahá’í Councils”  
throughout, but the actual name used will, as heretofore, vary from country  
to country, including such names as “State Bahá’í Councils,” “Provincial  
Bahá’í Councils” or, when referring to an individual Council, “The Bahá’í  
Council for …” etc. To avoid the confusion of thought which seems to  
have been caused by referring to “Regional Teaching and Administrative  
Committees,” we have decided to cease using this designation and to refer  
to these bodies as Bahá’í Councils formed by appointment rather than elec-  
tion. We shall be writing separately to these National Spiritual Assemblies,  
indicating what modifications, if any, they should now make to the existing  
structures.

250.8 It is our ardent prayer at the Sacred Threshold, that the establishment of  
Regional Bahá’í Councils will greatly enhance the ability of the Administra-  
tive Order to deal with the complex situations with which it is confronted  
in a number of countries at the present time, and thus carry forward, with  
increased vigor, the propagation of the Cause of God.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

30 MAY 1997  
THE ESTABLISHMENT OF  
REGIONAL BAHÁ’Í COUNCILS  
IN CERTAIN COUNTRIES,  
THEIR CHARACTERISTICS AND FUNCTIONS

1. The formation of Regional Bahá’í Councils:

250.9 1.1 Authority for the formation of Regional Bahá’í Councils: The  
formation of Regional Bahá’í Councils in any country, and  
the choice of the regions to be assigned to them are depen-  
dent upon the approval of the Universal House of Justice in  
each case.

250.10 1.2 Conditions indicating a need for the formation of Regional  
Bahá’í Councils: Regional Bahá’í Councils will be formed  
only in certain specific situations where this kind of decen-  
tralization is judged by the Universal House of Justice to be  
appropriate.

2. The characteristic features of Regional Bahá’í Councils:

250.11 2.1 Mode of establishment and membership:

250.11a 2.1.1 Regional Bahá’í Councils are not necessarily es-  
tablished universally throughout a country, but  
rather in those regions where the condition and  
size of the Bahá’í community indicate that such  
a development would be beneficial. In such cases,  
all other parts of the country remain under the  
well-established pattern of national committees,  
including a national teaching committee and its  
regional teaching committees.

250.11b 2.1.2 The number of members of a Regional Bahá’í  
Council is nine or, in certain cases, seven or even  
five, depending upon the decision of the National  
Spiritual Assembly in each case.

250.11c 2.1.3 In accordance with local requirements and the  
condition of the Bahá’í community, the Univer-  
sal House of Justice will decide which Regional  
Bahá’í Councils are to be formed by election and  
which by appointment.

250.11d 2.1.4 It is within the discretion of the National Spiri-  
tual Assembly to decide, case by case, whether  
its members may also serve on Regional Bahá’í  
Councils. In general the preference is for members  
of National Assemblies not to serve on Councils,  
whether these be elected or appointed bodies.

250.12 2.2 Regional Bahá’í Councils formed by election:

250.12a 2.2.1 The members of an elected Regional Bahá’í  
Council, who shall be nine in number, are elected  
from among all the adult believers in the region by  
the members of the Local Spiritual Assemblies in  
that region every year on 23 May, the anniversary  
of the Declaration of the Báb according to the  
Gregorian calendar, or on a weekend immediately  
before or after that date.

250.12b 2.2.2 Owing to the large number of voters involved  
and the brief interval between the National Con-  
vention and the elections of the Regional Bahá’í

Councils, these elections are to be conducted pri-  
marily by mail, through methods to be decided  
by the National Spiritual Assembly. The voting is  
to be by secret ballot. The members of the Lo-  
cal Spiritual Assemblies may send in their ballots  
individually or they may be collected by the Sec-  
retary of the Local Spiritual Assembly and mailed  
together.

250.12c 2.2.3 If feasible and desirable, an electoral meeting,  
or several electoral meetings, may be held in the  
region for those voters able to attend, in order to  
provide an occasion for members of Local Spiri-  
tual Assemblies in the region to consult about the  
progress of the Cause. Other believers may attend,  
but would not take part in the voting.

250.12d 2.2.4 If there is a tie vote, the tie is to be broken by lot,  
in view of the impracticability of holding a revote  
in such a situation.

250.12e 2.2.5 Any vacancy on a Regional Bahá’í Council should  
be filled by the person who had the next highest  
number of votes on the ballot in the preceding  
election.

250.12f 2.2.6 Auxiliary Board members are not eligible for ser-  
vice on a Regional Bahá’í Council.

250.12g 2.2.7 The result of the election is to be confirmed by the  
National Spiritual Assembly.

250.13 2.3 Regional Bahá’í Councils formed by appointment:

250.13a 2.3.1 It is left to the National Spiritual Assembly to de-  
cide whether the number of members is to be five,  
seven or nine.

250.13b 2.3.2 Balloting takes place among members of Local  
Spiritual Assemblies in the region, similarly to  
that for the election of a Regional Bahá’í Coun-  
cil, but the outcome of the voting constitutes a  
confidential list of nominations for the National  
Spiritual Assembly, which appoints the members  
of the Council from among these nominees and  
others, including persons proposed by the mem-

bers of the Auxiliary Boards within whose areas of  
responsibility the region lies.

3. The functions of Regional Bahá’í Councils:

250.14 The functions of a Regional Bahá’í Council and the degree of authority  
conferred upon it are within the discretion of a National Spiritual Assem-  
bly. However, they should not be limited to those of a national or regional  
committee for, in such a case, there would be no justification for bringing  
into being a Regional Bahá’í Council rather than appointing a national or  
regional committee. The functions and responsibilities generally envisaged  
for a Regional Bahá’í Council are as follows:

250.15 3.1 To carry out the policies of the National Spiritual Assembly  
and to supervise, on behalf of the National Assembly, the  
smooth and efficient execution of the plans and projects for  
its region.

250.16 3.2 To keep the National Spiritual Assembly regularly informed  
of the Council’s activities and of the conditions of the Faith  
throughout the region. Regional Bahá’í Councils are allowed  
to develop their own strategies and programs, and to carry  
out their day-to-day work without having to obtain further  
approval from the National Spiritual Assembly. However,  
through their frequent reports and the minutes of their meet-  
ings, the National Assembly is kept informed of their activi-  
ties and maintains its overall supervision of the affairs of the  
Cause in all parts of the country.

250.17 3.3 To take initiative in the promotion of the Faith in the region  
and to carry out its decisions within the range of authority  
vested in it by the National Assembly. The National Assembly  
allows the Council a wide latitude for autonomous action,  
intervening in its work only in matters which the Assembly  
regards as being of major importance. The main task of a  
Regional Bahá’í Council is to devise and execute expansion  
and consolidation plans in close collaboration with the Local  
Spiritual Assemblies and the believers within its area of juris-  
diction. Its goal is to create strong Local Spiritual Assemblies  
which will be the focal centers of Bahá’í activity, will exercise  
their vitally important role in the development of the Faith  
and will demonstrate their ability to regulate the affairs of  
their local communities.

250.18 3.4 To deal with both teaching and administrative matters within  
the region including the appointment of committees for  
issues within its terms of reference, such as external affairs  
and the translation, publication and distribution of Bahá’í  
literature.

250.18a 3.4.1 In the area of teaching, a Regional Bahá’í Council  
may be given authority by the National Assem-  
bly to appoint, direct and supervise the work of a  
number of area or district teaching committees. In  
those cases where a Regional Bahá’í Council has  
to carry out a wide range of functions, it may also  
be authorized by the National Spiritual Assembly  
to appoint a regional teaching committee to be re-  
sponsible to it for the teaching work in the region  
as a whole and for the direction and supervision of  
the area or district teaching committees.

250.18b 3.4.2 A Regional Bahá’í Council may be asked by the  
National Spiritual Assembly to arrange and super-  
vise the unit elections for delegates to the national  
convention.

250.18c 3.4.3 The working relationship between the Local Spiri-  
tual Assemblies and the National Spiritual As-  
sembly in an area where there is a Regional Bahá’í  
Council will depend upon the range of functions  
and responsibilities conferred by the National As-  
sembly upon the Council. In any case the author-  
ity to deprive a believer of his or her administrative  
rights, or to restore them, remains with the Na-  
tional Assembly. The right of direct access to the  
National Assembly by a Local Spiritual Assembly  
is preserved.

250.19 3.5 To be responsible, under the general guidelines and policies  
established by the National Spiritual Assembly, for conduct-  
ing, on behalf of the National Assembly, the external affairs  
of the Faith at the level of the region, representing the Bahá’ís  
of the region in relation to the civil authorities of that region.

250.20 3.6 To take part, under the guidance of the National Spiritual  
Assembly and in consultation with the Counselors or their

deputies, in the formulation of a plan for its region as part  
of the national plan within the framework of each worldwide  
Plan.

250.21 3.7 To devise, for the approval of the National Assembly, its own  
expansion and consolidation programs for the achievement  
of the plan for its region, within the overall framework of the  
national plan.

250.22 3.8 To formulate an annual budget for the region, in consultation  
with the Counselors or their deputies when advisable, and to  
submit this budget to the National Spiritual Assembly for its  
approval.

250.22a 3.8.1 Alternatively, should the conditions indicate the  
advisability of such a method, the annual budgets  
of Regional Bahá’í Councils may be specified by  
the National Spiritual Assembly.

250.23 3.9 To administer the budget for the region, sending regular  
reports and financial statements to the National Spiritual  
Assembly.

250.24 3.10 A Regional Bahá’í Council can be authorized by the National  
Spiritual Assembly to act as its agent in operating a regional  
branch of the national Bahá’í fund. In this respect the Coun-  
cil may perform the following functions.

250.24a 3.10.1 It encourages believers within its region to con-  
tribute to various funds of the Cause, including  
the regional branch of the national fund, with the  
aim that, in due course, the entire expenditure for  
the region would be provided by the believers in  
the region.

250.24b 3.10.2 If the whole of the budgeted expenditure for a  
year cannot be met by contributions from the  
believers in the region, the Council may apply to  
the National Spiritual Assembly for an allocation  
from the national Bahá’í fund.

250.24c 3.10.3 It is also within the discretion of the Counselors  
to allocate financial assistance to a Regional Bahá’í  
Council from the funds at their disposition.

250.25 3.11 Under normal conditions, correspondence between Regional  
Bahá’í Councils and the Bahá’í World Center should be ad-

dressed to the National Spiritual Assembly, which would then  
convey the communication to its intended recipient.

250.25a 3.11.1 If, because of local conditions, the Universal  
House of Justice authorizes certain Regional  
Bahá’í Councils to correspond directly with it,  
copies of all such correspondence should be sent  
to the National Assembly.

250.25b 3.11.2 Copies of the *Bahá’í International News Service*  
and of certain circular letters may be mailed from  
the Bahá’í World Center directly to all Regional  
Bahá’í Councils.

250.25c 3.11.3 When Regional Bahá’í Councils publish Bahá’í  
literature or regional newsletters, copies of such  
publications should be sent directly to the Bahá’í  
World Center under the same guidelines as apply  
to national Bahá’í publications.

250.25d 3.11.4 Although, in general, Regional Bahá’í Councils  
can be authorized to correspond directly with the  
World Center in order to share current informa-  
tion about the activities of their respective com-  
munities, this should not be misconstrued as a  
means to bypass the institution of the National  
Spiritual Assembly in matters requiring guidance  
or decision.

250.26 3.12 In most countries the legal status of Regional Bahá’í Councils  
would seem to be adequately covered by the National Assem-  
bly’s incorporation.

250.27 3.13 Just as Counselors have direct consultative relations with Na-  
tional and Local Spiritual Assemblies, so they also have direct  
relations with Regional Bahá’í Councils.

250.27a 3.13.1 Whenever the Counselors feel it necessary or de-  
sirable, they are free to deputize one or more Aux-  
iliary Board members to represent them in con-  
sultations with a Regional Bahá’í Council. Also,  
occasional meetings should be arranged between a  
Regional Bahá’í Council and the Auxiliary Board  
members responsible for areas within its region,  
for the discussion of the vision and strategies for

the work. A regular and free exchange of informa-  
tion between Auxiliary Board members on the one  
hand and Regional Bahá’í Councils on the other is  
encouraged.

4. National Committees in the new structure:

250.28 It is advisable for a National Spiritual Assembly to have a National Teaching  
Committee even if Regional Bahá’í Councils are formed in every part of a  
country. The functions of the National Teaching Committee in a country in  
which Regional Bahá’í Councils have been established are as follows.

250.29 4.1 The Guardian has referred to national committees as expert  
advisers and executive assistants of a National Spiritual As-  
sembly. This suggests that, rather than diminishing the role  
of its National Teaching Committee when Regional Bahá’í  
Councils are formed, a National Spiritual Assembly would  
develop further the advisory and executive aspects of its re-  
sponsibilities in certain respects. The capacity of the National  
Teaching Committee to monitor the effectiveness of the  
teaching work throughout the country could be enhanced.  
Through its knowledge of the progress of the work, it  
should be able to bring to the National Assembly’s attention  
strengths and needs in any region. There are also a number  
of specific matters, such as the analysis of opportunities for  
expansion and consolidation in rapidly changing conditions,  
the identification of successful approaches to teaching, and  
the dissemination of promising teaching methods, which  
would benefit from the constant attention of a vibrant and  
competent National Teaching Committee. Issues related to  
teaching among minorities and specific groups who reside in  
more than one region of the country present another area  
which would benefit from a National Teaching Committee’s  
attention.

250.30 4.2 The work of the National Teaching Committee in relation  
to Regional Bahá’í Councils is one of service and assistance,  
rather than direction and supervision as it is in relation to  
regional teaching committees. A parallel can be seen in the  
work of a national training institute, to which the National  
Assembly assigns the task of developing human resources:  
the institute assists the Councils by offering them programs

for the training of the human resources needed to carry out  
their plans in each region. The National Teaching Committee  
would, similarly, offer services to the Councils in support of  
the teaching work.

250.31 4.3 In countries where Regional Bahá’í Councils have been  
introduced only for certain areas, the National Teaching  
Committee is expected to perform not only the functions  
outlined above, but also to remain responsible, both directly  
and through its Regional Teaching Committees, for serving  
those areas not under the care of a Council. In carrying out  
such functions there must, of course, be close collaboration  
between the National Teaching Committee and its Regional  
Teaching Committees on the one hand, and the Regional  
Bahá’í Councils on the other.

250.32 4.4 In the case of all national committees, it is important to en-  
sure that legitimate national programs do not run counter to  
the process of decentralization, except in special emergency  
situations.

251  
Clarification on the authority of the  
Universal House of Justice

3 JUNE 1997

To an individual believer

Dear Bahá’í Friend,

251.1 The Universal House of Justice has received your email of 29 April 1997  
and has instructed us to send you the following reply.

251.2 The questions you pose, arising out of an email conversation between  
yourself and one of the other contributors to the discussion group in which  
you participate, are of fundamental importance, and the House of Justice  
warmly appreciates the spirit of your enquiry.

251.3 The issues raised seem to resolve themselves into two points: the first be-  
ing whether or not the Universal House of Justice has the authority to make  
authoritative interpretations; the second is whether anyone has the right to  
challenge the authority or actions of the Universal House of Justice. When

these issues are approached with an understanding of the unity underlying  
all the Teachings, clarification results. Should the seeker, however, be influ-  
enced by a spirit of mistrust and conflict, then unending problems appear.

251.4 The above points have both been covered in three letters written by the  
Universal House of Justice on 9 March 1965, 27 May 1966 and 7 De-  
cember 1969.[[348]](#footnote-348)251-1 Unfortunately it seems that many of the friends have  
not studied these letters deeply or understood their implications. Already  
in “The Dispensation of Bahá’u’lláh” Shoghi Effendi has shown, beyond  
any doubt, that the function of making authoritative interpretations of the  
Teachings is confined solely and exclusively to the Guardian. Neither the  
Universal House of Justice, nor any other institution, person or group of  
persons can assume that function. That the Universal House of Justice will  
never infringe on the functions reserved to the Guardian is shown, not only  
by its own words and actions, but by Shoghi Effendi’s statement in that  
same document: “Neither can, nor will ever, infringe upon the sacred and  
prescribed domain of the other.” It is guaranteed by the fact that the Uni-  
versal House of Justice as well as the Guardian are both “under the care and  
protection of the Abhá Beauty, under the shelter and unerring guidance of  
His Holiness, the Exalted One.”

251.5 In its letter of 9 March 1965, the House of Justice has stated: “There is  
a profound difference between the interpretations of the Guardian and the  
elucidations of the House of Justice in exercise of its function to ‘deliberate  
upon all problems which have caused difference, questions that are obscure,  
and matters that are not expressly recorded in the Book.’” The friends will  
to understand what this difference is by observing how the House of Justice  
functions and by turning to it for explanations when necessary.

251.6 As you recognize, the authority of the Universal House of Justice is un-  
challengeable. This is stated in numerous places in the Writings. In the same  
passage of the Will and Testament quoted above, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá goes on to  
say of the Guardian and the Universal House of Justice: “Whatsoever they  
decide is of God. Whoso obeyeth him not, neither obeyeth them, hath not  
obeyed God; whoso rebelleth against him and against them hath rebelled  
against God; whoso opposeth him hath opposed God; whoso contendeth  
with them hath contended with God; whoso disputeth with him hath dis-  
puted with God; whoso denieth him hath denied God; whoso disbelieveth

in him hath disbelieved in God; whoso deviateth, separateth himself, and  
turneth aside from him hath in truth deviated, separated himself and turned  
aside from God.”[[349]](#footnote-349)251-2

251.7 Furthermore, at the very end of the Will and Testament, in warning  
against the danger of Covenant-breaking, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá wrote: “Beware lest  
anyone falsely interpret these words, and like unto them that have broken  
the Covenant after the Day of Ascension (of Bahá’u’lláh) advance a pretext,  
raise the standard of revolt, wax stubborn, and open wide the door of false  
interpretation.” In this context, He continues: “To none is given the right to  
put forth his own opinion or express his particular conviction. All must seek  
guidance and turn unto the Center of the Cause and the House of Justice.  
And he that turneth unto whatsoever else is indeed in grievous error.”[[350]](#footnote-350)251-3

251.8 It is natural that the friends would discuss such matters among them-  
selves, as you and your correspondent have been doing on your Internet  
discussion group; how otherwise are they to deepen their understanding of  
the Teachings? But they should recognize that the resolution of differences  
of opinion on such fundamental questions is not to be found by continued  
discussion, but in referring to the Universal House of Justice itself, as you  
have done. Prolonged, unresolved, public discussion of these fundamental  
questions can do nothing but breed confusion and dissension.

251.9 Some people have put forward the thesis that in place of the Guardian’s  
function of authoritative interpretation, a check on the Universal House of  
Justice should be set up, either in the form of the general opinion of the  
mass of the believers, or in the form of a body of learned Bahá’ís—prefera-  
bly those with academic qualifications. The former is in direct contradiction  
to the Guardian’s statement that the members of the Universal House of  
Justice are not “allowed to be governed by the feelings, the general opinion,  
and even the convictions of the mass of the faithful, or of those who directly  
elect them.” “They are to follow,” he writes, “the dictates and promptings of  
their conscience. They may, indeed they must, acquaint themselves with the  
conditions prevailing among the community, must weigh dispassionately  
in their minds the merits of any case presented for their consideration, but  
must reserve for themselves the right of an unfettered decision. ‘*God will  
verily inspire them with whatsoever He willeth*,’ is Bahá’u’lláh’s incontrovert-

ible assurance.”[[351]](#footnote-351)251-4 As to the latter alternative: this would constitute usurpa-  
tion of a function of the Guardian.

251.10 Scholarship has a high rank in the Cause of God, and the Universal  
House of Justice continually consults the views of scholars and experts in  
the course of its work. However, as you appreciate, scholars and experts have  
no authority over the Institutions of the Cause. In a letter written on behalf  
of the Guardian, on 14 March 1927, to the Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís  
of Istanbul, it is pointed out how, in the past, it was certain individuals who  
“accounted themselves as superior in knowledge and elevated in position”  
who caused division, and that it was those “who pretended to be the most  
distinguished of all” who “always proved themselves to be the source of con-  
tention.” “But praise be to God” he continued, “that the Pen of Glory has  
done away with the unyielding and dictatorial views of the learned and the  
wise, dismissed the assertions of individuals as an authoritative criterion,  
even though they were recognized as the most accomplished and learned  
among men and ordained that all matters be referred to authorized centers  
and specified assemblies. Even so, no assembly has been invested with the  
absolute authority to deal with such general matters as affect the interests  
of nations. Nay, rather, He has brought all the assemblies together under  
the shadow of the one House of Justice, one divinely-appointed Center, so  
that there would be only one Center and all the rest integrated into a single  
body, revolving around one expressly-designated Pivot, thus making them  
all proof against schism and division.”[[352]](#footnote-352)251-5

251.11 Comments have been made in recent times, implying the existence of  
two categories of believers, designated “administrators” and “academics.”  
The House of Justice feels that it is important to recognize the unsound-  
ness of such a concept. In the nature of Bahá’í administration, there is no  
class of believers who serve as “administrators.” Individual Bahá’ís are either  
elected or appointed to positions of administrative service; they come from  
every field of endeavor, including academia. There is, moreover, a natural  
flow of individuals into and out of administrative posts. The same applies  
to the occupants of those institutions of the Administrative Order which  
are referred to as being of the “learned” in the Faith. Clearly there are some

Bahá’ís who are “academics” and some who are not, but “academics” in no  
way constitute a recognized group in relation to the structure of the Cause.

251.12 There remains the question concerning the authority for the duties and  
responsibilities outlined for the Universal House of Justice in its constitu-  
tion. These provisions are a codification of explicit statements found in the  
sacred texts and the writings of Shoghi Effendi.

251.13 The House of Justice assures you of its prayers in the Holy Shrines that  
your efforts to assist the friends to overcome misunderstandings and to  
clarify their vision of the Faith will be blessed with divine confirmations.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

252  
Message to European Bahá’í Youth Council  
for seven regional seminars throughout Europe

7 JULY 1997

To the European Bahá’í Youth Council

252.1 The Universal House of Justice has received your faxed letter dated 23  
June 1997 regarding the seven regional seminars which will take place in  
July. It warmly commends your consecrated efforts to inspire the Bahá’í  
youth in Europe to arise with enthusiasm and dedication and render valu-  
able services for the progress of the Cause throughout the continent. The  
House of Justice is delighted that the Bahá’í youth in Europe are coming  
together to address the role each one is called upon to play in this extraor-  
dinary period of opportunities and challenges between now and the end of  
the century.

252.2 At every stage in the growth of the Faith, youth have made vital con-  
tributions to the progress which has been achieved in its expansion and  
consolidation. The Bahá’í youth must now seize the abundant opportuni-  
ties before them to awaken mankind to the divine purpose of human  
existence, and to attract not only their peers but all the waiting souls to  
the truth of Bahá’u’lláh’s Revelation. Although the task is great, let them  
not hesitate. The House of Justice is confident that, equipped with the  
Sacred Writings for guidance, and sustained by the unfailing assistance  
of the Concourse on High, they will achieve success in all their endeav-  
ors to serve this precious Faith.

252.3 You may be sure of the prayers of the House of Justice at the Sacred  
Threshold beseeching the Blessed Beauty to aid and strengthen every step  
the devoted Bahá’í youth in Europe take in His path.

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

253  
Bahá’í International Community’s United Nations  
Office and Office of Public Information

11 AUGUST 1997

To National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

253.1 In our letter of 10 October 1994 conveying a paper on the external affairs  
strategy approved by the Universal House of Justice, we were instructed  
to say that the coordination of the external affairs work would be effected  
through close collaboration between National Spiritual Assemblies and the  
Bahá’í International Community’s United Nations Office and Office of  
Public Information, and we also indicated that it would take some time  
before these Offices would be prepared to initiate communications with you  
concerning the details of the plans to be pursued. Our purpose in writing  
to you now is to say that the United Nations Office will shortly launch  
its first coordinated program of diplomatic work in accordance with the  
strategy. The program will be concerned with human rights education. In  
anticipation of this initial effort, the House of Justice wishes us to convey  
the following.

253.2 As you know, the external affairs work falls into two main categories:  
diplomatic and public information. The emphasis of the United Nations  
Office, as distinct from that of the Office of Public Information, will be  
on the plans to be executed by your Assemblies towards building effective  
relations with your governments and influencing official attitudes and poli-  
cies on matters of global, rather than of strictly national, importance. The  
efforts thus required necessitate the exercise of skills and approaches similar  
to those employed in the campaign to defend our persecuted coreligionists  
in Iran and other countries. The obvious difference with the external affairs  
strategy is that your concentration will be on promoting the interests of  
society as a whole and not on calling attention to a need to assist the Bahá’í  
community.

253.3 Important as is the external affairs work, occupation with it must not be  
allowed to detract from the major aim of the Four Year Plan: namely, to  
advance the process of entry by troops. The House of Justice has already  
encouraged you to devise channels through which you may carry out this  
work either by the formation of committees, the setting up of offices,  
the assignment of tasks to capable individuals, or some combination of  
these. Since the activities involved are not of a kind that can be undertaken  
by members of the community in general, but must be engaged in by a  
relatively few individuals of the proper aptitude, stature and means, you can  
fulfill the diplomatic requirements of the external affairs strategy without  
diverting attention from the teaching work. Training will no doubt have  
to be given to some of the individuals you appoint; this is a matter about  
which the United Nations Office will advise you as necessary.

253.4 A number of you have already made significant advances in this special  
field, and the House of Justice confidently and with great anticipation looks  
forward to the progress to be attained as you enter into a new phase of  
collaboration with the Bahá’í International Community’s United Nations  
Office.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

FOR DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT.

254  
Martyrdom of two believers in Iran

18 AUGUST 1997

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

254.1 It is with much sadness that the Universal House of Justice has received  
the disturbing news that two more believers in Iran have been killed because  
of their Faith. While you may share this information with your community,  
no action should be taken at this time to publicize it in the media.

254.2 Mr. Masha’llah Enayati (Máshá’lláh ‘Ináyatí), a 63-year-old Bahá’í resi-  
dent of Ṭihrán, who was well known for having constantly taught the  
Faith in a bold and zealous manner, died on 4 July 1997 after being  
severely beaten while in custody. During a visit to his native village of  
Ardistán to attend the meeting held to commemorate the anniversary of  
the Ascension of Bahá’u’lláh, Mr. Enayati was arrested in circumstances

which are not clear. He was taken to prison in Iṣfahán, where he was  
severely beaten on all parts of the body. It appears that he was held in  
prison for about a week before being taken to a hospital. His daughter,  
who lives in Australia, was in Iran at the time and visited her father in  
the hospital, where he was still under armed guard, though it was only  
a minor matter for which he had been arrested. She witnessed the effects  
of the beating, including visible bruising all over his body and especially  
on his hands, which were black from his injuries. She reports that he was  
in good health before his arrest. Mr. Enayati passed away in the hospital.  
The Friends in Iran have added that Mr. Enayati’s death certificate is  
worded in a most unusual way, suggesting that the doctor may himself  
have been under threat and thereby pressured to falsify the certificate.  
Under “cause of death” is entered, “Will be known later,” in the hand-  
writing of the doctor.

254.3 Mr. Shahram Reza’i (Shahrám Riḍá’í), a young Bahá’í man who was serv-  
ing as a conscript in the army near the city of Rasht, was shot in the head by  
his weapons training officer on 6 July 1997 and died the following day. In  
court the officer claimed that the shooting was an accident. He was released  
after a few days, once the court established that the man killed was a Bahá’í.  
The court excused the officer of paying the blood-money normally required  
in such instances, ordering him to pay just the cost of the three bullets used  
to kill Mr. Reza’i. The Friends in Iran have no doubt that this was a case of  
deliberate murder and predicted before the “trial” that the officer would be  
released, since this has been so in other similar cases. We understand that  
Mr. Reza’i is the seventh Bahá’í undertaking compulsory army duties to  
have been killed by colleagues or officers.

254.4 Below is the provisional translation of the text of a letter written on  
behalf of the House of Justice for transmission to Iran:

254.4a The Universal House of Justice was grieved by the news of the sad  
events which engulfed the two lovers of the Abhá Beauty, Shahrám  
Riḍá’í and Máshá’lláh ‘Ináyatí. These two trod the path of truthful-  
ness and fearlessness and never concealed their relationship with the  
world-embracing Teachings of Bahá’u’lláh; this resulted in fueling the  
fire of prejudice amongst heedless individuals, and finally in leading  
the two to the exalted station of martyrdom and the attainment of the  
presence of the Desired One.

254.4b Kindly inform the families of these dear ones of the heartfelt sympa-  
thy of the House of Justice and assure them of its prayers in the Holy  
Shrines for the two martyrs in the path of God and also for those  
oppressed ones who survive them.

254.4c The willful killing of Mr. Enayati and Mr. Reza’i, occurring without  
any justification whatsoever, illustrates how the persecution of the  
believers in Iran is continuing to take place in various ways ….

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

FOR DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

255  
Leadership of the Faith  
following the passing of the Guardian

6 JANUARY 1998

To an individual Bahá’í

Dear Bahá’í Friend,

255.1 The Universal House of Justice has received your letter of 28 November  
1997 and has asked us to provide you with the following reply.

255.2 The House of Justice appreciates your turning to it with your concerns  
about the absence of a Guardian to succeed Shoghi Effendi, and it stands  
ready to provide the clarifications required to assist you in resolving the  
issues troubling you.

255.3 As a well-deepened believer with a distinguished record of service to the  
Cause over many decades, you have undoubtedly made a careful study of  
the letters of 6 October 1963, 9 March 1965, 27 May 1966, and 7 De-  
cember 1969, published in the volume *Messages from the Universal House of  
Justice—1963–1986*, which pertain directly to several of the issues to which  
you have referred in your letter.

255.4 An issue not directly discussed in these messages is that of the members of  
the family of Shoghi Effendi who were expelled from the Faith as Covenant-  
breakers, and their offspring. A detailed description of the faithlessness of  
this family has been provided in the book *The Covenant of Bahá’u’lláh* by  
Adib Taherzadeh, a perusal of which provides a deeper insight into the  
events which prompted the following statement of Shoghi Effendi in a cable

of 5 April 1952: “TIME ALONE REVEAL EXTENT HAVOC WREAKED THIS VIRUS  
VIOLATION INJECTED FOSTERED OVER TWO DECADES ‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ’S FAMILY.”

255.5 Unless they manifest evidence to the contrary, the children of the  
Covenant-breaking members of Shoghi Effendi’s immediate family must  
necessarily be regarded as being infected with this spiritually contagious  
disease through their intimate association with their parents. Shoghi Effendi  
warned the believers about the propagation of Covenant-breaking attitudes  
through close family relationships in the following passage from a letter  
dated 18 August 1949 written on his behalf:

255.5a The friends are sometimes surprisingly naive and superficial in their  
approach to the subject of Covenant-breakers. They do not seem to  
understand that the descendants of Azal, with their mother’s milk,  
drank hatred of Bahá’u’lláh, just as the descendants of Muḥammad-  
‘Alí and his relatives have imbibed from babyhood a false concept  
of the Master. It takes practically a miracle to overcome this lifelong  
habit of wrong thought.

255.6 While this passage was written about the descendants of Mírzá Yaḥyá  
and Mírzá Muḥammad-‘Alí, the insight it conveys is applicable also to the  
descendants of the Covenant-breakers in the family of Shoghi Effendi.

255.7 In your letter, you have referred to the possibility of a member of Shoghi  
Effendi’s family expressing contrition and being admitted into the com-  
munity. In principle, membership in the Bahá’í community is open to all  
such individuals who make application to the House of Justice and who are  
found, following investigation carried out with the assistance of the Coun-  
selors or their deputies, to be free of the spirit of Covenant-breaking. Thus  
the only barrier to the entry into the Faith of the members of the family  
of Shoghi Effendi, or indeed any of the descendants of Bahá’u’lláh, is their  
own attitude to the provisions of the Covenant.

255.8 Since the central element of your concern is that of the exercise of the  
functions of Guardian of the Cause, you should note that a distinction  
must be made between the possible reinstatement of members of Shoghi  
Effendi’s family and the designation of another Guardian of the Cause. You  
are well familiar with the provisions in the Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-  
Bahá for the Guardian’s appointment of a successor. The House of Justice  
pointed out in its letter of 9 March 1965 that:

255.8a At the time of our beloved Shoghi Effendi’s death it was evident, from  
the circumstances and from the explicit requirements of the Holy  
Texts, that it had been impossible for him to appoint a successor in  
accordance with the provisions of the Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-  
Bahá. This situation, in which the Guardian died without being able  
to appoint a successor, presented an obscure question not covered by  
the explicit Holy Text, and had to be referred to the Universal House  
of Justice.[[353]](#footnote-353)255-1

255.9 The House of Justice’s decision, which was announced on 6 October  
1963, was that “the Universal House of Justice finds that there is no way  
to appoint or to legislate to make it possible to appoint a second Guardian  
to succeed Shoghi Effendi.”[[354]](#footnote-354)255-2 In addition, no believer, irrespective of his  
lineage or accomplishments, can now legitimately advance a claim to be the  
Guardian of the Cause, since ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has stated quite categorically:

255.9a … ere the expiration of a thousand years, no one has the right to  
utter a single word, even to claim the station of Guardianship. The  
Most Holy Book is the Book to which all peoples shall refer, and in  
it the Laws of God have been revealed. Laws not mentioned in the  
Book should be referred to the decision of the Universal House of  
Justice. There will be no grounds for difference …. Beware, beware  
lest anyone create a rift or stir up sedition. Should there be differences  
of opinion, the Supreme House of Justice would immediately resolve  
the problems.[[355]](#footnote-355)255-3

255.10 The House of Justice understands your distress at the absence of a Guard-  
ian, and at the consequent adjustments which were necessitated in the  
Administrative structure of the Faith. However, there should be no doubt  
about the ability of the Cause of God to accomplish its world-redeeming  
and world-transforming mission, despite the loss it suffered with the passing  
of Shoghi Effendi. Your attention is directed to the statement of the House  
of Justice on 9 March 1965, that:

255.10a Although not invested with the function of interpretation, the House  
of Justice is in a position to do everything necessary to establish  
the World Order of Bahá’u’lláh on this earth. Unity of doctrine is  
maintained by the existence of the authentic texts of Scripture and  
the voluminous interpretations of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi,  
together with the absolute prohibition against anyone propounding  
“authoritative” or “inspired” interpretations or usurping the function  
of Guardian. Unity of administration is assured by the authority of  
the Universal House of Justice.[[356]](#footnote-356)255-4

255.11 You may also obtain a deeper understanding of the prospects for the  
development of the Administrative Order by contemplating the guidance  
provided in the following extract from a letter written on behalf of the  
Guardian in August 1936:

255.11a The Faith of Bahá’u’lláh constitutes, indeed, the stage of maturity  
in the development of mankind. His appearance has released such  
spiritual forces which will continue to animate, for many long years  
to come, the world in its development. Whatever progress may be  
achieved in later ages—after the unification of the whole human race  
is achieved—will be but improvements in the machinery of the world.  
For the machinery itself has been already created by Bahá’u’lláh. The  
task of continually improving and perfecting this machinery is one  
which later Prophets will be called upon to achieve. They will thus  
move and work within the orbit of the Bahá’í Cycle.[[357]](#footnote-357)255-5

255.12 The House of Justice trusts that the clarifications set out in this letter will  
be of assistance to you. Should you find that aspects of this matter remain  
troubling, you should not hesitate to turn to it again. You are assured of the  
prayers of the House of Justice on your behalf in the Holy Shrines.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

FOR DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

256  
Message to the Latin American Youth Congress  
in Chile

6 JANUARY 1998

To the friends gathered at the Latin American Youth Congress in Chile

Dear Friends,

256.1 As the Cause of God advances resistlessly along the path traced out for it  
by its Divine Founder, each stage of the process opens up to a new genera-  
tion of Bahá’í youth challenges unique to the historical moment. Building  
on the accomplishments of the generations before, youth must devise ways  
to take advantage of the opportunities presented to them. A discourse in  
consonance with the requirements of the time has to be refined, and activi-  
ties aimed at transforming society have to be pursued with vigor.

256.2 To accomplish such tasks during the brief span of time afforded youth  
requires resolve, spiritual discipline, energy, reliance on the power of divine  
assistance, and constant immersion in the Word of God. These efforts, which  
constitute an integral part of the growth processes of the Bahá’í community  
itself, nevertheless possess characteristics distinctly their own. In recent years,  
and in many parts of the world, Bahá’í youth have referred to their collective  
endeavors as a “youth movement,” a reminder that the energy being gener-  
ated will not only bring new recruits from among their peers, but will move  
an entire generation one step closer to the World Order of Bahá’u’lláh.

256.3 Over the next few days you will be contemplating the special opportunities  
which the Hand of Providence has laid before you. An essential component  
of any strategy you devise is training. In all your countries, this question is  
being enthusiastically addressed as institutes learn to operate with increasing  
effectiveness. You yourselves are participating, as students and as teachers, in  
building capacity in your communities to train thousands and thousands of  
believers, many of whom will be young people. With this vision in mind, you  
should devise actions, characteristic of your youth movement, in which your  
swelling numbers will engage. How will you teach the Cause and advance  
the process of entry by troops? How will you contribute to the establishment  
of a distinctly Bahá’í life? And how will you accelerate the transformation of  
Latin American society to achieve its high destiny? As you contemplate these  
questions, be assured that our prayers will surround you.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

257  
Acceptance of decisions  
made by the Local Spiritual Assembly

17 FEBRUARY 1998

To a Local Spiritual Assembly

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

257.1 The Universal House of Justice has received your email of 8 January 1998  
in which you forwarded a question from one of the members of your Bahá’í  
community … regarding the recourse of the friends when they believe an  
Assembly has made an error. We are to reply as follows.

257.2 First, it is important to consider the unique nature of the Bahá’í Adminis-  
trative Order, and the responsibilities of the individuals and the institutions  
within it. As … is no doubt aware, in the Bahá’í system, the individual votes  
for the members of the Spiritual Assembly with the understanding that she  
or he is free to choose without any interference whomever his conscience  
prompts him to select, and freely accepts the authority of the outcome. Sub-  
mission of the believers to the decisions of the Assembly is essential to the  
achievement and maintenance of unity within the community. In the act  
of voting, the individual subscribes to a covenant by which the orderliness  
of society is upheld. The Assembly has the responsibility to guide, direct  
and decide on community affairs and the right to be obeyed and supported  
by members of the community. The individual has the responsibility to es-  
tablish and maintain the Assembly through election, the offering of advice,  
moral support and material assistance; and he has the right to be heard by it,  
to receive its guidance and assistance, and to appeal any Assembly decision  
which he conscientiously feels is unjust or detrimental to the community.

257.3 Concerning the accountability of the Spiritual Assemblies, the Guardian  
in *God Passes By* (p. 331) wrote that the Assemblies are “invested with an  
authority rendering them unanswerable for their acts and decisions to those  
who elect them,” and that they are “solemnly pledged to follow, under all  
conditions, the dictates of the ‘Most Great Justice’ that can alone usher in  
the reign of the ‘Most Great Peace’ which Bahá’u’lláh has proclaimed and  
must ultimately establish.” The Assemblies are therefore responsible to God  
rather than to those who elect them.

257.4 The attitude of the believer towards the Assembly decisions should be  
one of wholehearted acceptance and support. If, however, the individual

feels that a decision is incorrect, he is free to bring additional information  
pertaining to the matter to the Assembly for its consideration. Should the  
decision remain unchanged, it is preferable if he accepts humbly the view of  
the Assembly in the spirit of sacrifice, and without further dispute. Then,  
as the Master has affirmed, any wrong decision will eventually be set right.  
When the believers act submissively and in the spirit of self-effacement it  
attracts the good pleasure of God, which in itself serves as a consolation to  
their hearts.

257.5 A believer who is distressed by the decision reached by an Assembly may  
well find comfort and reassurance in the following passage from a letter  
written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi:

257.5a The Assembly may make a mistake, but, as the Master pointed out,  
if the Community does not abide by its decisions, or the individual  
Bahá’í, the result is worse, as it undermines the very institution which  
must be strengthened in order to uphold the principles and laws of  
the Faith. He tells us God will right the wrongs done. We must have  
confidence in this and obey our Assemblies ….[[358]](#footnote-358)257-1

257.6 If, after taking all this into account, a believer is still unsatisfied with a  
decision of the Assembly, he can appeal, in the first instance, to his National  
Spiritual Assembly and ultimately to the Universal House of Justice. How-  
ever, in so doing it is advisable to bear in mind that such a dissenting voice  
should make itself heard only within the proper administrative institutions  
and never elsewhere. Once such a case has been presented to the institutions  
it is no longer the responsibility of that individual and should be left in the  
care of those divinely ordained agencies.

257.7 The same appeal process applies to an individual who has lost his voting  
rights, should he feel that they have been unjustly removed. When a believer  
is deprived of his administrative rights, he is entitled to clear information on  
the requirements to be fulfilled in order that his rights may be restored; these  
may include the passage of a prescribed period of time, the performance of  
certain remedial actions, or the alteration of an attitude or pattern of behav-  
ior which is considered unworthy or harmful. A condition for the restoration

of voting rights is that the believer be sincerely repentant, as evidenced by  
his statement to that effect or by his demeanor and conduct.

257.8 The House of Justice hopes that the foregoing has sufficiently addressed  
…’s question and wishes to assure her of its love for her.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

258  
Establishment of three new National Spiritual  
Assemblies, re-establishment of one  
National Spiritual Assembly

20 FEBRUARY 1998

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

258.1 Since the commencement of the Four Year Plan we have been greatly encour-  
aged by the steady expansion of the Faith in many regions of the world and by  
the ongoing maturation of Bahá’í communities everywhere, and it is with joy-  
ful hearts that we announce the establishment next May of three new National  
Spiritual Assemblies and the reestablishment of another National Assembly:

258.2 The Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of Sabah with its seat in Kota  
Kinabalu, whose inaugural National Convention is being organized by the  
Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of Malaysia.

258.3 The Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of Sarawak with its seat in Kuch-  
ing, whose inaugural National Convention is being organized by the Spiri-  
tual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of Malaysia.

258.4 The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of Slovakia with its seat in  
Bratislava, whose inaugural National Convention is being organized by the  
Regional Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of the Czech and Slovak Republics.

258.5 The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of Liberia, which cir-  
cumstances have prevented from being reestablished since 1992, with its  
seat in Monrovia and its National Convention being organized by the Bahá’í  
Administrative Committee of Liberia.

258.6 The Regional Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of the Czech and Slovak  
Republics, with its seat in Prague, will become the National Spiritual As-  
sembly of the Bahá’ís of the Czech Republic.

258.7 At this critical stage in human history, it is our hope that Bahá’ís every-  
where will be inspired by the continuing development of the Administra-  
tive Order in these countries and territories. May the friends in every land  
recognize the opportunities that lie before them, and may they arise to teach  
the Cause of God with enthusiasm and love.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

259  
Review of Bahá’í material prior to publication

4 MARCH 1998

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of the United States

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

259.1 The Universal House of Justice has received your letter … inquiring  
about your review of music and special materials …. We are to convey the  
following reply.

259.2 The memorandum on Bahá’í publishing dated Riḍván 1971, which the  
House of Justice sent to National Spiritual Assemblies, states that

259.2a At this early stage of the Cause all works by Bahá’ís which deal with the  
Faith, whether in the form of books, pamphlets, translations, poems,  
songs, radio and television scripts, films, recordings, etc. must be ap-  
proved before submission for publication, whether to a Bahá’í or non-  
Bahá’í publisher. In the case of material for purely local consumption  
the competent authority is the Local Spiritual Assembly, otherwise  
the National Spiritual Assembly (through its Reviewing Committee)  
is the approving authority.[[359]](#footnote-359)259-1

259.3 The obligation, as indicated in this statement, of Spiritual Assemblies  
to ensure the appropriateness of books, music and other items intended for  
dissemination in the interests of the Faith remains unchanged for the time

being; but it will have to be carried out with flexibility in the light of chang-  
ing circumstances. The House of Justice recognizes that the volume and  
variety of materials being created have greatly increased with the growth  
in size of the Bahá’í community and the rapid advance and ease of use of  
communication and other technologies.

259.4 Applying review standards to manuscripts is, of course, relatively straight-  
forward, whereas doing so with respect to different types of music and the  
wide range of items categorized as “special materials” poses a particular chal-  
lenge to those responsible for reviewing them. Since the form, expression  
and effect of music are, to a great extent, determined by the cultural norms  
of a society, the reviewing agency called upon to decide on the acceptability  
of proposed musical items must be sensitive and flexible in its judgment.  
The value of having National and Local Spiritual Assemblies exercise such  
judgment is obvious in the fact that what may well be accepted as appropri-  
ate in one place may have the opposite effect in another. Moreover, an aspect  
of the flexibility called for is recognizing that all acceptable musical items  
are not suitable for all Bahá’í occasions. For example, a distinction must be  
made between the music employed for devotional services and that used for  
other occasions in the Bahá’í community.

259.5 Special materials, such as those listed in your letter (i.e. art prints, tee-  
shirts, cards, automobile bumper stickers, book marks, calendars, jewelry,  
and art work that includes the Greatest Name and the Ringstone symbol),  
are so numerous, so varied and, in many instances, so ephemeral, that it  
would be impossible for any national agency to cope with the demands for  
review of them all. It is necessary therefore that your National Assembly de-  
termine what types of items must be reviewed and by what standard. As for  
the others, you will have to allow some latitude in their production, while  
continuing to educate the friends as to the principles that should guide their  
creation of such items.

259.6 The House of Justice applauds your intention to mount an effort to  
educate the friends concerning the standards to be upheld in creating, pub-  
lishing and distributing all kinds of materials involving the Faith and its  
symbols. In time, as the friends themselves increasingly exercise wise dis-  
crimination in choosing between appropriate and inappropriate items in  
circulation, the exertions of the institutions in promoting these standards  
will bring about the desired results.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

FOR DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

260  
Passing of Hugh E. Chance, former member of the  
Universal House of justice

26 MARCH 1998

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

260.1 HEARTS HEAVY WITH SORROW AT PROFOUND LOSS TO BAHÁ’Í WORLD OF HUGH  
E. CHANCE, OUR DEARLY LOVED FORMER COLLEAGUE, STAUNCH, FAR-SIGHTED  
SUPPORTER CAUSE BAHÁ’U’LLÁH. CONSTANT OPTIMISM, ADAMANTINE FAITH, IN-  
DOMITABLE WILL CHARACTERIZED HIS NOTABLE THREE-DECADE-LONG SERVICES  
AS MEMBER UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE SUBSEQUENT TO HIS MEMBERSHIP  
NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY UNITED STATES. HIS MANIFOLD CONTRIBUTIONS  
ORGANIZATION WORLD CENTER FAITH, HIS UNTIRING EFFORTS PROMOTE INTER-  
ESTS CAUSE ESPECIALLY FAR EAST ASIAN AND PACIFIC REGIONS, HIS VIGOROUS AS-  
SISTANCE DEVELOPMENT EXTERNAL AFFAIRS ACTIVITIES BAHÁ’Í INTERNATIONAL  
COMMUNITY HAVE LEFT IMPERISHABLE RECORD ACHIEVEMENTS. SUPPLICATING  
ARDENTLY HOLY THRESHOLD THAT HIS NOBLE SOUL MAY REAP RICH REWARDS  
ABHÁ KINGDOM, THAT HE MAY BE JOYOUSLY REUNITED HIS BELOVED WIFE MAR-  
GARET, THAT HEARTS HIS DEAR DAUGHTER AND OTHER MEMBERS FAMILY MAY BE  
SOLACED.

260.2 ADVISE HOLD MEMORIAL GATHERINGS IN HIS HONOR ALL HOUSES WORSHIP  
AND THROUGHOUT BAHÁ’Í COMMUNITY.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

261  
Passing of Florence Mayberry, former Counselor  
and member of the International Teaching Center

9 APRIL 1998

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

261.1 DEEPLY SADDENED LOSS OUTSTANDING STAUNCH PROMOTER FAITH FLORENCE  
MAYBERRY. HER TIRELESS INSPIRED SERVICES, LOCAL, NATIONAL, AND INTERNA-  
TIONAL, IN BOTH TEACHING AND ADMINISTRATIVE FIELDS, SPANNING OVER FORTY  
YEARS, CROWNED BY UNFORGETTABLE DECADE AS COUNSELOR MEMBER INTERNA-  
TIONAL TEACHING CENTER. VALIANT DEFENSE COVENANT, UNFLAGGING EFFORTS

BLAZON NAME CAUSE, INTREPID FAR-FLUNG TRAVELS DISTINGUISH HER SPLENDID  
RECORD ACHIEVEMENTS. ASSURE FERVENT PRAYERS PROGRESS HER LUMINOUS  
SPIRIT CONFIDENT BOUNTIFUL REWARDS ABHÁ KINGDOM.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

262  
Request for memorials  
for the passing of Florence Mayberry

10 APRIL 1998

To National Spiritual Assemblies in the Americas

262.1 Further to our message to all National Spiritual Assemblies about the passing  
of Mrs. Florence Mayberry, we request you to arrange befitting memorial  
meetings across your communities to honor her memory. Special meetings  
should be held in the Houses of Worship in Wilmette and Panama City for  
the same purpose.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

263  
Riḍván Message 1998

RIḌVÁN 155

To the Bahá’ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

263.1 At this halfway mark in the Four Year Plan, we affirm with uplifted  
hearts that the worldwide Bahá’í community is breaking new ground at a  
dynamic stage in its evolution. The process of entry by troops, upon which  
its energies are focused, is clearly advancing.

263.2 Three developments brighten our expectations. One is in the solid re-  
sults being produced wherever training institutes are in operation. Tens of  
thousands of individuals have over the last two years completed at least  
one institute course. The immediate effects upon them have been a greatly  
strengthened faith, a more conscious spiritual identity, and a deepened  
commitment to Bahá’í service. The second pertains to the notable improve-  
ment in the conditions affecting the establishment and renewal of Local

Spiritual Assemblies. The decision to form these institutions only on the  
first day of Riḍván, and to do so principally at the initiative of the com-  
munities to which they belong, was put into effect in 1997. While there was  
an immediate but not unexpected drop in the number of Local Assemblies  
worldwide, the decrease was not very large; in fact, increases were recorded  
in some countries. This outcome indicates that the process of maturation  
of these divinely ordained institutions is on course. The third is that a new  
confidence in teaching is stirring the friends, yielding impressive results in  
various regions. The potential for a steady and ever-expanding influx of new  
believers has always been great, and we are able to say with assurance that  
the capacity to actualize it is methodically being developed more than ever  
before with the prosecution of the current Plan.

263.3 Further to these signs of progress, we are gratified by the marvelous speed  
with which the construction projects on Mount Carmel proceeded to fulfill  
the schedule which had been set for the year just ended. Immediately ahead  
are the establishment in May of three new National Spiritual Assemblies—  
Sabah, Sarawak, and Slovakia—and the reestablishment of the National  
Spiritual Assembly in Liberia, raising to 179 the pillars of the Universal  
House of Justice. In contemplating the divine favors being bestowed on  
our community, we acknowledge with deep gratitude the constancy of the  
acts of service being performed by the individual Hands of the Cause of  
God, by the International Teaching Center, and by the Counselors and  
their auxiliaries on all continents. The increasing strength of National Spiri-  
tual Assemblies also bolsters our certitude in the imminence of resounding  
victories.

263.4 Against this salutary picture of the community’s prospects is the confused  
background of a planet at odds with itself. And yet, amid the widespread  
desolation of the human spirit, it is apparent that at some level of conscious-  
ness there is among the peoples of the world a growing sense of an irresist-  
ible movement towards global unity and peace. This sense is being aroused  
as the physical barriers between peoples are being virtually eliminated by  
breathtaking advances in science and technology. Nevertheless, a mixed  
catalogue of world-shaking tribulations and world-shaping developments  
keeps humanity concurrently dazed and dazzled. The storms and stresses  
battering the social fabric are incomprehensible to all except the relatively  
few of the planet’s inhabitants who recognize God’s purpose for this Day.

263.5 Our fellow human beings everywhere are insensibly subjected at one and  
the same time to the conflicting emotions incited by the continuous opera-

tion of simultaneous processes of “rise and of fall, of integration and of dis-  
integration, of order and chaos.” These Shoghi Effendi identified as aspects  
of the Major Plan and Minor Plan of God, the two known ways in which  
His purpose for humankind is going forward. The Major Plan is associated  
with turbulence and calamity and proceeds with an apparent, random dis-  
orderliness, but is, in fact, inexorably driving humanity towards unity and  
maturity. Its agency for the most part is the people who are ignorant of its  
course and even antagonistic towards its aim. As Shoghi Effendi has pointed  
out, God’s Major Plan uses “both the mighty and the lowly as pawns in His  
world-shaping game, for the fulfillment of His immediate purpose and the  
eventual establishment of His Kingdom on earth.”[[360]](#footnote-360)263-1 The acceleration of  
the processes it generates is lending impetus to developments which, with  
all the initial pain and heartache attributable to them, we Bahá’ís see as signs  
of the emergence of the Lesser Peace.

263.6 Unlike His Major Plan, which works mysteriously, God’s Minor Plan is  
clearly delineated, operates according to orderly and well-known processes,  
and has been given to us to execute. Its ultimate goal is the Most Great  
Peace. The four-year-long campaign, at the midpoint of which we have  
arrived, constitutes the current stage in the Minor Plan. It is to the achieve-  
ment of its purpose that we must all devote our attention and energies.

263.7 At times it may seem that the operation of the Major Plan causes a dis-  
ruption in the work of the Minor Plan, but the friends have every reason to  
remain undismayed. For they recognize the source of the recurrent turbu-  
lence at play in the world and, in the words of our Guardian, “acknowledge  
its necessity, observe confidently its mysterious processes, ardently pray  
for the mitigation of its severity, intelligently labor to assuage its fury, and  
anticipate, with undimmed vision, the consummation of the fears and the  
hopes it must necessarily engender.”[[361]](#footnote-361)263-2

263.8 Even a cursory survey of the global scene in recent years cannot but lead  
to observations fraught with special significance for a Bahá’í viewer. For one  
thing, amid the din of a society in turmoil can be discerned an unmistak-  
able trend towards the Lesser Peace. An intriguing inkling is provided by the  
greater involvement of the United Nations, with the backing of powerful  
governments, in attending to long-standing and urgent world problems; an-  
other derives from the dramatic recognition by world leaders in only recent

months of what the interconnectedness of all nations in the matter of trade  
and finance really implies—a condition which Shoghi Effendi anticipated  
as an essential aspect of an organically unified world. But a development  
of even greater moment to the Bahá’í community is that a massive number  
of people are searching for spiritual truth. Several recently published stud-  
ies have been devoted to this phenomenon. The ideologies that dominated  
the larger part of this century have been exhausted; at their waning in the  
century’s closing years, a hunger for meaning, a yearning of the soul, is on  
the rise.

263.9 This spiritual hunger is characterized by a restlessness, by a swelling dis-  
satisfaction with the moral state of society; it is also evident in the upsurge  
of fundamentalism among various religious sects, and in the multiplica-  
tion of new movements posing as religions or aspiring to take the place of  
religion. Here are observations that enable one to appreciate the interaction  
between the two divinely propelled processes at work on the planet. The  
manifold opportunities thus providentially provided to present the Message  
of Bahá’u’lláh to searching souls create a dynamic situation for the Bahá’í  
teacher. The implications for the task at hand are immensely encouraging.

263.10 Our hopes, our goals, our possibilities of moving forward can all be real-  
ized through concentrating our endeavors on the major aim of the Divine  
Plan at its current stage—that is, to effect a significant advance in the pro-  
cess of entry by troops. This challenge can be met through persistent effort  
patiently pursued. Entry by troops is a possibility well within the grasp of  
our community. Unremitting faith, prayer, the promptings of the soul, Di-  
vine assistance—these are among the essentials of progress in any Bahá’í  
undertaking. But also of vital importance to bringing about entry by troops  
is a realistic approach, systematic action. There are no shortcuts. Systemati-  
zation ensures consistency of lines of action based on well-conceived plans.  
In a general sense, it implies an orderliness of approach in all that pertains to  
Bahá’í service, whether in teaching or administration, in individual or col-  
lective endeavor. While allowing for individual initiative and spontaneity,  
it suggests the need to be clearheaded, methodical, efficient, constant, bal-  
anced and harmonious. Systematization is a necessary mode of functioning  
animated by the urgency to act.

263.11 Towards ensuring an orderly evolution of the community, a function  
of Bahá’í institutions is to organize and maintain a process of developing  
human resources whereby Bahá’ís, new and veteran alike, can acquire the  
knowledge and capacity to sustain a continuous expansion and consolida-

tion of the community. The establishment of training institutes is critical to  
such effort, since they are centers through which large numbers of individu-  
als can acquire and improve their ability to teach and administer the Faith.  
Their existence underscores the importance of knowledge of the Faith as a  
source of power for invigorating the life of the Bahá’í community and of the  
individuals who compose it.

263.12 The facts at hand confirm that the Four Year Plan works where a sys-  
tematic approach is understood and applied. These same facts show that  
the institutions of the Faith, in their collaborative efforts at national, re-  
gional, and local levels, have clearly been adhering to this understanding.  
However, with individuals, on whom rests the ultimate success of the Plan,  
this understanding is less clear. For this reason, we must emphasize to our  
fellow-believers the importance to their individual effort of this prerequisite  
of success in teaching and in other undertakings.

263.13 As translated into programs and projects by national and local institutions,  
the Plan, among other things, gives direction, identifies goals, stimulates ef-  
fort, provides a variety of needed facilities and materials to benefit the work  
of teachers and administrators. This is of course necessary for the proper  
functioning of the community, but is of no consequence unless its individual  
members respond through active participation. In so responding, each indi-  
vidual, too, must make a conscious decision as to what he or she will do to  
serve the Plan, and as to how, where and when to do it. This determination  
enables the individual to check the progress of his actions and, if necessary,  
to modify the steps being taken. Becoming accustomed to such a procedure  
of systematic striving lends meaning and fulfillment to the life of any Bahá’í.

263.14 But beyond the necessity of responding to the call of the institutions, the  
individual is charged by Bahá’u’lláh Himself with the sacred duty of teaching  
His Cause, described by Him as the “most meritorious of all deeds.” So long  
as there are souls in need of enlightenment, this duty must surely remain  
the constant occupation of every believer. In its fulfillment, the individual  
is directly responsible to Bahá’u’lláh. “Let him not wait for any directions,”  
Shoghi Effendi urgently advises, “or expect any special encouragement,  
from the elected representatives of his community, nor be deterred by any  
obstacles which his relatives, or fellow-citizens may be inclined to place in  
his path, nor mind the censure of his critics or enemies.”[[362]](#footnote-362)263-3 The writings of

the Central Figures and of our Guardian are replete with advice and exhor-  
tations concerning the individual’s irreplaceable role in the advancement of  
the Cause. So it is inevitable that we should feel impelled, at this particular  
time in the life of humanity as a whole, to appeal directly to each member  
of our community to ponder the urgent situation facing us all as the helpers  
of the Abhá Beauty.

263.15 Our lot, dear brothers and sisters, is to be consciously involved in a vast  
historic process the like of which has not ever before been experienced by  
any people. As a global community, we have, thus far, attained a unique  
and magnificent success in being representative of the full spectrum of  
the human race—thanks to the inestimable expenditure of life, effort and  
treasure willingly made by thousands of our spiritual forebears. There is  
no other aggregation of human beings who can claim to have raised up  
a system with the demonstrated capacity to unite all of God’s children in  
one world-embracing Order. This achievement places us not only in a posi-  
tion of incomparable strength, but more particularly in one of inescapable  
responsibility. Does not every one of us therefore have a divine obligation  
to fulfill, a sacred duty to perform towards every other one who is not yet  
aware of the call of God’s latest Manifestation? Time does not stop, does  
not wait. With every passing hour a fresh affliction strikes at a distracted  
humanity. Dare we linger?

263.16 In a mere two years the Four Year Plan will be concluded, just some  
months before the end of an unforgettable century. Looming before us,  
then, is a twofold date with destiny. In extolling the unprecedented po-  
tential of the twentieth century, the beloved Master averred that its traces  
will last forever. Seized with such a vision, the mind of the alert follower of  
the Blessed Beauty must undoubtedly be astir with anxious questions as to  
what part he or she will play in these few fleeting years, and as to whether  
he or she will, at the end of this seminal period, have made a mark among  
those enduring traces which the mind of the Master perceived. To ensure  
a soul-satisfying answer, one thing above all else is necessary: to act, to act  
now, and to continue to act.

263.17 Our heartfelt plea at the Holy Threshold on behalf of us all is that we  
may be divinely aided and richly confirmed in whatever we do towards  
meeting the urgent aim of the Divine Plan at so fate-laden a moment in  
human history.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

264  
Election of the Universal House of Justice

3 MAY 1998

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

264.1 NEWLY ELECTED MEMBERS UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE ‘ALÍ NAKHJAVÁNÍ, PETER  
KHAN, ADIB TAHERZADEH, GLENFORD MITCHELL, IAN SEMPLE, HOOPER DUNBAR,  
FARZAM ARBAB, DOUGLAS MARTIN, HUSHMAND FATHEAZAM.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

265  
Message to the Conference  
of the Continental Counselors

3 MAY 1998

To the Conference of the Continental Counselors

Beloved Friends,

265.1 It has been barely two years and four months since you came together  
here at the outset of your current term of service. In our message to your  
conference at that time, we described in detail not only the purpose and  
structure of the Four Year Plan but the form in which it would have to  
be pursued if it was to realize its ambitious aim. You were then given the  
mandate to go forth and prepare the Bahá’í world to take on the challenges  
that lay ahead.

265.2 The extraordinary events of the Convention we have all just witnessed bear  
eloquent testimony to the ardor and effectiveness of your response. All of the  
institutions of the Faith have most certainly played their parts in moving our  
beloved Cause a giant step forward in this brief period. The clarity and vigor  
with which the National Spiritual Assemblies are addressing the tasks of the  
Plan reflect that dramatic advance in maturity that the Guardian encouraged  
us to expect in these closing years of the century. We feel compelled, however,  
to pay special tribute to the selfless, inspiriting and intelligent contributions  
which you have made to this collective enterprise. Your work has brought  
honor to your institution and immense joy to our hearts.

265.3 As a result of your unceasing activity during the months immediately  
following the conference, the Bahá’í world had been made ready, by the

time it received our Riḍván 1996 message, to enter into intensive detailed  
planning. And once national plans were formulated your efforts did not  
slacken; with equal vigor you and your auxiliaries galvanized the believers  
into systematic action and helped them to remain focused on the central  
aim of the Plan. We hope that you will convey to your Auxiliary Board  
members and their assistants our heartfelt gratitude.

265.4 The challenge which now faces the Bahá’í world is to take advantage of  
the momentum thus achieved. It has within its grasp the opportunity to  
multiply its human resources on a scale far beyond anything heretofore at-  
tained. Every measure must be taken to ensure that this possibility becomes  
a reality. Training must be offered widely, to contingents of newly enrolled  
and veteran believers alike. It is also imperative that the energies being gen-  
erated and the skills being developed through training institute programs be  
channelled to serve directly the needs of the Plan. In short—without any  
delay—the work should move to the higher tempo that recent accomplish-  
ments make possible.

265.5 Your consultations this week need to be eminently practical. You come to  
them with a wealth of experience that the Bahá’í community has never be-  
fore enjoyed. You are well aware of the diverse strengths of the communities  
you serve and of the efficacy of the methods being employed in the field.  
The lessons of these past two years need to be examined and correlated,  
and their implications for advancing the process of entry by troops must  
be understood. In this context, you will also have to consider the increased  
capacity of your own institution, the work of the Auxiliary Board members,  
and your interaction with them, with Spiritual Assemblies, and with the  
International Teaching Center, whose concern it is to reinforce your efforts  
with advice, perspectives and resources.

265.6 Dear friends! You represent an army of able and highly motivated servants  
of the Cause throughout the world. Yours is an institution which, in one  
respect, has a particularly intimate relationship with the Universal House of  
Justice; in another, it is able to exercise an influence that penetrates the very  
grass roots of the community. Its nature fits it, uniquely, to serve as a river of  
encouragement, example and love whose waters can refresh and invigorate  
the spirit of every believer they touch.

265.7 We will follow your consultations this week with the heightened hope  
and confidence which your impressive achievements to date have awakened.  
For your part, be sure of our ardent prayers that Bahá’u’lláh will bless your  
deliberations and confirm your efforts to help bring about the massive

increase in resources which the mission of our beloved Cause so urgently  
requires.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

266  
Training Institutes

6 MAY 1998

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

266.1 Enclosed is a copy of a document entitled “Training Institutes” which  
summarizes the guidance provided to date on this important subject. The  
document was made available to delegates at the Eighth International Bahá’í  
Convention, and the Universal House of Justice believes you will find it  
very helpful as a resource paper.[[363]](#footnote-363)266-1

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

FOR DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

267  
Appointment of Counselor members to the  
International Teaching Center

13 MAY 1998

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

267.1 WITH JOYFUL HEARTS WE ANNOUNCE APPOINTMENT COUSELOR MEMBERS INTER-  
NATIONAL TEACHING CENTER FOR FIVE-YEAR TERM BEGINNING 23 MAY 1998: KISER  
BARNES, ROLF VON CZÉKUS, HARTMUT GROSSMANN, VIOLETTE HAAKE, FIRAYDOUN  
JAVAHERI, LAURETTA KING, JOAN LINCOLN, PAYMAN MOHAJER AND PENNY WALKER.  
PROFOUNDLY GRATEFUL SHAPOOR MONADJEM, DONALD ROGERS, FRED SCHECH-  
TER, KIMIKO SCHWERIN AND JOY STEVENSON FOR RECORD DISTINGUISHED SELF-  
SACRIFICING LABORS THIS VITAL INSTITUTION.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

268  
Two Bahá’ís in Iran sentenced to prison

21 MAY 1998

To selected National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

268.1 The Universal House of Justice has asked us to share with you the  
enclosed Persian original and English translation of an extraordinary ver-  
dict handed down by Court of Appeals Number Eight for the Province  
of Khurásán, 18 September 1997, against two members of the Iranian  
Bahá’í community, Mr. Jamáli’d-Dín Ḥájípúr and Mr. Manṣúr Mihrábí.  
Both defendants had appealed against sentences passed on them by the  
Revolutionary Court Number One in Bírjand, Iran, which had sentenced  
each of them to two years imprisonment and the confiscation of property.  
The appeals court upheld the decisions of the lower court. This document  
is being sent so that you may share it with your government and draw  
attention to those statements that indicate the atmosphere in which the  
Bahá’ís of Iran live.

268.2 As with many other judgments by Iranian courts, the document provides  
further evidence that members of the Bahá’í Faith in Iran are being arrested  
and condemned solely because of their membership in what is described  
as “the wayward Bahá’í sect.” The statement in the verdict that “Bahá’ísm  
is recognized as an illegal organization” makes a mockery of the Iranian  
regime’s claim that Bahá’ís nevertheless retain their rights to the observance  
of their religious beliefs. Charges brought against the defendants mention  
that they have “regularly been holding Bahá’í Feasts and meetings on ‘Bahá’í  
Life,’” adducing such activities as evidence of criminal behavior, including  
“espionage” for the state of Israel.

268.3 What is startling in the text of the judgment, however, is that it also  
accepts as evidence of illegal activity such actions of the two defendants as  
holding classes for Bahá’í youth in, respectively, English language studies  
and science and technology. The charges note, without apparent embarrass-  
ment on the part of the Iranian judicial authorities, that the two convicted  
persons carried out these activities “with the intention of improving the  
standard of education of Bahá’í students and their families.” The context in  
which the behavior of the defendants has to be seen derives, of course, from

the fact that the Iranian regime has arbitrarily excluded Bahá’í students from  
higher education solely on grounds of their religious affiliation.

268.4 That senior Bahá’ís like the two defendants have been free to offer their  
services in this regard is, of course, the result of their having been dis-  
missed—again solely on grounds of their religious affiliation—from their  
employment. The charges upheld by the appeals court leave no doubt on  
this point, noting in passing that Mr. Mihrábí had been dismissed from his  
position “as a result of the cleansing procedures.”

268.5 It will be apparent to your National Assembly that the persecution of  
Messrs. Ḥájípúr and Mihrábí is part and parcel of the continuing attempt  
to suffocate the spiritual and community life of the Iranian believers, as  
called for in the secret memorandum endorsed by the Iranian Head of State,  
Ayatollah Khamenei, a copy of which was submitted to the United Na-  
tions Human Rights Commission by its Special Representative, Professor  
Reynaldo Galindo Pohl.

268.6 The general issue of the protection of the civil rights of the members of  
the Iranian Bahá’í community is under close and continuing scrutiny by the  
United Nations, the General Assembly having adopted, on 12 December  
1997, a Resolution (52/142) calling unambiguously for the government  
of Iran to “implement fully the conclusions and recommendations of the  
Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights on religious in-  
tolerance relating to the Bahá’ís … until they are completely emancipated.”  
Those recommendations included the restoration of the Bahá’í commu-  
nity’s rights in the administration of its affairs and the rights of its youth to  
education ….

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

FOR DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

269  
Formation of the National Spiritual Assembly  
of Slovakia

23 MAY 1998

To the Bahá’ís of Slovakia

Dearly loved Friends,

269.1 The emergence of the independent National Spiritual Assembly of the  
Bahá’ís of Slovakia at the midpoint of the Four Year Plan is a cause of  
rejoicing for the whole Bahá’í world. It is the fruit of the self-sacrificing  
endeavors of the devoted believers, whether pioneers or native Czechs and  
Slovaks, who have raised up so many soundly based, spiritually motivated  
Bahá’í communities in the course of the past decade. And looking further  
back still, we see the foundations of these achievements in the travels of out-  
standing Bahá’í teachers such as Martha Root, in the extraordinary response  
of leading Czechoslovak statesmen to the Teachings of Bahá’u’lláh, and in  
the heroic steadfastness of the early believers who kept alive the spark of the  
Faith through so many dark years of suffering.

269.2 You stand now on the threshold of challenging new developments in  
which you will contribute your special qualities to the advancement of the  
Cause of God in Europe as your national Bahá’í community grows in the  
number and diversity of believers and in the strength of its institutions.

269.3 It is our fervent prayer in the Holy Shrines that the Slovak Bahá’í com-  
munity, in close collaboration with the communities of the Czech Republic,  
Austria, Hungary, Poland, Romania, and the Ukraine, will become a shin-  
ing light in the heart of the European continent, shedding far and wide the  
illumination of the Message of Bahá’u’lláh.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

270  
Deputization of Institute Teachers

1 JUNE 1998

To selected National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

270.1 Recently a number of questions have been raised regarding the deputi-  
zation of institute teachers and coordinators, and the Universal House of  
Justice has instructed us to bring to your attention the passage below from  
its Riḍván 1996 message and to comment on it as follows.

270.1a “Center your energies in the propagation of the Faith of God,”  
Bahá’u’lláh thus instructs His servants, adding, “Whoso is worthy of  
so high a calling, let him arise and promote it. Whoso is unable, it is  
his duty to appoint him who will, in his stead, proclaim this Revela-  
tion ….” Just as one deputizes another to teach in one’s stead by cov-  
ering the expenses of a pioneer or traveling teacher, one can deputize a  
teacher serving an institute, who is, of course, a teacher of teachers. To  
do so, one may make contributions to the Continental Bahá’í Fund,  
as well as to the Local, National and International Funds, earmarked  
for this purpose.[[364]](#footnote-364)270-1

270.2 Referring to this passage in its letter of 6 August 1996,[[365]](#footnote-365)270-2 the House of  
Justice informed the Bahá’í world of its decision to contribute US$300,000  
for the deputization of institute teachers, to be divided among the five Con-  
tinental Funds, and expressed the hope that the friends, especially those  
with means, would follow suit and would give adequate attention to this  
area of urgent need. In that letter, it was indicated that the Counselors  
would be asked to keep their Auxiliary Board members apprised of the level  
of deputization required by institutes in various regions so that they could  
make this information available to those who wished to pursue this new  
possibility.

270.3 Clearly, the individual believer has a number of options available to him  
or her in complying with Bahá’u’lláh’s injunction. Funds can be given di-  
rectly to a specific believer who has been selected to act as one’s deputy or  
can be contributed to one of the various Funds of the Faith, as mentioned  
above. However, for the deputization of institute teachers, the House of  
Justice wished to ensure that contributions and needs would be matched in  
such a way that national communities whose resources are meager would  
benefit from the assistance of those in communities with more resources at  
their disposal, whether in the same continent or another. Since the Conti-  
nental Boards of Counselors are in the best position to know the needs of  
institutes in various regions, it was felt that contributing to the Continental  
Fund is an efficient way for an individual believer to perform this service.

270.4 With this in mind, the House of Justice requested the International  
Teaching Center to compile and organize the necessary information and  
to share it with all Counselors. Accordingly, the Teaching Center identified  
three figures around which the deputization needs worldwide seemed to be  
clustered: US$1,200, US$3,600 and US$7,200 per staff member per year.  
It also drew up a list of countries, in groups by continent, where institute  
teachers and coordinators could benefit from deputization. It was suggested  
to the Counselors that they provide this list and the figures to the Auxiliary  
Board members to use in their consultations with those wishing to sup-  
port one or more staff members of an institute for a given period of time,  
allowing the friends to choose the region to which their funds should be  
channelled. The Trustees of the Continental Funds were asked to see to  
it that the appropriate amounts would reach institutes in the designated  
regions. This scheme was approved by the Universal House of Justice, and  
it is envisioned that the Teaching Center will bring the list of countries up  
to date from time to time and revise the figures as necessary.

270.5 While the Auxiliary Board members are not being asked to solicit funds,  
they are expected to go beyond the general promotion of deputization among  
the believers and to discuss the specific details with them when it is appropri-  
ate to do so. The arrangements needed to ensure that the contributions reach  
the proper Continental Funds vary from country to country. Therefore, you  
may wish to consult with the Counselors to determine what measures can be  
taken to advance this important endeavor in your community.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

FOR DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

271  
Passing of Peter Vuyiya, former Counselor  
member of the International Teaching Center

8 JUNE 1998

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

271.1 DEEPLY GRIEVED PASSING PETER VUYIYA NOBLE-HEARTED, SPIRITUALLY MOTI-  
VATED, DEDICATED SERVANT BAHÁ’U’LLÁH. HIS SEVERAL DECADES LOYAL SERVICE,  
INCLUDING MEMBERSHIP SUCCESSIVELY NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY KENYA,  
BOARD OF COUNSELORS AFRICA, AND INTERNATIONAL TEACHING CENTER HOLY  
LAND, BEAR ELOQUENT TESTIMONY STERLING QUALITIES WHICH CHARACTERIZED  
HIGHLY VALUED EFFORTS THIS DISTINGUISHED PROMOTER FAITH BLESSED BEAUTY.  
PRAYING HOLY SHRINES PROGRESS HIS RADIANT SOUL ABHÁ KINGDOM.

271.2 URGE ALL NATIONAL COMMUNITIES AFRICA HOLD MEMORIAL GATHERINGS HIS  
HONOR. NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY UGANDA CALLED UPON HOLD MEMORIAL  
SERVICE IN HOUSE OF WORSHIP. MAY AFRICAN BAHÁ’Í YOUTH EMULATE EXAMPLE  
HIS SELFLESS SERVICES BELOVED CAUSE.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

272  
Duties of the International Teaching Center

10 JUNE 1998

The International Teaching Center

Beloved Friends,

272.1 Twenty-five years have passed since the establishment of the Interna-  
tional Teaching Center, during which time its structure, including that of  
the institution of the Continental Boards of Counselors, has been steadily  
consolidated. The Counselors and their auxiliaries have assumed their re-  
sponsibilities for the protection and the propagation of the Faith with in-  
creasing vigor. Their role in the advancement of the Cause, whether through  
contacts with the individual believers or consultations with Assemblies, has  
been crucial, and the animating influence of their institution can now be  
felt in every area of Bahá’í endeavor. The contributions they are making to  
the execution of the Four Year Plan are ample evidence of the maturation

taking place. This impressive record stands as a testimony to the diligence  
and wisdom with which the Teaching Center has guided their efforts.

272.2 The enclosed overview of the duties assigned to your institution, ex-  
pressed in broad terms, will provide the general framework for your opera-  
tions. The focus of your work will, of course, be determined by the specific  
requirements of the Faith at any given period in its development.

272.3 In the matter of protection, the current procedures for determining the  
expulsion and reinstatement of Covenant-breakers remain unchanged, and  
you will continue to exercise the responsibility for evaluating the reports  
of the Counselors and submitting your decision in each case to us for our  
consideration and approval before it is announced.

272.4 In recent years, opposition to the Cause has taken forms unfamiliar to  
the Bahá’í community, and this poses new challenges to your institution.  
You will have to take measures to help the Counselors to develop, in col-  
laboration with National Spiritual Assemblies, the ability to detect these  
subtle attacks and to counter their negative influence. In this connection,  
their efforts to encourage promising young scholars and promote within the  
Bahá’í community an appropriate appreciation of intellectual attainment  
will represent yet another invaluable service to the Cause.

272.5 In the field of propagation, during the first two years of this term, you  
need to center your energies on the prosecution of the Four Year Plan. This  
is a decisive moment in the history of the world and in the fortunes of the  
Faith, and it is apparent that the Bahá’í community has become endowed  
with a new strength. The Bahá’ís of the world have their eyes fixed on one  
single aim. In order to significantly advance the process of entry by troops,  
they have been asked to concentrate on the discharge of two immediate  
tasks: to multiply the human resources of the Cause on an unprecedented  
scale and, in ever-increasing numbers, to devote themselves to teaching.  
Since the commencement of the Plan, the friends everywhere have been la-  
boring assiduously, acquiring the powers needed to accomplish these tasks.  
Through the imaginative use of the means at your disposal, you will be able  
to reinforce their exertions and ensure that they forge ahead with vision and  
resolve.

272.6 To this end, it will be important for the Teaching Center to keep care-  
ful watch over the progress being made worldwide, analyzing the situa-  
tion of the Faith region by region and, if necessary, in specific countries.  
In this way, you can determine the extent to which the capacity of each  
national community to promote the process of entry by troops is be-

ing developed and exercised. You will be able to identify specific needs,  
for example, in the strengthening of institutes, in the implementation of  
teaching projects, and in the production and distribution of literature,  
and to respond to them by making recommendations to us, offering ad-  
vice to the Counselors, deploying pioneers and traveling teachers, and  
disbursing financial resources.

272.7 Throughout the world, evidences multiply of a new energy at work in  
the life of the Cause. You have every reason to feel confident of the ability  
of your institution to help the friends seize the extraordinary possibilities  
thus opening before them. Be sure of our ardent prayers that Bahá’u’lláh will  
confirm you in this great endeavor.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

**OVERVIEW OF DUTIES EXERCISED  
BY THE INTERNATIONAL TEACHING CENTER  
UNDER THE GUIDANCE OF THE  
UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE**

272.7a • To exercise full responsibility for coordinating, stimulating and  
directing the Continental Boards of Counselors, acting also as  
liaison between them and the Universal House of Justice.

272.7b • To be fully informed of the situation of the Cause in all parts  
of the world and, from this knowledge, to make reports and  
recommendations to the Universal House of Justice and give advice  
to the Continental Boards of Counselors.

272.7c • To watch over the security and ensure the protection of the  
Faith of God. To investigate all cases of incipient Covenant-  
breaking, employing, as necessary, the services of the Continental  
Counselors and their auxiliaries. To evaluate the reports rendered  
by the Continental Counselors and to decide whether the offender  
should be expelled from the Cause, submitting the decision to  
the Universal House of Justice for its consideration, consultation  
with the Hands of the Cause of God, and approval before an  
announcement is made. To follow a similar procedure for the  
reinstatement of a contrite Covenant-breaker.

272.7d • To be attentive to the spiritual health of the Bahá’í community,  
strengthening the believers to resist the influence of both internal  
and external enemies and ensuring, to this end, that the Continental  
Counselors assist National and Local Spiritual Assemblies in

dealing with questions that cast doubt on the integrity of the Faith  
and its teachings.

272.7e • To be alert to possibilities for the expansion of the Faith, the  
consolidation of its institutions and the development of Bahá’í  
community life, analyzing such possibilities in the context of  
global plans, fostering consultation among the believers and their  
institutions on the nature and methods of sustained processes  
of growth, anticipating needs worldwide, and ensuring that the  
necessary resources become available to national communities. To  
give particular attention to the development of human resources,  
helping national communities increase their capacity to endow  
growing contingents of believers with spiritual insights, knowledge  
of the Faith, and skills and abilities of service.

272.7f • To administer a budget provided from the Bahá’í International  
Fund, allocating therefrom monies for the development of insti-  
tutes, the implementation of various types of teaching projects,  
and the production and distribution of literature and audiovisual  
materials, as well as the operations of the Continental Boards of  
Counselors. To also administer the expenditure of the Interna-  
tional Deputization Fund and to see to it that pioneers and travel-  
ing teachers are deployed in areas of need, with the help of the  
Continental Pioneer Committees, whose work it directs.

273  
Reaching the age of spiritual maturity

16 JUNE 1998

To two individual believers

273.1 The Universal House of Justice has received your email message of 5  
April 1998 regarding the responsibility of parents for their children’s behav-  
ior, and we have been asked to convey the following.

273.2 While some opportunities for service in the Administrative Order are  
clearly reserved for those who are over twenty-one years of age, at age fifteen  
the individual has the privilege of affirming, in his own name, his faith in  
Bahá’u’lláh. The importance of attaining spiritual maturity at the age of  
fifteen is that it marks that point in life at which the believer takes into his  
own hands the responsibility for his spiritual destiny.

273.3 The following extract from a Tablet of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá links the attainment  
of maturity with the deepening of one’s understanding and comprehen-  
sion of the realities of life, and the enhancement of one’s very capacity for  
understanding:

273.3a Know thou that before maturity man liveth from day to day and  
comprehendeth only such matters as are superficial and outwardly  
obvious. However, when he cometh of age he understandeth the reali-  
ties of things and the inner truths. Indeed, in his comprehension, his  
feelings, his deductions and his discoveries, every day of his life after  
maturity is equal to a year before it.[[366]](#footnote-366)273-1

While parents may grieve at some of the choices their children make, at the  
age of maturity a son or daughter is then essentially responsible for the deci-  
sions he or she takes and becomes answerable to God accordingly. Parents  
should continue in every way possible to help, encourage, and guide their  
children, but they should recognize clearly the basic change in account-  
ability that has occurred.

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

274  
Appointment of Continental Counselors

17 JUNE 1998

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

274.1 JOYFULLY ANNOUNCE APPOINTMENT FOLLOWING CONTINENTAL COUNSELORS TO  
FILL VACANCIES CREATED BY RECENT APPOINTMENTS TO INTERNATIONAL TEACH-  
ING CENTER: IN AFRICA GARTH POLLOCK, IN THE AMERICAS ANTONIO GABRIEL  
MARQUES FILHO, IN ASIA NIDAVANUR BASKARAN, IN AUSTRALASIA MANIJEH REY-  
HANI.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

275  
Twenty-fifth anniversary of the  
establishment of the International Teaching Center

2 JULY 1998

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dearly loved Friends,

275.1 Twenty-five years have now elapsed since the establishment of the  
International Teaching Center announced in our message of 5 June  
1973.[[367]](#footnote-367)275-1 These years have seen the progressive unfoldment of the duties of  
this cardinal institution of the Cause of God, and the development of its  
close interaction with the Universal House of Justice on the one hand and  
the Continental Boards of Counselors on the other. During the five years  
just completed, it exercised increased responsibility in relation to the protec-  
tion of the Faith. It stimulated pioneering and travel-teaching, as well as  
the production and distribution of literature and audiovisual aids and, after  
the launching of the Four Year Plan, it imparted a fundamental impetus to  
the establishment and sound functioning of training institutes. Suffusing  
all these activities has been its continuous interaction with the Continental  
Boards of Counselors, through whom its influence and encouragement have  
reached all levels and every area of the Bahá’í world community.

275.2 On 23 May 1998 the International Teaching Center entered upon a five-  
year period full of promise for the speedy advancement of the process of  
entry by troops into the Cause of Bahá’u’lláh. On the morning of Saturday  
13 June, the newly appointed members having arrived from their far-flung  
homelands, all the Counselor members of the Teaching Center met in Bahjí  
with the Hands of the Cause of God Amatu’l-Bahá Rúḥíyyih Khánum and  
‘Alí Akbar Furútan, and the members of the Universal House of Justice, for  
prayer at the Sacred Threshold of the Shrine of Bahá’u’lláh. There followed  
a week of intense consultation and preparation for the next phase of their  
work, focused on the prosecution of the second half of the Four Year Plan.

275.3 It is our ardent prayer in the Holy Shrines that as the edifices which are  
the Seats of the Institutions of the Faith at its World Center rise before  
the public gaze on the slope of Mount Carmel, and the influence of the

institutions of its Administrative Order becomes more potent in every land,  
so the ears of mankind will become attuned to the glorious Message which  
the devoted followers of Bahá’u’lláh are proclaiming and, on every side, the  
spiritually thirsty masses will rally to His Banner.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

276  
Execution of Bahá’í in Iran

22 JULY 1998

To National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

276.1 With sorrowful hearts we have to inform you of the execution in Mash-  
had, Iran, of a Bahá’í, Mr. Rúḥu’lláh Rawḥání, in the early morning of 21  
July 1998. We have been informed that Mr. Rawḥání’s body was handed  
over to his relatives and was buried at 11:00 a.m. local time on the same day.

276.2 Mr. Rawḥání was fifty-two years old and was arrested on 20 September  
1997, accused of converting a young woman from Islám to the Bahá’í Faith.  
The woman concerned denied that she had converted; she explained that  
her mother was a Bahá’í and that she herself had been raised as a Bahá’í. She  
was not arrested.

276.3 Mr. Rawḥání was kept incommunicado for the duration of his impris-  
onment; his family was not permitted to communicate with him, and no  
information is available regarding his treatment in prison. There is no evi-  
dence that Mr. Rawḥání was accorded any legal process, and no sentence  
was announced. It appears certain that he was not allowed access to a lawyer.

276.4 The night before his execution, someone from the Iranian Intelligence  
Department telephoned a Bahá’í in Mashhad stating that Mr. Rawḥání  
was to be executed the next day. Initially, the friends did not believe this  
statement, as they had experienced previous incidents when false statements  
were made to the Bahá’ís in an attempt to cause anguish. It was not until  
they were summoned to collect the body that they realized that the informa-  
tion had been correct.

276.5 You will recall that no Bahá’í had been executed since March 1992, and  
that the Government of Iran has been indicating to the world that the situ-  
ation regarding the Bahá’ís had changed. However, the execution of Mr.

Rawḥání causes grave concern that, whatever the official assertion of the  
Iranian Government, the Bahá’í community of Iran remains unprotected,  
and officials in that country can persecute the Bahá’ís at will and with im-  
punity ….

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

277  
Details regarding Rúḥu’lláh Rawḥání,  
Bahá’í martyr in Iran

22 JULY 1998

To selected National Spiritual Assemblies

277.1 Further to the circular letter of 22 July 1998 from the Universal House of  
Justice, informing National Spiritual Assemblies of the execution in Mash-  
had, Iran, of Mr. Rúḥu’lláh Rawḥání, we provide below information about  
him which has just been received from his close relatives in Australia ….

277.2 Mr. Rawḥání was a person of a deeply gentle and innocent character.  
Indeed his family nicknamed him “Rúḥu’lláh the innocent.” He was the  
father of four children, sons aged 24 and 17, and daughters aged 22 and  
9. His family, unable to obtain any information about his circumstances or  
state of health, have undergone intense suffering during his imprisonment.

277.3 Mr. Rawḥání was not a wealthy man. He made his living as a salesman  
of medical supplies and health products, an occupation he engaged in for  
about twenty years. Approximately twelve years ago he was sentenced to  
a period of two years’ imprisonment, because of his membership in the  
Bahá’í Faith, and to an additional one year’s internal exile in the village of  
Najafábád, which he was not permitted to leave and where he had to report  
daily to the police.

277.4 After this period he returned to Mashhad to continue his profession.  
About four years ago, his brother-in-law from Australia, who was visiting  
his ill father in Iran, saw Mr. Rawḥání. He said that the psychological suffer-  
ing that Mr. Rawḥání had undergone in his earlier imprisonment was clearly  
evident in his face. His children were also affected by the suffering imposed  
on their father. Just prior to his arrest in September 1997, the family had  
decided to move to Iṣfahán, as Mr. Rawḥání had found it increasingly dif-  
ficult to make a satisfactory living in Mashhad. On the day of the family’s  
intended departure, revolutionary guards came to their home and arrested

him. From that time, the family had seen Mr. Rawḥání only once—about  
a month after he was arrested—after which the authorities refused to give  
them any information about his situation, or even to tell them whether he  
was alive or dead.

277.5 This changed on Monday last, when the family were informed that they  
could see him for one hour. It is understood that this meeting was the first  
time that Mr. Rawḥání had breathed fresh air in three months. The next  
day the family were called to the prison to collect his body. They were given  
only one hour to bury their loved one, despite their appeal for more time to  
enable other relatives to attend the funeral. From the marks of a rope on his  
neck, it appeared that Mr. Rawḥání had been executed by hanging.

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

278  
Imprisonment of four Bahá’ís in Iran

28 JULY 1998

To selected National Spiritual Assemblies

278.1 You may have seen the BBC Newsfile report that on 26 July 1998 Radio  
Tehran and Iranian television quoted the President of the Tehran Revo-  
lutionary Tribunal, Mr. Gholam-Hossein Rahbar-Pour, as saying, “Essen-  
tially, none of the branches of the court has issued a death sentence for a  
person named Ruhollah Rowhani, affiliated to the Bahá’í sect. The report  
of his execution is a total lie.” The report goes on to say, “None of Iran’s  
provincial revolutionary courts had issued such a sentence either, he added.”  
A similar release was made by Agence France Presse. This statement by a  
leading representative of the Iranian judiciary is very significant, in that  
it conforms to the Islamic Revolutionary Government’s normal practice of  
denying that the Bahá’ís are persecuted in Iran.

278.2 Contrary to the statement of Mr. Rahbar-Pour, the facts are as stated in  
our previous letters about the execution of Mr. Rúḥu’lláh Rawḥání, namely  
that he was arrested in Mashhad in September 1997 on the specious charge  
of having converted a young Muslim, was held in solitary confinement for  
almost the whole of his detention, and was executed on 21 July 1998, the  
day after his family had been permitted to visit him for the first time since

October the previous year. The family was summoned to collect his body  
and required, despite their protests, to complete the burial within one hour,  
under the supervision of the Intelligence Department.

278.3 It has since been established that the authorities gave the family no docu-  
mentation about Mr. Rawḥání—no court verdicts or death or burial certifi-  
cates. His death certificate was seen, however, and on it was written that the  
cause of death was suffocation. A security officer tore up this certificate in  
front of the family, and arranged for another doctor to write a new death  
certificate, giving the cause of death as internal disease.

278.4 The House of Justice was also informed a short time ago that the trial  
of four Bahá’í prisoners in Mashhad—Mr. Sírús Dhabíḥí-Muqaddam,  
Mr. Hidáyat-Káshifí Najafábádí, Mr. ‘Aṭá’u’lláh Ḥamíd Naṣírízádih and  
Mr. Rúḥu’lláh Rawḥání—took place in the month of Bahman (January/  
February) this year, and that they were all sentenced to death. The Su-  
preme Court in Tehran confirmed the death sentence only in the case of  
Mr. Rawḥání, and, for technical reasons, returned the cases of the other  
three to Mashhad for a retrial, which took place on 29 April. The prisoners  
were not permitted to hire their own lawyers, but their defense was pre-  
sented by one appointed by the court. The prisoners objected to some of the  
statements of the advocate on their behalf, and a heated argument between  
him and the prisoners took place in court. The prisoners were told that the  
verdict of the court would take about three months to be issued.

278.5 The families of the three prisoners were recently given permission to visit  
them every second Tuesday. The date of the next scheduled visit is 28 July.  
The families are greatly concerned that what happened with Mr. Rawḥání  
may happen with these prisoners—he was executed the day after the fam-  
ily visit. The Intelligence Department brought the three prisoners to the  
memorial service for Mr. Rawḥání. This was a most unusual thing to have  
happened, and it is feared that it may also be an indication that they may  
expect the same fate ….

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

279  
Visit by representative of the  
Bahá’í International Community to the  
United Nations to the Pacific Islands

29 JULY 1998

The National Spiritual Assemblies of the Bahá’ís  
of the Cook Islands, the Eastern Caroline Islands,  
the Fiji Islands, Kiribati, the Mariana Islands, the  
Marshall Islands, New Caledonia and Loyalty Islands,  
Papua New Guinea, Samoa, the Solomon Islands, Tonga,  
Tuvalu, Vanuatu, and the Western Caroline Islands

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

279.1 The Universal House of Justice has asked us to convey the following  
message which requires your immediate attention.

279.2 Ever since the Peace Statement was released in 1985, the House of Jus-  
tice has entertained the hope that leaders in the Pacific Region would, in  
a joint effort, take initiatives towards the realization of world peace. This  
expectation was brightened by the immediate, positive responses the Peace  
Statement received from two leaders, Sir Thomas Davis of the Cook Islands  
and the late President Amata Kabua of the Marshall Islands, both of whom  
subsequently visited the Bahá’í World Center. One of the purposes of the  
establishment some time ago of the Bahá’í International Community office  
in the Pacific was to encourage these leaders towards constructive endeavors  
of global significance, but, alas, for a number of reasons it was not possible  
to sustain the activities of that office. However, this purpose need not be  
abandoned.

2793 The House of Justice has decided to send an emissary to call on key  
leaders of your countries, particularly heads of state, to emphasize their role  
in advancing the cause of peace. Mr. Giovanni Ballerio, a representative of  
the Bahá’í International Community to the United Nations, is to undertake  
this mission. Following a briefing at the Bahá’í World Center, he will travel  
directly to the Pacific region, beginning his itinerary in Western Samoa on  
9 September and ending it in Palau on 22 December 1998.

279.4 You are each urgently and warmly requested to take the following action.  
Arrange an appointment for Mr. Ballerio to meet your head of state during  
the period of his stay in your country, as indicated in the enclosed schedule.

Give as your reason for requesting such an appointment that a representa-  
tive of the Bahá’í International Community to the United Nations, who is  
based in Geneva, will be traveling in the Pacific area at the request of the  
Universal House of Justice, the head of that Community; and he has been  
asked by the House of Justice to seek an opportunity to convey its greetings  
to the head of state. If it can be arranged, a Continental Counselor will be  
present in your community so as to render any assistance that may be called  
for and, along with a member of your Assembly, to accompany Mr. Ballerio  
during his meeting with the head of state.

279.5 As a support to your own ongoing efforts to maintain good relations with  
your government, you should feel free to take advantage of Mr. Ballerio’s  
presence in your country to arrange for him to meet with other high govern-  
ment officials, if time permits.

279.6 Mr. Ballerio will communicate directly with you concerning the particu-  
lars of his travel schedule and other relevant matters.

279.7 We are to assure you of the ardent prayers of the House of Justice in the  
Holy Shrines that your efforts to assist in this important activity may be  
abundantly confirmed by the Blessed Beauty.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

FOR DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

280  
Continued persecution by Iranian government  
of Bahá’ís in Iran

4 AUGUST 1998

To selected National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

280.1 The Universal House of Justice has been informed by a number of Na-  
tional Spiritual Assemblies that the Iranian ambassadors in their respective  
countries have now acknowledged that Mr. Rúḥu’lláh Rawḥání, whose  
execution the Iranian authorities originally denied, was indeed hanged in  
Mashhad on 21 July 1998, as reported in our letter of 22 July to National  
Assemblies. The justification given for Mr. Rawḥání’s brutal killing is that  
he was convicted of “criminal acts against national security.”

280.2 As you are aware, the charge against Mr. Rawḥání and his long incarcera-  
tion bore no relation to any question of national security; they arose out

of the accusation that he had converted a young Muslim woman to the  
Bahá’í Faith. This young woman has made it clear that she is not a religious  
convert, but was raised as a Bahá’í by her mother, who is herself a member  
of the Faith. It is reasonable to conclude that the sudden introduction of  
an entirely fictitious charge related to national security represents a belated  
attempt by Iranian authorities to fend off criticism from other governments,  
the media and human rights agencies, and to provide a plausible excuse for  
denying access to relevant information and documentation.

280.3 Included in the statements from the Iranian embassies is a report that  
Mr. Rawḥání had been arrested “for the same reasons” (i.e. violations of  
national security) twice before … the facts of Mr. Rawḥání’s earlier two  
arrests leave no doubt as to how completely baseless are the charges now  
brought against his memory:

280.3a 1) Mr. Rawḥání was first arrested in 1984 as a former member of  
the Local Spiritual Assembly of Cháhishk, a village near Mashhad.  
Although all Bahá’í administrative bodies had been dissolved  
in response to an order from Iran’s Attorney General in 1983,  
some forty friends, including Mr. Rawḥání, were arrested on the  
retroactive charge of having previously been members of Assemblies  
and Bahá’í committees in the Mashhad region. Mr. Rawḥání  
served more than a year in prison, over two years’ internal exile in  
Najafábád, near Iṣfahán, and was compelled to pay a fine of over  
one million rials before being permitted to return to his home.

280.3b 2) Mr. Rawḥání’s second arrest occurred approximately four years  
ago. With the dissolution of their administrative institutions, the  
believers found themselves having to make informal arrangements  
for the conduct of such purely religious activities as Nineteen  
Day Feasts, children’s classes, prayer meetings and the like. It was  
Mr. Rawḥání’s involvement in one such planning meeting that  
occasioned his second arrest. He, like all the others taken into cus-  
tody on that occasion, was released after twenty-four hours.

280.4 Until recently, the Iranian authorities have done relatively little to con-  
ceal the fact that Bahá’ís are arrested, tried, sentenced and punished solely  
on the grounds of their religious beliefs and activities. The text of the judg-  
ment of the appeals court in the cases of Mr. Jamáli’d-Dín Ḥájípúr and  
Mr. Manṣúr Mihrábí, forwarded to you with our letter of 21 May 1998,  
makes it clear that the official position of the government of Iran and its

courts is that the Bahá’í religion is itself “an illegal organization” and that a  
person’s membership in it makes him or her, by definition, liable to criminal  
charges. The proceedings against Messrs. Rawḥání, Ḥájípúr and Mihrábí  
make a mockery of the Iranian Government’s assurances that, even though  
the Bahá’í Faith is not one of the religions recognized in the constitution of  
that country, Iranian Bahá’ís nevertheless retain the right to the observance  
of their religious beliefs. Activities such as “holding Bahá’í Feasts and meet-  
ings on ‘Bahá’í Life’” are brazenly adduced as evidence of criminal behavior,  
including “espionage” for foreign governments.

280.5 It may be noted in passing that these shameless proceedings in Iranian  
courts against Bahá’í citizens of the country violate fundamental provisions  
of Iran’s Constitution, which guarantees written charges, the selection  
of legal representation, public trial, and verdicts which are reasoned and  
documented “with reference to the articles and principles of the law in ac-  
cordance with which they are delivered.” …

280.6 In view of the efforts of Iranian diplomatic spokesmen to suggest some  
significance in the fact that a Bahá’í like Mr. Rawḥání has been arrested  
several times … most of the people arrested with Mr. Rawḥání on earlier  
occasions have likewise been arrested for a second or third time. The reason  
is related to the point made in our letter of 21 May 1998 that the province  
of Khurásán (whose capital is Mashhad) appears to have been selected as  
one of those regions in which a policy of particularly severe intimidation  
is being pursued. Random arrests and imprisonment of believers who are  
seen as active in encouraging the religious life of the friends are apparently  
aimed at generating fear in the community as a whole. Alas, it now seems  
not unlikely that, as this intimidation had failed to produce any significant  
effect, the hanging of Mr. Rawḥání was decided upon as a demonstration of  
the seriousness of the authorities’ determination to pursue the goals exposed  
in the secret document drawn up in 1991 by the Supreme Revolutionary  
Council.

280.7 The current campaign of disinformation being carried on by Iranian  
embassies increases our concern about the safety of Mr. ‘Aṭá’u’lláh Ḥamíd  
Naṣírízádih, Mr. Sírús Dhabíḥí-Muqaddam and Mr. Hidáyat-Káshifí Na-  
jafábádí, who were likewise sentenced to death in Mashhad and are now  
awaiting their fate after a farcical “retrial.”

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

281  
Bahá’í Sacred literature in simplified English

12 AUGUST 1998

To an individual believer

Dear Bahá’í Friend,

281.1 The Universal House of Justice has asked us to … reply to your letters  
… elaborating your previously expressed views concerning your feeling of a  
need for Bahá’í sacred literature in simplified English, and we are to convey  
the following.

281.2 The House of Justice fully appreciates that the real purpose of your letters  
is to find a way to help the largest number of people, whatever their ability  
in English, to experience the Word of God as brought by Bahá’u’lláh; and it  
sympathizes with your desire to make the Teachings accessible to those who  
are not adept at reading English. Undoubtedly, a great deal can be done to  
fulfill your desire; however, it is important for you to understand basically  
that the standard of presentation of the divine Word cannot be lowered,  
and that it must be made available to all, including those who cannot read  
it in its elevated style. No simplification of language can take its place.

281.3 Even an unlettered person is capable of responding to the exalted lan-  
guage of the Holy Scriptures, as it is the inner spirit of the divine Texts  
that touches the heart. Bahá’u’lláh states in a well-known Tablet that, “The  
Word of God is the king of words and its pervasive influence is incalculable.  
… The Word is the master key for the whole world, inasmuch as through  
its potency the doors of the hearts of men, which in reality are the doors  
of heaven, are unlocked.”[[368]](#footnote-368)281-1 Hearts become attracted and souls confirmed  
through the mysterious effects of exposure to the living Word—that Word  
which has demonstrated the power to stimulate intellectual development.  
You yourself have mentioned that a mystical experience enabled you to per-  
severe in learning to understand the divine Texts.

281.4 You write that the people who you are trying to reach are not well educat-  
ed and thus not able to comprehend the language of the Writings. It is not  
the prerogative of anyone to judge what another individual is capable of un-  
derstanding from the Word of God. Consider, for instance, that throughout

the world millions of Christians, from all walks of life, have for generations  
derived spiritual sustenance from the King James Bible. The publication  
of the Bible in simplified English is a relatively recent development and  
coincides with a period in which Christian organizations have lost much of  
their historical vitality; it also coincides with the lamentable decline in the  
standard of English usage in the United States and other English-speaking  
countries. An even more potent example relates to Islám, many generations  
of the adherents of which, literate or illiterate, have memorized all or large  
portions of their Holy Book, the Qur’án; it would be unthinkable to such  
believers to be presented with the proposition of simplifying the language  
of Muḥammad’s Revelation.

281.5 The House of Justice does not want to see a dilution of the standard of  
English translation of the Writings established by Shoghi Effendi. Regard-  
ing such translations, it is suggested that you may find it illuminating to  
read the two paragraphs in the introduction to the Kitáb-i-Aqdas … con-  
cerning “the style of language in which the Kitáb-i-Aqdas has been rendered  
into English.”[[369]](#footnote-369)281-2

281.6 The matter of Englishing certain Arabic or Persian terminologies has  
been and will continue to be given attention by the House of Justice. For  
instance, it has already decided that terms and place names, like Teheran  
and Shiraz, which have recognized spellings in languages using the Roman  
alphabet, need not appear in their transliterated forms as Ṭihrán and Shíráz  
in materials intended for general distribution among non-Bahá’ís.

281.7 It is of course understood that some people do not have the vocabulary to  
read literature of a certain level. It is possible, therefore, to accompany the  
Texts with explanatory material. If, in this context, you wish to pursue your  
question further, you will have to take it up with your National Spiritual  
Assembly and abide by its advice.

281.8 As you strive to deepen your knowledge of the Faith and to serve its vital  
interests, be assured of the ardent prayers of the House of Justice in the  
Holy Shrines that you may be divinely assisted and confirmed.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

FOR DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

282  
Release of a compilation on the arts

19 AUGUST 1998

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

282.1 The reference in the Riḍván 153 B.E. message of the Universal House  
of Justice concerning the importance of the arts has encouraged the friends  
in many countries to initiate and pursue activities to use various forms of  
art in promoting the teaching work. A number of Spiritual Assemblies and  
friends also suggested that a compilation on the subject be prepared. This  
request was approved by the House of Justice and a compilation entitled  
*The Importance of the Arts in Promoting the Faith* has been completed by  
the Research Department, and a copy is enclosed herewith. The House of  
Justice leaves it to your discretion to determine how best its contents may be  
shared with the friends under your jurisdiction.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

FOR DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

283  
Clarification on the role of the  
Universal House of Justice

27 AUGUST 1998

To an individual believer

Dear Bahá’í Friend,

283.1 The Universal House of Justice has asked us to convey the following  
reply to your letter … seeking clarification on the “interpretative function”  
of that institution ….

283.2 In the light of the Teachings which are well known to you, and given the  
repeated statements of the House of Justice on this subject, it is not correct  
to insist that the House of Justice has an interpretative function. This mat-  
ter has been dealt with in three published letters, dated 9 March 1965, 27  
May 1966 and 7 December 1969, appearing in *Messages from the Universal  
House of Justice: 1963–1986* (U.S. Bahá’í Publishing Trust). A careful study  
of these letters can provide you with the answers you seek. However, the

House of Justice is happy to offer some further comments for your consid-  
eration.

283.3 Any reference to authoritative or binding interpretation of Bahá’í Scrip-  
ture is a reference to the divinely guided meaning given to such Scripture  
by either ‘Abdu’l-Bahá or the Guardian, the two persons authorized in the  
sacred Texts to interpret the Teachings. With regard to Shoghi Effendi, your  
letter cites a passage from the 9 March 1965 letter of the House of Justice  
which says: “The Guardian reveals what the Scripture means; his interpreta-  
tion is a statement of truth which cannot be varied. Upon the Universal  
House of Justice, in the words of the Guardian, ‘has been conferred the  
exclusive right of legislating on matters not expressly revealed in the Bahá’í  
writings.’” In keeping with its legislative function the House of Justice exer-  
cises the role of elucidation based on passages in the Will and Testament of  
‘Abdu’l-Bahá and statements in the writings of the Guardian. For example,  
‘Abdu’l-Bahá states:

283.3a It is incumbent upon these members (of the Universal House of Jus-  
tice) to … deliberate upon all problems which have caused difference,  
questions that are obscure and matters that are not expressly recorded  
in the Book … and bear upon daily transactions ….

(*Will and Testament of* ‘Abdu’l*-Bahá* (Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Trust,  
1971), p. 20)

283.4 Further, in response to a question raised by a National Spiritual Assembly  
about the Universal Court of Arbitration, the Guardian, in a letter dated 9  
April 1923, defined such explanation as being in the domain of the Univer-  
sal House of Justice and anticipated its function of elucidation:

283.4a … regarding the nature and scope of the Universal Court of Arbi-  
tration, this and other similar matters will have to be explained and  
elucidated by the Universal House of Justice, to which, according to  
the Master’s explicit Instructions, all important fundamental ques-  
tions must be referred ….

(Published in *Bahá’í Administration: Selected Messages 1922–1932*  
(Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1974), p. 47)

283.5 The meanings of the terms “elucidation” and “interpretation,” as they  
are used with regard to the functions of Bahá’í institutions, should not of

course be confused with each other. The elucidations of the Universal House  
of Justice stem from its legislative function, and as such differ from inter-  
pretation. The divinely inspired legislation of the House of Justice does not  
attempt to say what the revealed Word means—it states what must be done  
in cases where the revealed Text or its authoritative interpretation is not  
explicit; and in this context it offers explanations. It is, therefore, on quite  
a different level from the sacred Text, and the Universal House of Justice  
is empowered to abrogate or amend its own legislation whenever it judges  
the conditions make this desirable. The major distinction between the two  
functions of elucidation and interpretation, to repeat the point differently,  
is that legislation with its resultant outcome of elucidation is susceptible of  
amendment by the House of Justice itself, whereas the Guardian’s interpre-  
tation is a statement of truth which cannot be varied.

283.6 While the House of Justice does not interpret, it makes deductions on  
the basis of the revealed Texts and their authorized interpretations. This is  
clearly indicated in the following statement of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá:

283.6a Briefly, this is the wisdom of referring the laws of society to the House  
of Justice. In the religion of Islám, similarly, not every ordinance was  
explicitly revealed; nay not a tenth part of a tenth part was included  
in the Text; although all matters of major importance were specifically  
referred to, there were undoubtedly thousands of laws which were  
unspecified. These were devised by the divines of a later age accord-  
ing to the laws of Islamic jurisprudence, and individual divines made  
conflicting deductions from the original revealed ordinances. All these  
were enforced. Today this process of deduction is the right of the  
body of the House of Justice, and the deductions and conclusions of  
individual learned men have no authority, unless they are endorsed  
by the House of Justice. The difference is precisely this, that from the  
conclusions and endorsements of the body of the House of Justice  
whose members are elected by and known to the worldwide Bahá’í  
community, no differences will arise; whereas the conclusions of in-  
dividual divines and scholars would definitely lead to differences, and  
result in schism, division, and dispersion. The oneness of the Word  
would be destroyed, the unity of the Faith would disappear, and the  
edifice of the Faith of God would be shaken.

(Published in *Messages from the Universal House of Justice, 1963–1968*  
(Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1996), p. 86)

283.7 In the normal use of the term, interpretation is the natural activity of  
an intelligent mind. As has been stated on previous occasions in the com-  
munications of the House of Justice, there is an important distinction made  
in the Faith between authoritative interpretation, as described above, and  
the interpretation which every believer is fully entitled to voice. Believers  
are free, indeed are encouraged, to study the Writings for themselves and to  
express their understanding of them. Such personal interpretations can be  
most illuminating, but all Bahá’ís, including the one expressing the view,  
however learned he may be, should realize that it is only a personal view and  
can never be upheld as a standard for others to accept, nor should conten-  
tion ever be permitted to arise over differences in such opinions.

283.8 As to your reference to the perception of certain scholars that the opin-  
ions of the House of Justice are neither binding nor authoritative, the fol-  
lowing words of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá are illuminating:

283.8a Let it not be imagined that the House of Justice will take any decision  
according to its own concepts and opinions. God forbid! The Supreme  
House of Justice will take decisions and establish laws through the  
inspiration and confirmation of the Holy Spirit, because it is in the  
safekeeping and under the shelter and protection of the Abhá Beauty,  
and obedience to its decisions is a bounden and essential duty and an  
absolute obligation, and there is no escape for anyone.

(Published in *Wellspring of Guidance: Messages 1963–1968*  
(Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1976), pp. 84–5)

283.9 The House of Justice trusts that these comments will assist you to arrive  
at the clarification you seek, and it assures you of its prayers in the Holy  
Shrines on your behalf.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

FOR DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

284  
Arrests, imprisonment, and confiscation of property  
of Bahá’ís in Iran

24 SEPTEMBER 1998

To selected National Spiritual Assemblies

284.1 The Universal House of Justice is pleased to notify you that it has been  
informed of the release from prison of Mr. Mansur Mehrabi (sometimes  
referred to as Mehrabkhani), who was arrested in Birjand, Khurasan, on 19  
May 1997. The number of Bahá’ís now known to be in prison in Iran by  
reason of their Faith is thirteen.

284.2 The House of Justice has, however, received more disquieting news from  
Iran. In Bujnurd, northern Khurasan, three friends, Mrs. Nahid Sabeti, Mr.  
Manouchehr Sharifi and Mr. Hushmand Sanani, were arrested last week for  
participating in Bahá’í “Family Life” gatherings. After spending six days in  
prison, they were released, having been given suspended sentences of five  
years’ imprisonment. The Friends in Iran feel that this use of suspended sen-  
tences is a new tactic devised by the Ministry of Information (Intelligence)  
to prevent Bahá’ís from participating in monthly religious gatherings. It is  
a threatening device, and the Bahá’ís in Iran are fearful that it may be ex-  
tended to other parts of the country if allowed to go unchallenged. As has  
been the recent practice of the Government of Iran, no written documenta-  
tion relating to the arrest or punishment of the friends has been provided  
to them.

284.3 The House of Justice has also been informed that another three Bahá’í  
homes in Yazd and one in Ardakan have been confiscated because their  
owners were members of the Bahá’í community. It may be noted that, de-  
spite the efforts of the governments of some countries to bring influence to  
bear on the Government of Iran, the hardship meted out to the Bahá’ís of  
Iran continues unabated, and in places like Yazd the confiscation of Bahá’í  
houses and properties is routinely pursued.

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

285  
Two Bahá’ís imprisoned in Iran sentenced to death

29 SEPTEMBER 1998

To selected National Spiritual Assemblies

285.1 The Universal House of Justice has asked us to convey the following  
disturbing news about the friends in Iran.

285.2 Sentences of death have been communicated orally by prison authorities  
in Mashhad to Messrs. Sirus Zabihi-Moghaddam and Hedayat-Kashefi Na-  
jafabadi, two of the three Bahá’ís who were imprisoned and tried along with  
the recently executed Mr. Ruhollah Rohani, according to reports received at  
the Bahá’í World Center. The third Bahá’í, Mr. Ataollah Hamid Nasiriza-  
deh, was condemned to 10 years’ imprisonment and will be transferred to a  
prison in Kerman.

285.3 You may well recall that when a number of governments protested to  
the Iranian Government regarding the execution on 21 July 1998 of Mr.  
Rohani, they also appealed for the safety of the other Bahá’í prisoners in  
Mashhad, and officials of some of these governments were given to under-  
stand from statements of Iranian officials that the Iranian authorities would  
not carry out any further executions.

285.4 … In his [Mr. Rohani’s] case there was at first an official denial of his  
execution, and then, when it was confirmed otherwise and the Iranian Gov-  
ernment found itself confronted by worldwide protest, it excused its action  
by making the spurious accusation that he had acted against the security of  
the country. The rationale was that the nature of the case made it impossible  
for details to be revealed. In the current situation, no such chicanery on the  
part of Iranian authorities should be countenanced. The surreptitious man-  
ner in which the sentence of death was conveyed to Messrs. Moghaddam  
and Najafabadi by word of mouth, without any evident documentation,  
raises serious questions as to how the authorities intend to deal with inter-  
national reactions ….

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

286  
Details on Bahá’ís Imprisoned and  
Sentenced to Death in Iran

1 OCTOBER 1998

To selected National Spiritual Assemblies

286.1 Further to our email of 29 September 1998 concerning the Bahá’ís in  
Iran who have been sentenced to death, the Universal House of Justice has  
asked us to provide the following background information to assist you  
in explaining to your government contacts and the media the sequence of  
events and their implications.

286.2 As you know, Mr. Ruhollah Rohani was executed in Mashhad under  
mysterious circumstances on 21 July 1998. The execution was carried out  
in secrecy on the very day after his wife had been invited to visit him in  
prison. No official announcement of his death was made, no document  
affirming the death sentence was produced, no document certifying the  
cause of his death was issued. It is known that he had faced trial in Branch  
8 of the Revolutionary Court in Mashhad during the month of Bahman  
(January/February) of this year, as had three other Bahá’ís: Messrs. Sirus  
Zabihi-Moghaddam, Hedayat-Kashefi Najafabadi, and Ataollah Hamid  
Nasirizadeh. All four had been sentenced to death, but the verdict of the  
court in each case had to be submitted to the Supreme Court in Teheran for  
ratification. The Supreme Court reportedly confirmed the death sentence  
only in the case of Mr. Rohani, and, for technical reasons, returned the  
cases of the other three to Mashhad, this time to Branch 3 of the Revolu-  
tionary Court, for retrial.

286.3 Whereas in the previous trial the prisoners had no lawyer to defend them,  
a lapse apparently noted by the Supreme Court, at the retrial a lawyer not  
approved by the defendants was assigned to them. The accused had vehe-  
mently objected to some of the statements of their defense counsel which  
appeared to prejudice their case. The prisoners were then told that the ver-  
dict of the court would be decided later. A few days ago, it was communi-  
cated orally to the prisoners that the death sentence has been confirmed in  
the cases of Messrs. Moghaddam and Najafabadi, and that Mr. Nasirizadeh  
has been sentenced to ten years’ imprisonment.

286.4 The accused have been given a chance to appeal to the court that sen-  
tenced them. Therefore, the appeal will take place in the same Branch 3

of the Revolutionary Court of Mashhad. The difference this time is that  
they will be permitted to engage their own lawyer. It is very difficult, of  
course, to find a lawyer who will take on this type of case, because Bahá’í  
lawyers are not permitted to practice in Iran; and in the rare instances in the  
past when Muslim lawyers have undertaken to defend Bahá’ís, they were  
subjected to harassment and abuse.

286.5 The nature of the defense that a lawyer can provide in such an appeal  
is also severely circumscribed. The lawyer is able to meet the defendants  
in prison and may be permitted to see the court file from which he may  
make notes, but he may not photocopy any of the documents it contains.  
In essence his defense amounts to a written statement prepared by him for  
inclusion with the submission to be made by the Revolutionary Court to  
the Supreme Court in Teheran. The Supreme Court will then study the file  
and, if it is satisfied that the proper procedures were followed, will refer the  
case to one of its branches. The judge or judges of this branch, without  
meeting with lawyers or anyone else, will then review the file and issue their  
judgment, either confirming or annulling the verdict.

286.6 The fact remains that the Bahá’ís have not had an advocate of their own  
to argue their case in open court and that, even if they were to find a lawyer  
to handle their appeal, no adequate defense is possible.

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

287  
Arrest of faculty members of the Bahá’í Institute of  
Higher Education and raids on Bahá’í homes

6 OCTOBER 1998

To selected National Spiritual Assemblies

287.1 The Universal House of Justice has asked us to provide you with the  
following update on recent developments in Iran.

287.2 A new, two-pronged assault was launched against the Iranian Bahá’í  
community during the last week. One was aimed at stultifying academic  
educational activities among the Bahá’ís; the other was a further attempt at  
destabilizing Bahá’í families.

287.3 More than 36 faculty members of the Bahá’í Institute of Higher Educa-  
tion (BIHE) were reported to have been arrested between 29 September and

3 October in cities across the country. It is understood that most of these  
have now been released, but that five in Tabriz and two in Tehran remain  
in custody. The arrests were carried out by officers of the Iranian Govern-  
ment’s intelligence agency, the Ministry of Information, and also involved  
the seizure of textbooks, scientific papers and documentary records, some  
70 computers, and items of furniture useful to students, including tables  
and benches. Those arrested were asked to sign a document declaring that  
BIHE had ceased to exist as of 29 September and undertaking that they  
would no longer cooperate with it. The detainees refused to sign any such  
declaration.

287.4 Raids on more than 500 Bahá’í homes added to the harassment suffered  
by Bahá’ís throughout Iran at the hands of intelligence officers. When que-  
ried about the seizure of personal household effects like television sets and  
pieces of furniture, these officers claimed that they had been authorized by  
the Attorney-General to take anything they wished.

287.5 The wave of arrests and harassment bears the marks of a centrally or-  
chestrated campaign intended to lend impetus to the declared policy of the  
Iranian Government to nullify the Bahá’í community and force its members  
to convert to Islam. This policy became widely known in 1993 when it was  
accidentally revealed that the Iranian Supreme Revolutionary Council had  
earlier adopted a position on “the Bahá’í question” in a secret document  
dated 25 February 1991 and signed by Ayatollah Khamenei. The document  
contained such declarations as the following:

287.5a The Government’s dealings with them must be in such a way that  
their progress and development are blocked.

287.5b They must be expelled from universities, either in the admission pro-  
cess or during the course of their studies, once it becomes known that  
they are Bahá’ís.

287.5c A plan must be devised to confront and destroy their cultural roots  
outside the country.

287.5d Deny them employment if they identify themselves as Bahá’ís.

287.5e Deny them any position of influence, such as in the educational sec-  
tor, etc.

It is evident that the Iranian Government has worked at various means to  
achieve these ends; among them are the banning of the administrative insti-  
tutions of the Faith, the disruption of the moral education classes for Bahá’í  
children and young people, the economic strangulation of the Bahá’ís  
through such means as the dismissal of Bahá’í employees, the denial of  
pensions and the confiscation of properties, and the prohibition of Bahá’í  
youth from entering institutions of higher learning in Iran. The recent at-  
tacks by Iranian authorities can be viewed as effecting only a part of this  
policy.

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

288  
Appeal submitted to Supreme Court  
for Bahá’ís imprisoned in Iran

1 DECEMBER 1998

To selected National Spiritual Assemblies

288.1 The Universal House of Justice has received copies of two important  
documents prepared by the lawyer who courageously agreed to conduct an  
appeal against the conviction of the three Bahá’ís imprisoned in Mashhad,  
despite various threats and intense pressure to dissuade him. The lawyer,  
Mr. Mahmud Kiani Bahjestani, a Muslim, submitted an appeal to the  
Supreme Court on behalf of Mr. Sirus Zabihi-Moghaddam, Mr. Hedayat  
Kashefi-Najafabadi and Mr. Ataollah Hamid-Nasirizadeh, the first two of  
whom have been sentenced to death, and the third to ten years’ impris-  
onment. Mr. Bahjestani was not able to interview his clients, nor was he  
permitted to have copies of the material in the defendants’ files held by the  
court. He was, however, allowed to view those files and to make such notes  
as he wished. He did not appear before the Supreme Court but submitted  
his appeal in writing.

288.2 The first of the documents enclosed is a provisional translation of the  
notes taken by Mr. Bahjestani from his clients’ files held by the judiciary in  
Mashhad. The second is a provisional translation of the appeal submission  
itself.

288.3 As you are aware, Bahá’í prisoners have rarely been allowed a lawyer dur-  
ing their so-called trials. Reference to page 3 of the enclosed extracts from  
the defendants’ files (pages 38–40) and to section 4 on page 3 of the appeal

submission makes it clear that, before the initial trial, Branch 8 of the Mash-  
had court summarily imposed a lawyer of its own choosing, Mr. Ehtesham  
Shahabi, on the accused, failing to observe the legal requirement to allow  
them ten days to arrange for their own lawyer. The last sentence of the  
extract from pages 118–120 of the accused’s files shows that when Branch 3  
of the Mashhad court came to retry the case, it having been referred back  
by the Supreme Court, the defendants were once more deprived of their  
right to select their own advocate, as Mr. Shahabi had again been appointed  
to represent them. In light of the foregoing, the international uproar at the  
evident injustices in their case may well have been a significant factor in the  
prisoners having for the first time been allowed to engage a lawyer, to make  
their appeal.

288.4 The two enclosed documents confirm beyond any shadow of a doubt the  
total baselessness of the claim by the Iranian Government that Mr. Ruhol-  
lah Rohani was executed for crimes threatening the security of Iran, and  
that the three prisoners arrested in Mashhad with him at about the same  
time, who have now appealed against their sentences, are guilty of any such  
crimes. In the absence of any merit in the Government’s claims, its attri-  
bution of crimes against the state to these prisoners appears to be merely  
another attempt to silence the protests of civilized countries and to justify  
its inhuman treatment of its Bahá’í citizens.

288.5 The first item in the lawyer’s extracts from his clients’ files is a copy of  
the text of a document that the authorities asked the prisoners to sign, com-  
mitting themselves to desist from participation in Bahá’í activities. Had the  
prisoners complied with the authorities’ wishes by making this commit-  
ment, they would surely have been freed. You will note that there is nothing  
in this commitment regarding activities by the accused against the security  
of the country.

288.6 The spuriousness of the charge that the three defendants acted against  
national security becomes even clearer when one studies the text of the  
lawyer’s appeal submission to the Supreme Court. Unfortunately, however,  
jurisdiction over the Bahá’í community has been given to the Ministry of  
Information, which deals with security and intelligence matters and comes  
under the direction of the religious leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran  
(Ayatollah Khamenei). Further, the appeal of the three accused is dealt with  
by the judiciary, which also falls under a fundamentalist ally of Mr. Khame-  
nei, and this department has normally paid no attention to the appeals of  
Bahá’ís in the past. Consequently, it is not known whether the submission

of the lawyer in the present case will be treated any differently. It is hoped  
that intensive pressure brought to bear on the Iranian Government from  
outside the country and the resolutions passed by such bodies as the Euro-  
pean Union and the United Nations will make a difference ….

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

289  
Update on the situation of the Bahá’ís  
imprisoned in Iran

14 DECEMBER 1998

To selected National Spiritual Assemblies

289.1 This message is to bring you up to date on the situation of the Bahá’ís in  
Iran. All those known to have been arrested in connection with the Bahá’í  
Institute of Higher Education (BIHE) have been released, with the excep-  
tion of the following friends in Isfahan, who were arrested in early October  
and are understood to be still detained:

Mr. Ziaullah Mirzapanah Mr. Farzad Khajeh

Dr. Sina Hakiman Mr. Habibullah Ferdosian

289.2 The authorities called upon many of those arrested in relation to the BIHE  
to sign a statement committing themselves to cease serving in this institution  
and not to associate with it in the future. All refused to sign, since the opera-  
tion of the Institute contravenes no law of the country. One of the effects of  
these widespread raids and arrests in Iran was to bring about a rededication  
among many of the friends there to their commitment to provide educational  
opportunities for the young Bahá’ís who have been so callously denied access  
to the higher education facilities in the country of their birth.

289.3 The BIHE has resumed its activities for the new academic year, although  
its functioning is still hampered by the loss of equipment, especially com-  
puters, which it suffered in the raids, equipment that has not been returned.  
The announcement by the Friends in Iran inviting the Bahá’í students to  
resume their studies was made throughout the country at a recent Nineteen  
Day Feast. There has been no reaction from the Government as yet.

289.4 In September 1996 we were informed that the final year of high school  
had been designated a pre-university year, and that Bahá’í students had  
been barred from attending it. This restriction brought with it a number of  
disadvantages to those affected, such as limiting their access to many em-  
ployment opportunities and making it difficult for them to obtain a driving  
license. We are pleased to be able to report that this discrimination against  
Bahá’í youth appears to have come to an end very recently, and they are now  
able to register for the pre-university year in the high schools. It remains to  
be seen whether they will be awarded the certificate for successful comple-  
tion of the year. The Friends in Iran feel that international pressure on the  
Government of Iran is likely to have been instrumental in bringing this  
about ….

289.5 At the same time … the harassment and intimidation of the Bahá’ís  
in that country has in no way abated, and flurries of arrests continue to  
occur. Often those arrested are released after a short time. Typical are the  
cases of three friends—Mr. Derakhshan Fanaiyan, Mrs. Minu Zamani  
(Fanaiyan) and Mr. Hossain Mazlumi-Nosratabad—who were arrested  
in the town of Damavand on 17 October; information has just been  
received that they have been released … they are very much part of  
the pattern of harassment. For example, five friends engaged in teaching  
Bahá’í children’s classes were recently arrested in the tribal area of Boyer  
Ahmadi-ye in western central Iran; further arrests are reported to have  
taken place during the last two weeks of November in Tankabon and  
Sari, in the region north of Tehran, and four friends are believed to have  
been detained ….

289.6 You will have received our email of 1 December enclosing the statement  
of the lawyer who appealed on behalf of the convicted friends in Mash-  
had, Mr. Sirus Zabihi-Moghaddam, Mr. Hedayat Kashefi-Najafabadi and  
Mr. Ataollah Hamid-Nasirizadeh. Nothing further is known of their situ-  
ation as yet. It should also be remembered that four other Bahá’ís remain  
condemned to death in Iran, two—Mr. Musa Talebi and Mr. Zabihullah  
Mahrami—for apostasy, and two Mr. Kayvan Khalajabadi and Mr. Beh-  
nam Mithaqi—for Bahá’í activities. They were condemned some years ago,  
and their ultimate fate is still uncertain ….

289.7 The Universal House of Justice deeply appreciates your continuing ef-  
forts on behalf of these and all the Bahá’ís in Iran who steadfastly bear  
sufferings out of loyalty to the Blessed Beauty.

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

290  
Resignation from the Continental Board of Counselors

4 JANUARY 1999

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

290.1 We have accepted the resignation of Afemata Moli Chang from member-  
ship of the Continental Board of Counselors in Australasia. In doing so,  
we express our gratitude for the dedicated services he has rendered in this  
capacity, and look forward to his devoted endeavors for the advancement of  
the Cause in the years ahead.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

291  
Message to the European Bahá’í Youth Council

2 FEBRUARY 1999

To the European Bahá’í Youth Council

To the Meeting of European National Bahá’í Youth Committees called by  
the European Bahá’í Youth Council in Nove Zamky, Slovakia

Beloved Friends,

291.1 The Bahá’í communities of the European continent play a unique role  
in the Bahá’í world. In no other continent are there so many independent  
national Bahá’í communities in such a relatively small area speaking such  
a diversity of languages, living in countries which, after centuries of inter-  
necine strife, are being pulled by the force of providence into ever closer  
collaboration. These countries are linked, moreover, by the ties of history  
with every other part of the world.

291.2 The struggles of the European nations towards harmony and justice, the  
periodic resurgence of violent opposition to the dual process of the eman-  
cipation and unification of peoples, are a concentrated sample of the labor  
of the whole world for the unification of humankind, which is the hallmark  
of this Dispensation.

291.3 In this context one can better appreciate the importance of the devoted,  
enthusiastic and collaborative activity of the Bahá’í youth throughout Eu-  
rope. It is the very diversity and complexity of Europe that required the es-

tablishment of the European Bahá’í Youth Council as an institution which,  
at one and the same time, facilitates collaboration among the European  
Bahá’í youth, assists them to have a united vision, and provides them with a  
voice in the councils of other youth movements on that continent.

291.4 National Youth Committees have great responsibilities for the activities  
of the young Bahá’ís in their respective countries. May your efforts assist  
them all to enrich the record of their already outstanding services to the  
Cause, to deepen their understanding of the Teachings of Bahá’u’lláh, and  
to uphold in every aspect of their lives the standards of behavior which He  
has set before them.

291.5 It is our fervent prayer at the Sacred Threshold that your deliberations  
at this gathering will give a new impetus to the endeavors of the European  
Bahá’í youth for the achievement of the Four Year Plan as a basis for the  
great work which lies ahead of them thereafter.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

292  
Release of a document to commemorate the end  
of the twentieth century

25 FEBRUARY 1999

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

292.1 The year 2000 will conclude the hundred years that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá de-  
scribed as “the century of light.” His perspective on the twentieth century  
offers Bahá’ís and Bahá’í communities an opportunity to participate mean-  
ingfully in many of the activities and discussions expected to take place  
around the world over the coming two years.

292.2 To assist the friends in this respect, the Universal House of Justice has  
asked the Bahá’í International Community’s Office of Public Information  
to prepare the enclosed document, “Who is Writing the Future?” As you  
will see, it both examines the events of the twentieth century in the light  
of Bahá’u’lláh’s Teachings, and relates these developments to the challenges  
facing humanity at century’s end. Its purpose is to serve as a source of ideas,  
perspectives, images, and language that will stimulate a wide range of cre-  
ative responses among Bahá’ís.

292.3 The sponsorship of millennial activities will, of course, be the concern  
of non-Bahá’í groups, but the House of Justice believes that such activities  
can be seen by Bahá’ís and the Bahá’í communities as creating occasions  
whose effectiveness can be enhanced by Bahá’í contributions. Given the  
great diversity of our community’s resources, National Spiritual Assemblies  
will want to ensure that ample latitude is given for a wide range of responses  
by individual believers and groups. Artists, writers, musicians and drama-  
tists will no doubt find the enclosed document highly stimulating and will  
readily identify ways in which its themes can be introduced into activities  
organized by government agencies and various private bodies. It is likely that  
programs of scholarly associations will also present a range of opportunities  
for qualified believers to draw attention to Bahá’í perspectives on the cur-  
rent world situation. Your Assembly may wish to address special messages  
to groups in your own country, adapting elements of the document’s theme  
to this purpose.

292.4 In order that such efforts enjoy broad support within the Bahá’í com-  
munity, it will be important for the friends to understand the message being  
communicated. Consequently, consideration should be given to ways of  
incorporating the material in the enclosed document into Bahá’í summer  
school programs and local study activities.

292.5 As you will note, “Who is Writing the Future?” has been cast in the form  
of a message addressed to non-Bahá’í readers. This has been done primarily  
in order to make the material most readily useful to Bahá’ís participating in  
the various events marking the beginning of the new millennium. Should  
your Assembly feel, however, that the document would also be useful as a  
booklet or brochure, there is no objection to your publishing it. In that case,  
although the design is left to your discretion, the text should be used in its  
present form, without editing, commentary, or supplementary material.

292.6 Whatever their various forms of belief, our fellow human beings are  
looking to the immediate future with mingled feelings of tentative hope  
and deep anxiety. This circumstance offers Bahá’ís a unique opportunity to  
share with them the Teachings that give meaning to this critical moment in  
human history.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

FOR DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

293  
Appointment of Continental Counselor for Australasia

11 MARCH 1999

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

293.1 We are pleased to announce the appointment of Donald Blanks as a  
member of the Continental Board of Counselors in Australasia, to fill the  
vacancy which resulted from the announcement made in our letter of 4  
January 1999.[[370]](#footnote-370)293-1

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

294  
Establishment of Chair for Bahá’í Studies at the  
Hebrew University of Jerusalem

29 MARCH 1999

To National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

294.1 We are happy to announce that documents were signed today estab-  
lishing a Chair for Bahá’í Studies at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem.  
After visiting the Shrine of the Báb, the University’s President and Rector,  
together with other senior officers and representatives of the Bahá’í World  
Center, took part in a brief private ceremony. The signature and exchange  
of documents concluded discussions initiated by the University nearly a year  
ago. In the introduction to its formal proposal for the establishment of the  
Chair, the University thus explained its motivation:

294.1a Three years ago, Professor Moshe Sharon began to teach the History  
and Sacred Literature of the Bahá’í Faith, on a regular basis, at the  
Institute of Asian and African Studies in the Faculty of Humanities of  
The Hebrew University of Jerusalem. As a result of Professor Sharon’s

pioneering work, the University has become convinced of the impor-  
tance of the field and of the need to provide an institutional basis for  
the continuation and development of this work on both the teaching  
and research levels.

294.2 It is noteworthy that in 1925, when the University was being established,  
the beloved Guardian wrote a letter of warm encouragement to its founders,  
since which time it has achieved world renown.

294.3 We offer thanksgiving at the Holy Threshold for this unanticipated  
manifestation of Bahá’u’lláh’s ceaseless bounties.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

295  
Guidance for serving indigenous people

6 APRIL 1999

To a Local Spiritual Assembly

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

295.1 The Universal House of Justice has received your letter of 6 January 1999  
and has asked us to respond as follows.

295.2 The House of Justice is deeply concerned about the condition and needs  
of the indigenous people …. Although there is no doubt that increased ma-  
terial resources would be helpful in resolving some of the problems which  
exist there, they will not suffice to bring about a fundamental and enduring  
solution. This can only come about through a realization that, at a basic  
level, the issues which you face are essentially spiritual, dealing with values,  
attitudes, and behavior. Hence, a spiritual solution is required.

295.3 The message of the Bahá’í Faith is that Bahá’u’lláh has brought teach-  
ings which are infused with a dynamic spiritual power with which the most  
formidable barriers can be overcome and the most sweeping transformation  
effected. You, dear friends, who have been privileged to accept these divine  
teachings in this day can best meet your own needs and those of the wider  
society … by giving first priority to your endeavors to put the Bahá’í teach-  
ings into practice. Through your obedience to Bahá’í law, your striving to  
spiritualize your lives, and your continuing effort to deepen your under-  
standing of the Holy Writings, you can most appropriately respond to the

needs of the present time. It is most important that you strive to make your  
Local Spiritual Assembly strong and effective, through its holding regular  
meetings, its development of the skills of consultation, and through its at-  
tention to pressing needs such as the holding of the Nineteen Day Feast, the  
establishment of regular children’s classes, and the provision of guidance to  
Bahá’í youth in their personal development and education.

295.4 As you persevere in such aims, you will find that your Bahá’í community  
will grow in unity and cohesion, and will attract the attention of those  
around you because of its shining qualities. On such a foundation you will  
be able to embark on a wide range of social and economic development  
projects which will improve the material life of the people, and solve the  
problems to which you have drawn attention in your letter. Your Spiritual  
Assembly should not hesitate to turn to your National Spiritual Assembly  
for guidance in carrying out your functions, and should make every possible  
effort to implement the directions it gives you. In addition, the Auxiliary  
Board members assigned to serve your area are a most valuable source of  
advice and counsel.

295.5 You are assured of the prayers of the House of Justice in the Holy Shrines  
on your behalf as you strive to carry out your duties.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

FOR DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

296  
Release of compilation on internal  
opposition to the Bahá’í Faith

7 APRIL 1999

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

*Issues Related to the Study of the Bahá’í Faith*

296.1 In May of 1998, *Bahá’í Canada* reproduced a collection of letters which  
the Universal House of Justice had written to various individuals on the sub-  
ject of the academic study of the Bahá’í Faith. Copies of this compilation  
were subsequently mailed by the Canadian National Spiritual Assembly to  
its sister Assemblies. The reprint has now been made generally available in  
booklet form by the United States Bahá’í Publishing Trust. The House of

Justice has asked us to forward you a copy of the latter publication with the  
following comments.

296.2 As a number of the friends are aware, a campaign of internal opposition  
to the Teachings is currently being carried on through the use of the Inter-  
net, a communications system that now reaches virtually every part of the  
world. Differing from attacks familiar in the past, it seeks to recast the entire  
Faith into a sociopolitical ideology alien to Bahá’u’lláh’s intent. In the place  
of the institutional authority established by His Covenant, it promotes a  
kind of interpretive authority which those behind it attribute to the views  
of persons technically trained in Middle East studies.

296.3 Early in 1996, the deliberate nature of the plan was revealed in an ac-  
cidental posting to an Internet list which Bahá’í subscribers had believed  
was dedicated to scholarly exploration of the Cause. Some of the people  
responsible resigned from the Faith when Counselors pointed out to them  
the direction their activities were taking. A small number of others continue  
to promote the campaign within the Bahá’í community.

296.4 In the past, in situations of a somewhat similar nature, the patience and  
compassion shown by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and the Guardian helped various be-  
lievers who had been misled by ill-intentioned persons to eventually free  
themselves from such entanglements. In this same spirit of forbearance the  
Universal House of Justice has intervened in the current situation only to  
the extent that has been unavoidable, trusting to the good sense and the  
goodwill of the believers involved to awaken to the spiritual dangers to  
which they are exposing themselves. Nevertheless, certain Counselors and  
National Spiritual Assemblies are monitoring the problem closely, and the  
friends can be confident that whatever further steps are needed to protect  
the integrity of the Cause will be taken.

296.5 As passages in the enclosed reprint make clear, this campaign of internal  
opposition—while purporting to accept the legitimacy of the Guardianship  
and the Universal House of Justice as twin successors of Bahá’u’lláh and the  
Center of His Covenant—attempts to cast doubt on the nature and scope of  
the authority conferred on them in the Writings. When other Bahá’ís have  
pointed out that such arguments contradict explicit statements of the Mas-  
ter, persons behind the scheme have responded by calling into question the  
soundness of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s own judgment and perspective. Gradually, these  
arguments have exposed the view of those involved that Bahá’u’lláh Himself  
was not the voice of God to our age but merely a particularly enlightened  
moral philosopher, one whose primary concern was to reform existing society.

296.6 By itself, such opposition would likely stand little chance of influencing  
reasonably informed Bahá’ís. As one of the letters in the enclosed reprint  
(20 July 1997) points out, the scheme relies for effect, therefore, on exploit-  
ing the confusion created in modern thought by the reigning doctrines of  
materialism. Although the reality of God’s continuous relationship with His  
creation and His intervention in human life and history are the very essence  
of the teachings of the Founders of the revealed religions, dogmatic mate-  
rialism today insists that even the nature of religion itself can be adequately  
understood only through the use of an academic methodology designed to  
ignore the truths that make religion what it is.

296.7 In general, the strategy being pursued has been to avoid direct attacks  
on the Faith’s Central Figures. The effort, rather, has been to sow the seeds  
of doubt among believers about the Faith’s teachings and institutions by  
appealing to unexamined prejudices that Bahá’ís may have unconsciously  
absorbed from non-Bahá’í society. In defiance of the clear interpretation  
of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and the Guardian, for example, Bahá’u’lláh’s limiting of  
membership on the Universal House of Justice to men is misrepresented  
as merely a “temporary measure” subject to eventual revision if sufficient  
pressure is brought to bear. Similarly, Shoghi Effendi’s explanation of  
Bahá’u’lláh’s vision of the future Bahá’í World Commonwealth that will  
unite spiritual and civil authority is dismissed in favor of the assertion  
that the modern political concept of “separation of church and state” is  
somehow one that Bahá’u’lláh intended as a basic principle of the World  
Order He has founded. Particularly subtle is an attempt to suggest that the  
Mashriqu’l-Adhkár should evolve into a seat of quasi-doctrinal authority,  
parallel to and essentially independent of the Local House of Justice, which  
would permit various interests to insinuate themselves into the direction of  
the life processes of the Cause.

296.8 Typically, when misrepresentations of the kind described are challenged,  
the reaction of those behind the campaign has been to claim that their civil  
rights are being threatened, an assertion that is of course meaningless in the  
light of the purely voluntary nature of Bahá’í membership. Much emphasis  
is placed by them also on academic freedom, their view of which proves,  
on examination, to be merely freedom on their part to pervert scholarly  
discourse to the promotion of their own ideological agenda, while seeking  
to exclude from discussion features of the Bahá’í Faith that are central to the  
Writings of its Founders.

296.9 The effect of continued exposure to such insincerity about matters vital  
to humanity’s well-being is spiritually corrosive. When we encounter minds  
that are closed and hearts that are darkened by evident malice, Bahá’u’lláh  
urges that we leave such persons to God and turn our attention to the op-  
portunities which multiply daily for the promotion of the truths which He  
teaches. In words written at the direction of the Guardian, regarding a situ-  
ation similar to, though much less serious than, the present one, “… the  
friends should be advised to just leave these people alone, for their influence  
can be nothing but negative and destructive ….”[[371]](#footnote-371)296-1

296.10 The enclosed material is being sent to your Assembly less out of concern  
over the immediate situation, which is being systematically addressed, than  
because of longer-term considerations to which it lends perspective. What  
we are currently seeing, in a relatively primitive form, is the emergence of  
a new kind of internal opposition to Bahá’u’lláh’s Mission. While it will no  
doubt assume other features as time passes, it is a kind of opposition that  
takes aim directly at Bahá’u’lláh’s assertion of the spiritual nature of reality  
and of humanity’s dependence on the interventions of Divine Revelation.

296.11 Developments of the kind described will come as no surprise to friends  
who are familiar with the Guardian’s description of the successive waves of  
“crisis” and “victory” that have marked the history of the Faith ever since  
its inception. It is precisely this cyclical process, Shoghi Effendi says, that  
has propelled the steady unfoldment of Bahá’u’lláh’s intent, testing our  
commitment to His Teachings, purifying His community, and releasing a  
greater measure of the capacities latent in His Revelation. That resistance to  
Bahá’u’lláh should now be emerging in yet a new guise is itself a tribute to  
the gathering strength of the Cause, offering the friends everywhere new op-  
portunities for the deepening of their faith and the energizing of their work.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

FOR DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

297  
Verdict for arrest and imprisonment  
of four Bahá’ís in Iran

15 APRIL 1999

To selected National Spiritual Assemblies

297.1 You have already been informed, through our email letter of 24 March  
1999, of the disturbing news of the prison sentences received by four  
Bahá’ís in Iṣfahán, Dr. Sina Hakiman, Mr. Farzad Khajeh Sharifabadi,  
Mr. Habibullah Ferdosian Najafabadi and Mr. Ziaullah Mirzapanah. The  
condemned men did not receive a written copy of the court verdict giving  
details of their alleged crimes and their sentences, this information being  
conveyed to them orally. A transcript of the text of the verdict, number  
2/791/77, has now been received, and a provisional translation of it is en-  
closed for your reference.

297.2 The four Bahá’ís were convicted in connection with their participation  
in the activities of the Institute for Higher Bahá’í Studies, which is a similar  
kind of organization to BIHE, although the latter focuses mainly on aca-  
demic subjects, whereas the Institute for Higher Bahá’í Studies is essentially  
concerned with the study of matters related directly to the Faith. You will  
recall that the many teachers, administrators and office workers of BIHE,  
who were arrested all over Iran in the raids on more than 530 Bahá’í homes  
in the fall of 1998, were all released some time ago, with the exception of  
the four in Iṣfahán who have now been sentenced.

297.3 It is significant to note that the verdict is based on an article of the crimi-  
nal law of Iran pertaining to the security of the country, although it has  
no relevance to the charges mentioned in the text of the court report. The  
membership of the four men in the Institute for Higher Bahá’í Studies is  
cited as their major crime. The Institute is referred to as “secret,” and its  
crime was to attract youth to undertake study of their own Faith, an activity  
branded by the text of the verdict as “teaching against Islám and the regime  
of the Islamic Republic.” Bahá’í studies are, of course, not only not against  
Islám, but they do not relate in any way whatsoever to the politics of the  
Islamic Republic. The Bahá’í community in Irán has the right to study the  
tenets of its Faith, which is universal and all-embracing, acknowledging the  
validity of Islám and of all the revealed religions of the past.

297.4 Dr. Hakiman was sentenced to ten years’ imprisonment, and the only  
offenses that the court verdict specifies are that he was “one of the active  
members of the [Bahá’í] sect” and was “responsible for the formation of  
classes for Bahá’í Studies.” Mr. Sharifabadi was sentenced to seven years,  
and the verdict states that he was “another active member of the misled  
Bahá’í sect, Secretary of the Institute for [Higher] Bahá’í Studies, affiliated  
with the House of Justice of the Bahá’ís and Israel” and that he was “also  
in charge of the educational books of the Bahá’ís.” The verdict states that  
Mr. Najafabadi (also seven years), was a “follower of the Bahá’í ideology,  
member of the illegal Institute for [Higher Bahá’í] Studies” and “administra-  
tor, supporter and distributor of books amongst the members and students  
affiliated to the misled [Bahá’í] sect.” The verdict finds Mr. Mirzapanah,  
who was given a three-year sentence, to have been “the intermediary be-  
tween Ṭihrán and Iṣfahán and the Institute for [Higher] Bahá’í Studies, and  
[engaged in] activity against the regime of the Islamic Republic.”

297.5 Not only are the astonishing sentences by the court wholly unjustified  
and beyond all reason, but its verdict also has nothing to do with the article  
of the penal code which it cites in justification of its decisions. The text of  
this article is:

297.5a Article 498—Anyone, of whatever belief, who forms or organizes an  
association, group or branch of a group with two or more people,  
under any name or title, in or outside the country, whose aim is the  
disruption of the security of the country, shall be sentenced to be-  
tween two and ten years’ imprisonment, provided that he does not  
fall into the category of “muḥárib” [one who wages war against God].

It is clear that this article has no relationship to individuals engaged in teach-  
ing the tenets of their peace-loving Faith to its young followers ….

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

298  
Postponement of formation of  
National Spiritual Assembly of Macedonia

15 APRIL 1999

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

298.1 In the Riḍván message 156 B.E. reference is made to the convocation of  
the first Convention to form a National Spiritual Assembly in Macedonia.  
We have been asked to inform you that owing to conditions in that country  
at the present time, the Universal House of Justice has decided to postpone  
the formation of the National Spiritual Assembly of Macedonia.

298.2 Kindly ensure that this information is released at the same time as the  
Riḍván message and that caution is exercised so that it is not generally cir-  
culated in advance.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

FOR DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

299  
Riḍván Message 1999

RIḌVÁN 156

To the Bahá’ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

299.1 Our hearts are aglow with hope as we survey what has been accomplished  
in the year preceding the fateful, final stretch toward the consummation  
of the Four Year Plan. From the year’s momentous beginning with the  
Eighth International Bahá’í Convention, the Bahá’í world has sustained a  
rising pace of activity that has significantly advanced the process of entry  
by troops. Our community has grown appreciably, its human resources  
have been richly enhanced. From projects of expansion to endeavors at con-  
solidation, from social and economic development to external affairs, from  
services of the youth to expressions in the arts, from the World Center of  
the Faith to remote villages and towns—in fact, from whatever angle the  
community is viewed—progress has been made. The prospects for the Plan  
are impelling.

299.2 The momentum generated at the International Convention pervaded the  
Counselors’ Conference that immediately followed it, further galvanizing  
the indefatigable participants; and it charged the proceedings of the Na-  
tional Conventions held in May, including those of Sabah, Sarawak, and  
Slovakia which met for the first time to form their National Spiritual Assem-  
blies. That same energy infused the International Teaching Center, which  
has been displaying a remarkable potency in the short time since its sixth  
term began on the anniversary of the Declaration of the Báb. Concentrating  
on refining and consolidating their organization, the Counselor members  
have refrained from their usual travels during this first year, but they can  
be expected after this to resume their visits to various parts of the world, so  
as to reinforce their vitalizing influence on the successful conclusion of the  
Four Year Plan.

299.3 Further to these happenings in the Holy Land, the construction projects  
on Mount Carmel, beheld with such thrilling astonishment by the delegates  
to the International Convention, press onward towards their scheduled  
completion at the end of the century. With the opening since last Riḍván  
of all remaining areas of construction, the speed of work has reached a  
new peak. The Center for the Study of the Texts and the Extension to the  
Archives Building are being readied for occupancy within a few weeks;  
the exterior of the International Teaching Center building is fully clad in  
marble, while finishing work at all levels of its interior is proceeding. The  
lowering of Hatzionut Avenue, to accommodate the bridge which now con-  
nects the Terraces of the Shrine of the Báb on both sides of the road, has  
been completed and normal traffic restored. The unfolding magnificence  
of the Terraces has so captured public attention that the nineteenth terrace  
at the top of the mountain has already been opened to visitors on a daily  
schedule, evoking the enthusiastic response of a grateful populace. As part  
of a campaign to attract international attention to the city, the Municipality  
of Haifa has published a pictorial brochure on the Shrine of the Báb and the  
Terraces, available in five major languages besides Hebrew.

299.4 We feel compelled to mention at least two other developments at the  
World Center of a wholly different order: First, the decision to raise the  
number of pilgrims in each group to 150 from 100—this to take effect  
when the revamping, now in progress, of the newly acquired building, situ-  
ated across the way from the resting place of the Greatest Holy Leaf, has  
been completed and use can be made of its provision of a pilgrim hall and  
other facilities for the administration of an expanded pilgrimage program.

Second is the notable headway being made, despite the inevitable slowness  
of the process, in the plan to translate texts from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh  
with a view to publishing a new English volume of His works. Effort is  
being devoted to providing full versions of such major Tablets as the Súriy-  
i-Mulúk and the Súriy-i-Haykal, as well as complete texts of Tablets ad-  
dressed to individual kings and rulers. Also scheduled for inclusion are the  
Súriy-i-Ra’ís, the Lawḥ-i-Ra’ís and the Lawḥ-i-Fu’ád.

299.5 The Cause of Bahá’u’lláh marches on resistlessly, quickened by the in-  
creasing application of an approach to the development and use of human  
resources that is systematic. The further creation of national and regional  
training institutes, now numbering 344, has pressed this development  
forward, with the result that, apart from North America and Iran where  
numerous courses have been given, some 70,000 individuals have already  
completed at least one institute course. All of this is contributing to a grow-  
ing body of confirmed, active supporters of the Cause. The untold potential  
of this progression is illustrated in such reports as the one received from  
Chad, where in an area served by an institute more than 1,000 people em-  
braced the Faith through the individual efforts of those who had received  
training. Understanding of the necessity for systematization in the develop-  
ment of human resources is everywhere taking hold.

299.6 Collateral with the demonstrated efficacy of training institutes is the prag-  
matic emergence of Regional Bahá’í Councils in selected countries where  
conditions have made the establishment of these institutions necessary and  
viable. Where there is close interaction between a Council and a training  
institute, the stage is set for a galvanic coherence of the processes effecting  
expansion and consolidation in a region, and for the practical matching of  
the training services of institutes to the developmental needs of local com-  
munities. Moreover, the operational guidelines whereby the Continental  
Counselors and the Regional Councils have direct access to each other give  
rise to a further institutional relationship which, along with that connecting  
the Councils to the National and Local Spiritual Assemblies, effectuates a  
dynamic integration of functions at the regional level.

299.7 The ever-expanding work in social and economic development is also  
benefiting from the operation of those training institutes that give attention  
to such subjects as literacy, primary health care and the advancement of  
women. The more widespread efforts of the Office of Social and Economic  
Development to promote a global process of learning about relevant Bahá’í  
principles are enhanced by the work of these institutes, as well as by the rise

of Bahá’í-inspired organizations scattered throughout the planet. Clearly,  
then, the institutional capacity to administer development programs is  
gaining in strength. This is apparent in projects sponsored by Bahá’í institu-  
tions or initiated by individuals through the inspiration of the Faith. An  
outstanding example of the latter is Unity College, which was created by a  
family in Ethiopia as the first, and since late 1998, the only private college  
in the country, with a student body that swelled to 5,000 during this past  
year. Another example, on a smaller scale but of significance nonetheless, is  
the initiative taken by a family in Buffalo, New York: here, in their home,  
they have been assisting tens of children and youth from the inner city to  
develop, through Bahá’í spiritual and moral teachings, patterns of behavior  
that will enable them to overcome self-destructive attitudes bred by poverty  
and racism.

299.8 In the area of external affairs, the most energetic actions have been  
prompted by two tragic happenings in Iran. The sudden execution in Mash-  
had last July of Mr. Rúḥu’lláh Rawḥání, the first such official action in  
six years, registered a shock that provoked a worldwide and unprecedented  
outcry by governments and United Nations agencies. In late September the  
government’s intelligence agency launched an organized attack on the Bahá’í  
Institute of Higher Education, involving the arrest of 36 members of the  
faculty and raids on more than 500 homes across the country. The latter  
incident inspired a global campaign of protest, still in progress, in which  
academic institutions and associations, educators, and student groups have  
been participating, and in which the press has taken a special interest, as  
reflected in the appearance of substantial articles in *Le Monde*, *The New York  
Times* and other major newspapers. The successful passage in the United  
Nations General Assembly last December of yet another resolution on Iran,  
in which the Bahá’ís are distinctly mentioned, must surely have been influ-  
enced by these two conspicuous manifestations of an unrelenting religious  
persecution.

299.9 But intensive as has been the demand upon the friends in all parts of  
the world to defend our beleaguered brethren, much attention was devoted  
as well to a wide range of external affairs endeavors. The four-month-long  
mission undertaken by an emissary of the House of Justice, Mr. Giovanni  
Ballerio, to islands of the Pacific Ocean where he met with 22 heads of  
state, 5 heads of government and more than 40 other high-ranking officials;  
the efforts pursued by a number of National Assemblies, at the urging of  
the Bahá’í International Community’s United Nations Office, to promote

human rights education; the participation, by invitation, of representatives  
of South Africa’s Bahá’í community in the proceedings of the Truth and  
Reconciliation Commission, at which they were able to recount their record  
of unflinching support of racial unity throughout the years of apartheid; the  
recent success of communities in Australia, Brazil, Finland and Portugal in  
obtaining the decision of educational authorities to include courses on the  
Bahá’í Faith in the curricula of primary and secondary schools—these, not  
to mention the public information projects that generated publicity through  
all forms of the media, are examples of the broadly based enterprises in  
external affairs that engaged the energies of the community.

299.10 A corollary spate of activities involved the use of the arts, of which the  
musical and other artistic performances associated with the celebration in  
Paris of the centenary of the establishment of the Faith in Europe were an  
outstanding instance. The Voices of Bahá Choir, composed of 68 members  
drawn from Europe and the Americas, delighted audiences in eight Europe-  
an cities and introduced the Faith to many. “Light and Fire,” the completed  
part of an opera/ballet being written by Bahá’í composer Lasse Thoresen of  
Norway, was successfully performed last September at the prestigious music  
festival in Poland known as the Warsaw Autumn, which was opened by the  
Queen of Sweden. The work is based on recent heroic acts of the martyrs in  
Iran, a fact that exposed the audience to knowledge of the Faith. Europe’s  
apparent lead in these particular endeavors was also marked by the occasion  
of the Austrian Chamber Music Festival when the Austrian Cross for Sci-  
ences and Arts, the highest award of its kind for Austria, was presented by  
the President of the Republic to Mr. Bijan Khadem-Missagh, a Bahá’í vio-  
linist and conductor. A program at that same Festival featured the recitation  
of extracts from Bahá’í and other sacred scriptures. But a word, too, must  
be said in recognition of the prominent part being played by youth all over  
the world in their employment of the arts in the teaching work; renditions  
by their dance workshops, in particular, have acquired renown within and  
outside the Bahá’í community.

299.11 We therefore enter this Riḍván season, as a community in a dynamic state  
of transformation, enjoying a coherence of vision and activity consonant  
with the aim of advancing the process of entry by troops. And we begin  
the final year of the Plan with a boost in administrative strength, as three  
countries in Europe—Latvia, Lithuania and Macedonia—convoke their  
first Conventions to form National Spiritual Assemblies and thus raise the  
number of pillars of the Universal House of Justice to 182. But beyond this

festive moment is a chronology of expectations that lists, first and foremost,  
the conclusion of the Four Year Plan at Riḍván 2000. This will be followed  
by the commencement on the Day of the Covenant of that very year of a  
new term of office for the Continental Boards of Counselors, whose mem-  
bers will soon thereafter be called to the Bahá’í World Center for a confer-  
ence at which, among other matters, the features of the next global teaching  
and consolidation plan will be discussed. The Counselors’ Conference will  
mark the occupation by the International Teaching Center of its perma-  
nent seat, an occasion for which Auxiliary Board members throughout the  
world will be invited to join the Counselors in the Holy Land. The Mount  
Carmel projects will have been completed by this time and the preparations  
will have been well advanced for dedicatory events, scheduled to take place  
on 22 and 23 May 2001, to which a number of representatives from each  
national Bahá’í community will be invited. The details concerning these  
events are to be announced in due course.

299.12 This projection of portentous happenings cuts across the divide in time  
between the twentieth century and the new milennium, according to the  
reckoning of the common era. It is a projection that underscores the con-  
trast between the confident vision that propels the constructive endeavors  
of an illumined community and the tangled fears seizing the millions upon  
millions who are as yet unaware of the Day in which they are living. Bereft  
of authentic guidance, they dwell on the horrors of the century, despairing  
over what these could imply for the future, hardly appreciating that this very  
century contains a light that will be shed on centuries to come. Ill-equipped  
to interpret the social commotion at play throughout the planet, they listen  
to the pundits of error and sink deeper into a slough of despond. Troubled  
by forecasts of doom, they do battle with the phantoms of a wrongly in-  
formed imagination. Knowing nothing of the transformative vision vouch-  
safed by the Lord of the Age, they stumble ahead, blind to the peerlessness  
of the new Day of God.

299.13 The pitiful conditions implied by such a state of heart and mind cannot  
but prompt us all to action, unabating action, to fulfill the intentions of a  
Plan whose major aim is to accelerate that process which will make it pos-  
sible for growing numbers of the world’s people to find the Object of their  
quest and thus to build a united, peaceful and prosperous life.

299.14 Dear Friends: The days pass swiftly as the twinkle of a star. Make your  
mark now, at this crucial turning point of a juncture, the like of which  
shall never return. Make that mark in deeds that will ensure for you celes-

tial blessings—guarantee for you, for the entire race, a future beyond any  
earthly reckoning.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

300  
Message to the first National  
Convention of the Bahá’ís of Latvia

RIḌVÁN 156

To the Bahá’ís of Latvia

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

300.1 It is with profound happiness that we greet the dear friends who are  
gathered for the first National Convention of the Bahá’ís of Latvia. This  
significant achievement is the fruit of the united efforts of all the friends in  
the Baltic States, together with the assistance of the many dedicated souls  
who have visited your country, beginning with Miss Martha Root, who  
first brought the light of Bahá’u’lláh’s Revelation to Latvia during her visit  
to Riga in April 1927. Today, your community has acquired the strength to  
elect its own National Spiritual Assembly, and stands ready to carry forward  
the noble work of the Cause.

300.2 Dear friends, the task before you is indeed challenging. Yours is the duty  
to show forth, by your words and by your deeds, the power of the Word of  
God to transform human character and the ordering of society. You must  
strive, by the force of your example of harmony and of love towards all  
people, to play your part in obliterating the racial, religious and political  
animosities which have for so long plagued humankind. Your countrymen  
are eagerly receptive to the gift which you can offer them, and opportuni-  
ties for advancing the Cause have never been so plentiful. Your National  
Assembly, as a divinely ordained institution of the Administrative Order,  
is the channel for the outpouring of heavenly guidance and assistance, and  
your faithful and loving allegiance to it will be the surest means for the at-  
tainment of your highest aspirations.

300.3 Be assured that we shall offer ardent prayers in the Holy Shrines that the  
believers in your dear country will put forth a great effort in their love for  
Bahá’u’lláh. May He bless and guide your every step.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

301  
Message to the first National  
Convention of the Bahá’ís of Lithuania

RIḌVÁN 156

To the Bahá’ís of Lithuania

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

301.1 It is with exceeding gladness that we greet the dear friends of Lithu-  
ania on the historic occasion of their first National Bahá’í Convention. The  
emergence of the independent National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís  
of Lithuania is a cause of rejoicing for the whole Bahá’í world. This pre-  
cious victory for the Cause of Bahá’u’lláh is the fruit of the self-sacrificing  
endeavors of the devoted believers, whether native Lithuanians, pioneers  
or traveling teachers, who have raised up a dynamic national Bahá’í com-  
munity where, just a decade ago, there were only two believers in the entire  
country. Looking even further back, we can see the foundations of this  
achievement in the travels of Miss Martha Root, who planted the seeds of  
Bahá’u’lláh’s Teachings in her visit to Kaunas in April 1927.

301.2 A new chapter in the history of the Faith in your country is opening.  
You can render no greater service to your people than sharing the life-giving  
Message of Bahá’u’lláh with your fellow citizens. It is your high privilege  
to work toward the fulfillment of such a noble goal with ever greater vigor,  
confidence and courage. The continued expansion of teaching activities, the  
steady multiplication and consolidation of your Local Spiritual Assemblies,  
the encouragement of youth, the holding of regular classes for children,  
and the ever more effective use of your training institute—these stand out  
among your major tasks as you face a challenging future.

301.3 For outward developments to properly endure and flourish, they must  
be matched by inner spiritual growth. The process of drawing ever closer  
to Bahá’u’lláh in prayer and meditation, of deepening your grasp and ap-  
preciation of the fundamental verities of our Faith, of transforming your  
personal lives and conduct and fostering strong bonds of unity and love  
among the believers will enable you to reach unimagined heights and lay the  
foundation for a rich and active community life which, by its example, will  
draw the souls of others to its blissful shelter.

301.4 Rest assured that we shall pray ardently in the Holy Shrines that  
Bahá’u’lláh may bless and strengthen you with His divine confirmations

and enable you to foster the sound growth and development of His Faith  
in your land.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

302  
Primary source material at the Bahá’í World Center

4 MAY 1999

To an individual believer

Dear Bahá’í Friend,

302.1 The Universal House of Justice has received your email of 30 December  
1998 requesting clarification of the policies governing access to sources at  
the Bahá’í World Center and regarding publication of primary source mate-  
rial available to people through other avenues. It welcomes the opportunity  
to provide further information on these issues and has instructed us to send  
you the following reply.

302.2 Your questions have to be considered in the context of the range of the  
work and responsibilities of the Universal House of Justice. One of the most  
important functions of the Head of the Cause is to guide the faithful to the  
tasks which need to be performed at each stage in its progress. It must allo-  
cate the resources of the Faith and point out those areas on which attention  
should be focused. Naturally, each individual tends to see the importance  
of his or her special interests or to focus on needs which are immediately  
apparent. All these have their own validity, but it is the Universal House of  
Justice which sees the whole picture and can guide the process. The friends  
must have faith in this, otherwise their efforts will be dissipated and even  
mutually conflicting.

302.3 The question of providing access to primary source materials is but one  
of the matters which must occupy the attention and consume the resources  
of the Cause. The written material of this Dispensation is incomparably  
rich and varied, and we now stand only a century and a half from the day  
on which the Báb announced His Mission to Mullá Ḥusayn in Shíráz.

302.4 Access to source documents relating to the Bahá’í Faith which are held in  
libraries in different parts of the world, or are in the hands of individuals, is  
open to anyone who wishes to consult them, dependent only on the permis-  
sion of the institution or individual in whose possession the documents are

held. A major service which a number of Bahá’í scholars have rendered to  
the Faith is in tracing such deposits and, where possible, obtaining archival  
quality photocopies for the World Center Archives and Library.

302.5 As for source documents at the World Center itself: these are held by the  
Universal House of Justice in trust for the entire Bahá’í world and ultimately  
for the whole of humankind, of both present and future generations. There  
is tremendous work to be accomplished in sorting, identifying and catalog-  
ing such documents so that they can be effectively studied without either  
damaging them or losing vital information by disturbing their interrelation-  
ships. As far as the urgent needs of the Faith are concerned, the primary  
work in this respect must be devoted to the Sacred Texts rather than to  
documents of historical interest, although the latter are by no means ig-  
nored. It would be irresponsible for the House of Justice, without itself first  
being fully informed of what is in the Archives, to consider opening them to  
individual scholars for the pursuit of purely personal interests.

302.6 Far from allowing anyone to tamper with the historical records, the Uni-  
versal House of Justice has the obligation to preserve the integrity, not only  
of the Sacred Texts, but of all the historical documents in its possession. It  
has, moreover, a responsibility for arranging their publication for the schol-  
arly world in a coherent manner that will not give a misleading impression  
of events as a result of the mere choice of the items and the order in which  
they are made public. Undoubtedly, in due course, it will be possible to  
publish editions of historical documents in facsimile accompanied, in the  
case of each document, by a printed transcription, and supplemented by  
necessary commentaries and notes. It is with such thoughts in mind that the  
House of Justice feels that a certain discipline is required of those individual  
believers who decide, for their own purposes, to publish or translate docu-  
ments which they have at hand.

302.7 This entire process is made the more delicate by past experience with  
those who, pursuing unacknowledged agendas of their own, have wished  
to publish certain documents for ulterior motives, or with others who have  
lacked the good sense and breadth of vision to act responsibly.

302.8 You refer to the principle of the unfettered search after truth. This is  
certainly upheld, but it cannot imply that the institutions of the Faith have  
a duty to make available to each inquirer every piece of information he or  
she requests. We are faced here, not with wisdom prevailing over the search  
for truth, but with a process of organic growth, both in the world and, com-  
mensurate with it, at the World Center of the Faith.

302.9 The Universal House of Justice has asked us to assure you of its prayers  
on your behalf in the Holy Shrines for the reinforcement of your devoted  
endeavors to advance the interests of the Cause of Bahá’u’lláh.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

303  
Increased need for contributions  
to the Bahá’í International Fund

25 MAY 1999

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

303.1 With the Four Year Plan proceeding rapidly toward its conclusion, the  
Universal House of Justice has decided that it is necessary to provide you  
with information about the international funds of the Faith. We have been  
asked to convey the following.

303.2 As a result of the sacrificial contributions from believers everywhere for  
over a decade, the vast construction project on Mount Carmel is moving  
toward conclusion with unprecedented speed. The House of Justice is con-  
fident that Bahá’ís throughout the world will continue to meet the need  
expressed in its 20 June 1995 letter to you for the contribution of ten mil-  
lion dollars each year until the end of the century.[[372]](#footnote-372)303-1

303.3 A new challenge has emerged as a result of the progress of the Faith  
both at the World Center and throughout the planet. It is becoming evi-  
dent that the level of expenditure required from the Bahá’í International  
Fund is rising sharply, due to a combination of the following factors. The  
Edifices and Terraces on Mount Carmel must be maintained at a standard  
appropriate to their character and the dignity of the Faith; measures must  
also be instituted to handle, in an appropriate manner, the greatly increased  
number of people expected to visit the Terraces and to provide protection  
from damage. The emergence of the World Administrative Center on the  
Mountain of God in all its splendor is attracting increased attention to the  
Faith, and thus creating new opportunities for extension of the influence of

the Cause. The achievements of the energetic and dedicated prosecutors of  
the Four Year Plan in all parts of the planet, establishing new institutions  
of the Faith and increasing its human resources, have raised the tempo of  
the administrative activity at the World Center, and call for the assignment  
of more resources to ensure that its work is carried out efficiently and with  
dispatch. The need for property acquisition in both Haifa and ‘Akká areas to  
safeguard the serenity of the environs of the Holy Places, to which reference  
has been made in an earlier letter, remains pressing as the process of urban  
development in this area accelerates.

303.4 The House of Justice draws your attention to the necessity for increased  
support of the Bahá’í Fund at an international level with full confidence  
that the impressive record of sacrificial endeavor by the believers will be  
sustained in their response to the situation described here. The formula-  
tion of budgets at a national and local level should be carried out in the  
light of these conditions. Above all there should be no interruption to  
your sustained effort to assist the friends in your area to acquire a deeper  
understanding of the spiritual obligation binding upon all, irrespective of  
their circumstances, to contribute to the Funds of the Faith. In particular,  
those believers who have been blessed with material resources beyond those  
necessary for their essential needs should ponder deeply the responsibilities  
resting upon them at this time when the requirements of the Cause are so  
pressing.

303.5 The prayers of the Universal House of Justice will be offered at the Holy  
Shrines for the confirmation of their endeavors to assist in the advancement  
of the Faith.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

FOR DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

304  
Publication of English translations  
of the Bahá’í Writings

30 JUNE 1999

To selected National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

304.1 The Universal House of Justice has recently had opportunity to review  
the procedures related to the translation of Bahá’í Writings into English,  
whether involving whole works or extracts. We have been asked to share  
with you the following conclusions, which may relate to your publishing  
programs or to those of other Bahá’í publishers within your jurisdiction.

304.2 As in the past, certain Tablets or extracts translated into English for use or  
publication by the Bahá’í World Center or other publishers will continue to  
be reviewed and approved in the Holy Land and designated as “authorized  
translations.”

304.3 However, because of the increasing need for translation of specific mate-  
rial, particularly in relation to growing scholarly interest in the Faith and  
its various Teachings, favorable consideration has been given to allowing  
wider use of provisional translations. Individual believers, of course, remain  
free to translate into English any of the Holy Writings for their own use.  
Such translations may also be published in circulars and journals without  
review other than by the editors of such publications. They may also be  
shared electronically. In all such cases they should be clearly identified as  
“provisional translations.”

304.4 The House of Justice has now established a mechanism which will allow  
for inclusion in books and pamphlets of provisional translations which are  
of sufficiently good quality for wide distribution. Arrangements have been  
made for such translations to be checked at the World Center. When these  
items are to be included in works intended for publication by a Bahá’í pub-  
lisher, the trust or publisher involved should forward them here for the nec-  
essary clearance. In the case of items to be included in works submitted to  
non-Bahá’í publishers, the authors or translators themselves should forward  
the items here for consideration prior to the involvement of any non-Bahá’í

publishers. Publications containing such translations, once these have been

cleared, should indicate that they are provisional translations.

304.5 The translations submitted for checking at the World Center should  
include copies of the Arabic or Persian texts used by the translator(s). The  
items sent will be considered both from the point of view of the quality of  
the English rendering of the material and as to whether there are any major  
doubtful points with regard to the accuracy of the translation itself. Those  
which fall short on either of these counts will be returned to the sender with  
an explanation. For instance, the translations may need further refining or  
may contain mistakes of meaning, and, therefore, necessitate improvement  
before resubmission.

304.6 It remains the prerogative of the World Center to decide on the time-  
liness and wisdom of publishing English translations of specific Tablets.  
Some may be identified as not suitable for publication at the present time.

304.7 The House of Justice is hopeful that this new arrangement will lead to  
the availability of a greater amount of translated material and avoid the  
present delays in approving fully authorized translations.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

305  
Policies on translation and publication of Bahá’í  
documents into English

4 JULY 1999

To selected National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

305.1 Further to the letter to you dated 30 June 1999[[373]](#footnote-373)305-1 concerning English  
translations of Bahá’í Writings and their publication, we have been asked to  
convey to you the following related policies concerning the publication and  
translation of historical documents. For your ease of reference, Appendix

II enclosed summarizes the policies concerning the translation of Bahá’í  
Sacred Writings into English, which were covered in our earlier letter.

305.2 The Universal House of Justice has noted two processes developing in re-  
cent years: an increase in the number of Bahá’ís who are individually trans-  
lating portions of the Sacred Writings into English, and a growing number  
of Bahá’ís who wish to arrange for the publication of historical documents,  
accompanied by translations into English. Wishing to facilitate this process,  
while, at the same time, upholding the standard of approved translations  
and safeguarding the integrity of the Faith, the House of Justice has formu-  
lated two policy statements governing these matters (see Appendices II and  
III enclosed).

305.3 The net purpose of the policies is to speed up the review and publication  
of such items, and to permit a wider use of provisional translations.

305.4 To give you some background to these developments, we have been asked  
to send to you extracts from a letter which was written on 4 May 1999 to  
an individual believer who enquired about the provision of primary source  
material to students of the Faith (see Appendix I). As you will see, these  
passages cover such matters as the various sources of such material, the du-  
ties incumbent upon the Universal House of Justice, the limited resources  
available to carry out the necessary work at this time, the priority of certain  
steps, and the defense of the Faith against the machinations of its enemies  
and the naïveté of some of its faithful followers.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

FOR DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

305.5 Appendix 1[[374]](#footnote-374)305-2

305.6 Appendix II

*POLICIES GOVERNING AUTHORIZED AND  
PROVISIONAL TRANSLATIONS OF THE BAHÁ’Í HOLY WRITINGS  
INTO ENGLISH AND THEIR PUBLICATION*

4 JULY 1999

305.7 The principal purpose of these policies is to extend the use of provisional  
translations to publication in books and pamphlets, provided that they are  
of adequate quality, without involving the delays which would be required  
to have them thoroughly reviewed, corrected and polished.

1. Tablets, or extracts therefrom, translated into English for use  
or publication by the Bahá’í World Center will continue to be  
reviewed by an ad hoc translation and review committee at the  
World Center and designated as authorized translations.

2. Individual believers are free to translate into English any of the  
Holy Writings for their own use. Such translations may also  
be issued electronically, and may be published in circulars or  
journals without review by anyone other than the editors of the  
publications, but they must, in all cases, be clearly labeled as  
“provisional translations.”

3. If such translations are to be included in books or pamphlets in-  
tended for publication by a Bahá’í publisher, the Trust or private  
publisher involved should forward the manuscript to the Bahá’í  
World Center for clearance, together with copies of the Arabic or  
Persian texts used in the translation. If the publisher is not a Bahá’í  
agency, the authors or translators themselves should forward the  
manuscript and the Arabic or Persian texts to the Bahá’í World  
Center for consideration prior to the involvement of any non-  
Bahá’í publisher. If the translations are found to be of a quality  
adequate for publication, the manuscript will be returned to the  
sender with a note to this effect. Such translations should be identi-  
fied as “provisional translations.” If the translations are found not  
to be of acceptable quality, they will be returned to the translator  
for reworking. This procedure does not replace the normal review  
process for the book as a whole, which remains the responsibility  
of the National Spiritual Assembly within whose area of jurisdic-  
tion the book or pamphlet is to be published.

305.8 Appendix III

*POLICIES GOVERNING THE PUBLICATION AND TRANSLATION  
OF BAHÁ’Í HISTORICAL DOCUMENTS*

4 JULY 1999

305.9 In view of the increasing interest being shown by individual Bahá’ís in  
the publication of documents describing historical events of the Bahá’í  
community and, where necessary, their translation into English and their  
publication in that language, the following policies have been formulated  
to accelerate and simplify the process of granting the necessary approval.

305.10 It should be noted that, in this context, a “historical document” indicates  
a document written some time ago either in the course of the events or as  
a memoir recording events. A historical account now being written by a  
Bahá’í does not come under these policies but would follow the normal  
pre-publication review process.

1. **Historical documents in the sole possession of the Bahá’í World  
Center**:

305.11 The Universal House of Justice envisages the implementation of a  
planned process of the examination, cataloging and categorization of  
all historical documents held by the World Center of the Faith, to  
be followed, or possibly accompanied, by a program for the prepara-  
tion of such documents for publication, in facsimile, in the form of  
transcripts, and, where appropriate, accompanied by a translation into  
English.

2. **Historical documents which are in the hands of members of the  
Bahá’í community**:

305.12 It is noted that there are many historical documents which have already  
been published in the original language, as well as an undetermined  
number of memoirs and other manuscripts which are in the hands of  
individual Bahá’ís and Bahá’í families. Of these the House of Justice  
has concern only over those documents which relate to the history of  
the Faith in Iran, the Arab countries, the Holy Land or other sensitive  
areas. In relation to these it has established the policies listed below.  
The publication and translation of all other historical documents is  
adequately covered by the normal process of review.

305.13 2.1 In countries such as those instanced above, serious danger to  
the Bahá’í communities could be precipitated by the untimely  
publication (with or without translation) of historical docu-  
ments relating to events there. Therefore, every proposal to  
publish or translate a document relating to the history of the  
Faith in the Middle East must be referred to the Universal  
House of Justice for its approval.

305.14 2.2 A Bahá’í who has a copy of a historical document and con-  
siders publishing it, should, out of courtesy, consult the im-  
mediate family of the writer, seeking their agreement to the  
publication, before proceeding.

305.15 2.3 When the House of Justice has approved the publication,  
and/or translation, of a historical document, it should be  
published in full, without deletions, to preserve the integrity  
of the document as an entity. If it is decided to publish only  
the most interesting and publishable portions of a document,  
the publication should be clearly designated as an abridged  
version of the work in question or as extracts from it.

305.16 2.4 In most, if not all, cases of the publication of a historical  
document, it will be desirable for an introduction, footnotes  
and possibly appendices to be added. At the present time,  
such additions should be kept to a minimum and should not  
constitute a mass of supplementary material disproportionate  
to the document itself.

305.17 2.5 It would be inappropriate for the translation of a Tablet to  
appear for the first time as a footnote or appendix to such a  
document.

305.18 2.6 The publication of the original of a historical document, with  
or without a translation, after being approved in principle by  
the Universal House of Justice, will require a special kind of  
review. Bearing in mind that the basic purpose of review is to  
ensure that a publication gives an accurate impression of the  
Faith, the reviewers will have to give attention to the follow-  
ing points:

305.18a 2.6.1 The accuracy of the introduction and footnotes  
and any other material added to the document  
itself.

305.18b 2.6.2 The need for additional footnotes to clarify points  
of which the document itself may give a mislead-  
ing or inadequate impression.

305.18c 2.6.3 The advisability of deleting superfluous footnotes  
or other supplementary material.

305.18d 2.6.4 The quality of the translation. The reviewing  
committee cannot be expected to check the accu-

racy of the translation, but it should give attention  
to the quality of expression and the meaning it  
conveys, and raise questions or make suggestions  
where necessary If the number of such points  
would be large, the whole translation should be  
referred back to the translator for reworking.

306  
Publication of Bahá’í Sacred Texts with a study guide

4 JULY 1999

To all Bahá’í Publishing Trusts

306.1 Recently the Universal House of Justice clarified an issue related to pub-  
lication of Bahá’í Sacred Texts as follows:

306.2 The House of Justice feels that it would not be proper to publish a full-  
text edition of a Bahá’í Sacred Text incorporating a study guide.

306.3 This is not to say that study guides may not include comments on all  
aspects of the texts under study. They may also cite extensively from any of  
the Bahá’í Writings, but such works should in no way become substitutes  
for the basic texts as normally published.

306.4 The purpose of this decision is to distinguish clearly between the Sacred  
Texts themselves and study guides or commentaries written upon them,  
since the latter are not authoritative. The Texts should remain free of any  
impression that the views of the author of any study guide are necessarily to  
be followed in gaining an understanding of the Holy Writings.

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

307  
The advancement of women

5 AUGUST 1999

To a National Spiritual Assembly

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

307.1 The Universal House of Justice has received your email letter of 30 May  
1999 … and has asked us to respond as follows.

307.2 The House of Justice is pleased to note that you are planning to give  
greater attention to the advancement of women in both the internal func-  
tioning of your Bahá’í community and in your external affairs activities.  
The establishment of an Office for the Advancement of Women has the  
potential to provide a powerful reinforcement to the efforts of the believers  
in this important aspect of Bahá’í endeavor. In response to your question  
about the appointment of a member of your National Spiritual Assembly as  
the director of the Office, the House of Justice feels that this matter should  
be left to your discretion; however, it advises you to consider carefully the  
possibility that the appointment of a member, or of a close family relative  
of a member, could well be misunderstood by your Bahá’í community and  
thus create a negative impression. You are encouraged to seek the views of  
the Counselors on this point, and indeed on the other aspects of the new  
initiative you are now planning.

307.3 You have in several places referred to your distress at the attitudes and  
conduct of some male members of the Bahá’í community concerning the  
advancement of women, in their regarding it as an issue which concerns  
only women, or reacting to it through immoderate language or inappropri-  
ate humor. In assisting them to acquire an understanding that they have a  
vital role to play in the implementation of this principle of the Faith, you  
have many possible approaches from which to select. For example, their  
participation in a careful study of the compilation on women would serve to  
bring to their attention those passages in the document which refer clearly  
to the efforts which are required of men. A contemplation of the peerless ex-  
ample of the life of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá should include a study of His actions and  
statements to advance the status and development of women. The messages  
of the House of Justice, calling upon all elements of the Bahá’í community  
for a greater commitment to the advancement of women, must also be given  
due weight in considering the responsibility of men in this regard.

307.4 Your recommendation that the compilation on women be revised is  
noted, and will be considered in due course, most especially as the amount  
of material to be included in it expands with elucidations of the House of  
Justice in response to the needs of the developing Bahá’í community. The  
experience you mention, that of individuals focusing on only one passage  
from the present document and using it as a vehicle in attempting to press  
their views on an individual who has a different understanding, is not solved  
simply by a reordering of the passages; rather it points to a need for deeper  
study and more careful reading, by which is obtained a comprehensive un-

derstanding of this complex subject such that all passages are seen to be ele-  
ments of a harmonious whole. In striving to attain this state, account must  
also be taken of the statements of the House of Justice in the Introduction  
to *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas* concerning the progressive clarification and progres-  
sive application of the laws of the Faith through the instrumentality of the  
Covenant.

307.5 You refer to the view which exists in some quarters of your community,  
based apparently on a passage written on behalf of the Guardian to two  
believers in response to a particular situation, that it is not appropriate to  
create Bahá’í agencies such as an Office for the Advancement of Women or  
to hold meetings to which only women are invited. Such a view ignores the  
clear advice and encouragement set out in several messages of the House  
of Justice concerning the implementation of the principle of equality of  
the sexes, or the actions it has taken in setting up an Office for the Ad-  
vancement of Women in the United Nations Office in New York. Attention  
should also be drawn to the letter of 25 May 1975 from the House of  
Justice to all National Spiritual Assemblies, in which reference is made to  
eighty National Spiritual Assemblies being called upon specifically to orga-  
nize Bahá’í activities for women.[[375]](#footnote-375)307-1 Passages in the compilation on women  
include the call by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá for “women’s assemblages,” His mention  
of some of the subjects which should be discussed at such gatherings, and  
His warning against an approach which would lead to greater disharmony  
and argumentation between men and women. Thus those men who are  
apprehensive about meetings of women can be reassured that these Bahá’í  
gatherings would not degenerate into the contentiousness and antagonism  
toward males which appears in some such meetings organized by radical or  
extremist elements in the wider society.

307.6 In the conduct of your activities for the advancement of women, you  
should take great care to avoid unquestioning acceptance of approaches and  
themes which influence the efforts toward that end in the world around you.  
Statistics on the participation of women on Bahá’í institutions are compiled  
from time to time by Bahá’í agencies, including the Bahá’í International  
Community’s United Nations Office for the Advancement of Women, and  
have been published on occasion in the annual *Bahá’í World* year book.  
However, caution should be observed in their interpretation, because of

the small size of the Bahá’í communities in most countries, and the differ-  
ences in the traditional attitudes toward the participation of women in the  
various cultures represented in the worldwide community. It would also  
be improper to use these results in an attempt to ensure that the composi-  
tion of institutions is evenly balanced between the sexes, since believers  
are enjoined to select those best qualified to serve, irrespective of their sex.  
The Faith does not seek to promote the advancement of women through  
an artificial endeavor to achieve parity, but rather through a fundamen-  
tal transformation of values and understanding coupled with the creation  
of opportunities and encouragement for the development of talents and  
capabilities.

307.7 Likewise, Bahá’í institutions are admonished in the teachings to con-  
sider the welfare and sentiments of all elements of their community in their  
decision-making, and to create opportunities for all to participate in consul-  
tation at gatherings such as the Nineteen Day Feast.

307.8 The sharing of Bahá’í material developed in one country with others  
can be accomplished in a variety of ways, including use of the Bahá’í Inter-  
national Community’s Office for the Advancement of Women, as well as  
advertising in your [national newsletter].

307.9 Your comments on the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of  
Discrimination against Women illustrate the point made earlier about the  
need for care in determining the extent to which the Bahá’í community  
should identify with the initiatives of non-Bahá’í bodies. A document such  
as the Convention should be studied to ascertain whether the provisions  
are, in fact, wholly compatible with the Bahá’í teachings. As you are aware,  
the Faith upholds the equality of the sexes but specifies a differentiation  
of functions in some areas, such as educational priorities when resources  
are limited, service in armed defense forces, membership of the Univer-  
sal House of Justice, exemption from certain laws in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas,  
intestacy provisions, and so on, which could be perceived as effecting a  
discrimination between men and women.

307.10 You are assured of the prayers of the House of Justice in the Holy Shrines  
on your behalf, as you embark on a process which could well prove to be a  
powerful means of promoting the interests of the Cause of Bahá’u’lláh in  
… and beyond.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

FOR DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

308  
Message to the Indigenous Teaching Conference  
in Sucre, Bolivia

20 AUGUST 1999

Friends gathered at the Indigenous  
Teaching Conference in Sucre, Bolivia

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

308.1 In recent years a number of conferences and meetings of consultation  
have taken place among the indigenous believers of Latin America, from  
which have emanated spiritual forces of considerable magnitude. As you  
gather once again, your hearts must surely be uplifted by the progress that  
has resulted from your previous deliberations. You are well aware of ‘Abdu’l-  
Bahá’s promise about your future, and you are systematically moving to-  
wards that future with unshakable resolve and confidence. The Four Year  
Plan has brought new strength to the Bahá’í community through the work  
of training institutes. You should seize upon the opportunities that these in-  
stitutes offer so that an increasing number of you can enhance your capacity  
to actively engage in the spiritual and material education of your peoples.  
That you may be divinely assisted in discharging this vital task is our fervent  
prayer at the Sacred Threshold.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

309  
Response to earthquake in Turkey

24 AUGUST 1999

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

309.1 The historic associations of the Cause of Bahá’u’lláh with Turkey, a land  
held sacred in the hearts of Bahá’ís, make of the disaster wreaked by the  
recent earthquake an event of inexpressible sorrow for the Bahá’í world.  
While we are relieved to have received reports that the lives of our coreli-  
gionists were spared, we grieve with all those who have suffered incalculable  
loss both from the deaths in the thousands of their fellow-citizens and from

the extensive destruction of property. In addition to our fervent prayers in  
the Holy Shrines for the bereaved and distressed, we have arranged for a  
financial contribution to be made towards relief efforts. Moreover, the prin-  
cipal representative of the Bahá’í International Community at the United  
Nations has been asked to convey to the President of Turkey heartfelt con-  
dolences on behalf of our world community.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

310  
Deputization and funding for the Training Institutes

24 AUGUST 1999

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of the United States

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

310.1 The Universal House of Justice has asked us to convey the following  
reply to your inquiry of 14 July 1999 concerning the funding of training  
institutes.

310.2 Your letter has offered the House of Justice a welcome opportunity to  
clarify certain points regarding deputization, and for this it is grateful. It has  
also noted with warm appreciation the generosity of your offer not only to  
raise funds in support of training institutes in different parts of the world  
but also to strive to meet any financial goal it may wish to specify towards  
this end. While the friends would no doubt respond well to such a goal, a  
fundraising approach would not be in keeping with the sense of the appeal  
made in the Riḍván 153 message to the Bahá’ís of the world for the deputi-  
zation of teachers by individuals. As that message stated:

310.3 “Center your energies in the propagation of the Faith of God,” Bahá’u’lláh  
thus instructs His servants, adding, “Whoso is worthy of so high a calling,  
let him arise and promote it. Whoso is unable, it is his duty to appoint him  
who will, in his stead, proclaim this Revelation ….”[[376]](#footnote-376)310-1 Just as one deputizes  
another to teach in one’s stead by covering the expenses of a pioneer or  
traveling teacher, one can deputize a teacher serving an institute, who is,  
of course, a teacher of teachers. To do so, one may make contributions to

the Continental Bahá’í Fund, as well as to the Local, National and Interna-  
tional Funds, earmarked for this purpose.

310.4 The individual’s duty to teach is the primary point here. Deputizing  
one’s own appointed substitute is also highly recommended for one who  
can afford to do so. The individual can always exercise the right to choose  
directly the one he or she wishes to deputize; but often the person wanting  
to provide deputization is unable to identify or select a deputy. For anyone  
finding himself or herself in this latter position, the International Deputiza-  
tion Fund established by the Universal House of Justice in 1965 has con-  
tinued to exist. The new element introduced by the Riḍván 153 message is  
the teacher at a training institute, whose financial support by another would  
fulfill the purpose of deputization. The range of choice for the individual  
wishing to deputize someone has thus been expanded. To realize one’s pur-  
pose in this regard, one may channel one’s financial support of a training  
institute teacher through whatever institution of the Fund is convenient to  
one. The emphasis on the Continental Fund in this case is significant for  
the convenience it provides, since it is through the Boards of Counselors  
that training institutes needing such support can most readily be identified,  
and it is through the Continental Fund that the most direct routing of a  
contribution to its specific destination can be effected. Thus the earmarked  
contributions channeled through the Local or National Fund would ulti-  
mately be turned over to the relevant Continental Fund for delivery to its  
intended destination outside your community.

310.5 It is clear, then, that this new element in deputization is not a question of  
supporting any Bahá’í Fund and cannot strictly speaking be dealt with as a  
Fund issue, even though an institution of the Fund must act, in this case, as  
a channel for the individual’s intention. It is essentially a matter of teaching,  
and it is in this context that the appeal for deputization must be understood  
by all concerned. Obviously, Local and National Spiritual Assemblies are  
expected to inform the friends of the importance of Bahá’u’lláh’s instruc-  
tion and to encourage action in this regard as an appropriate response by  
individuals to the duty of teaching.

310.6 With the creation of training institutes across the globe, an added op-  
portunity for a more direct involvement in deputization presents itself to  
the individual; the House of Justice trusts therefore that the friends can be  
helped to feel some connection with the specific centers of teaching activity  
to which their offerings for deputization are sent. It is for this reason that the  
Continental Counselors and their auxiliaries have been called upon to play

a distinctive role in this matter as officers bearing a particular responsibil-  
ity for propagation, for the Auxiliary Board members and their assistants  
operate at the grassroots of the community and are able readily not only  
to stimulate individuals to teach but also to urge them, if their material  
circumstances allow, to respond to the need for deputization. By being able  
to provide detailed information about current needs, they can make their  
presentations immediately relevant to any interest shown by the friends.  
This is why the House of Justice has asked that the Counselors keep their  
Auxiliary Board members apprised of the level of deputization required by  
institutes in various regions so that they can make this information available  
to those who wish to pursue this new possibility.

310.7 While, therefore, the Auxiliary Board members are not being asked to  
solicit funds in the sense of raising money in support of the Continental  
or any other Fund, they do have the task of arousing commitment to the  
teaching work, which includes acts of deputization, and they have access  
to updated relevant information that is needed by friends interested in  
deputizing. In this connection, the action of these officers of the Faith is  
directed to individuals and not to Local Spiritual Assemblies or other insti-  
tutions. They, of course, share with Spiritual Assemblies the responsibility  
of promoting interest in deputization as an aspect of the teaching work, but  
their mode of operation places them in an advantageous position to reach  
individuals in effective, intimate settings.

310.8 In sum, the call for deputization falls within the framework of teaching  
and depends on individual response, as with pioneering. To establish a depu-  
tization fund goal would be to loosen the believers’ grasp of this important  
characteristic of Bahá’í life, which enhances individual motivation towards  
and direct involvement in the teaching work. The Bahá’í institutions must  
do all they can to facilitate this special expression of individual responsibil-  
ity towards promulgating the Cause: the Continental Counselors and their  
auxiliaries in the manner described above, the Spiritual Assemblies by en-  
couraging it and providing useful information, the Bahá’í Funds by funneling  
deputization contributions. Given the situation in the United States, the fol-  
lowing advice is offered in reply to your expressed wish to take some action:

1. The adoption of a financial goal for training institute deputization  
is not required, but you will want to underscore the importance of  
deputization by keeping this matter before the friends.

2. An aspect of collaboration with the Counselors would be for them  
to share with you regularly the updated information they receive

from the International Teaching Center on the current needs of  
training institutes throughout the world.

3. You could offer information and advice to the friends throughout  
the community as to how the various funds may facilitate their wish  
to contribute towards the deputization of teachers functioning at  
training institutes in other countries.

4. You will want to make sure that appropriate mechanisms exist for  
transmitting to the respective Continental Funds the financial as-  
sistance to training institute teachers that the friends pay to the  
Local and National Funds, together with information as to the  
wishes of the donors.

310.9 The House of Justice is confident that in these and other ways you may  
devise in consultation with the Counselors you will be able to give effective  
support to individual efforts at deputization and thus ensure an outstanding  
place for your community in this vital endeavor.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

FOR DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

311  
Martyrdom of Bahá’í in Tajikistan

5 OCTOBER 1999

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

311.1 The Universal House of Justice has requested us to announce the martyr-  
dom by assassination of Mr. ‘Abdu’llah Mogharrabi, steadfast and devoted  
pioneer of the Faith to Tajikistan.

311.2 After spending the majority of his years in the Cradle of the Faith, serv-  
ing in various teaching and administrative capacities, he left Iran, upon the  
advice. of the institutions when his life was in danger, to settle elsewhere.  
He resided a few years in the United Kingdom, close to his daughter, before  
pioneering to Tajikistan where he had been a pillar of strength to that com-  
munity since the inception of the National Spiritual Assembly in 1994.  
He was the Secretary of that institution for all but one year of his time in  
Tajikistan.

311.3 The manner in which he was killed leaves no doubt that the attack was  
carried out by fanatical elements in the country. It is significant that in 1993

one of the Iranian newspapers mentioned his name abusively, accusing him  
of anti-Islamic activities aimed at deceiving the Muslims in Tajikistan.

311.4 He was killed during the evening of Friday, 24 September 1999. The  
Bahá’í friends who participated with the authorities in the investigation  
of his death reported that Mr. Mogharrabi’s hands had been tied behind  
his back, he had been gagged and was forced to lie face down; there were  
signs of torture over his body. He was shot in the back, the bullet piercing  
his heart. His room was left untouched, and the money which he held in  
various currencies was not taken. The front door to the house had been  
left open, which attracted the attention of neighbors a few hours after the  
incident.

311.5 His sacrifice will certainly draw fresh confirmations upon the efforts of  
the Bahá’í community in Tajikistan and neighboring countries. Despite his  
advanced age, 88, he tirelessly served the people of this country and its  
Bahá’í community, providing a true example to us all of devotion to the  
Faith. In one of his letters to the Bahá’í World Center some time ago, he  
had expressed his desire to give his last breath as a martyr of the Faith.  
Mr. Mogharrabi’s illustrious life reminds us all of the statement made by the  
Blessed Beauty in the Hidden Words:

311.5a O SON OF MAN!

Ponder and reflect. Is it thy wish to die upon thy bed, or to shed  
thy life-blood on the dust, a martyr in My path, and so become the  
manifestation of My command and the revealer of My light in the  
highest paradise? Judge thou aright, O servant![[377]](#footnote-377)311-1

311.6 The House of Justice prays for the progress of his soul, and extends its  
loving sympathy to the members of his family. It will also supplicate on  
behalf of the believers in Tajikistan, a country in which Mr. Mogharrabi was  
proffered the crown of martyrdom.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

312  
Correspondence from the Bahá’í World Center

9 NOVEMBER 1999

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

312.1 As the work of the Bahá’í World Center steadily increases, the Universal  
House of Justice, in order to concentrate on matters requiring its direct at-  
tention, has progressively referred to various Departments subjects that can  
be handled in other ways.

312.2 We have been asked to inform you of a new development in this  
respect. As you may know, in addition to the ongoing responsibil-  
ity exercised by the Secretariat of the House of Justice, the Office of  
Correspondence has been responding to a small percentage of relatively  
routine requests and inquiries made to the World Center. Arrangements  
have now been made for that Office to handle a broader range of such  
correspondence, over its own signature, following policies laid down for  
this purpose. The House of Justice trusts that these new arrangements  
will further improve communication between the World Center and the  
Bahá’í world.

312.3 Communications to the Bahá’í World Center should continue to be ad-  
dressed as indicated in the *International Bahá’í Directory*.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

FOR DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

313  
One and Five Year Plans

26 NOVEMBER 1999

To the Bahá’ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

313.1 On this special day, when our hearts and thoughts are focused on the  
immortal example set by the life of the Center of the Covenant, we pause  
to note, with feelings of deep gratitude, the current progress of the Divine  
Plan which He conceived, and to glance at the future beyond the four-year  
stage now rapidly coming to an end.

313.2 The accomplishments during this period are encouraging indeed. An  
impressive network of training institutes on a scale but dimly imagined  
at the start of the Plan has been established throughout the world. These  
nascent centers of learning have made significant strides in developing for-  
mal programs and in putting into place effective systems for the delivery of  
courses. Reports indicate that the number of believers benefiting directly  
from training courses has climbed to nearly 100,000. Without question, the  
capacity of the worldwide community to develop its human resources has  
been distinctly enhanced.

313.3 The effects of this systematic approach to human resource development  
are making themselves felt in the lives of all three protagonists of the Plan—  
the individual believer, the institutions, and the local community. There has  
been an upsurge in teaching activities undertaken at the initiative of the  
individual. Spiritual Assemblies, Councils, and committees have grown in  
their ability to guide the believers in their individual and collective endeav-  
ors. And community life has flourished, even in localities long dormant, as  
new patterns of thought and behavior have emerged.

313.4 As we survey the Bahá’í world, we see a greatly strengthened community,  
internally sound and notably reinforced. Its achievements in reaching the  
general public, governments and organizations of civil society and in win-  
ning trust in all these circles are striking. Agencies specialized in external  
affairs, following a well-defined strategy, have broadened the range of the  
Faith’s influence nationally and internationally, and projects of social and  
economic development, which seek the spiritual and material upliftment of  
entire communities, are penetrating society at the grassroots.

313.5 The two stages in the unfoldment of the Divine Plan lying immedi-  
ately ahead will last one year and five years respectively. At Riḍván 2000  
the Bahá’í world will be asked to embark on the first of these two stages, a  
twelve-month effort aimed at concentrating the forces, the capacities and  
the insights that have so strongly emerged. The Five Year Plan that fol-  
lows will initiate a series of worldwide enterprises that will carry the Bahá’í  
community through the final twenty years in the first century of the Faith’s  
Formative Age. These global Plans will continue to focus on advancing the  
process of entry by troops and on its systematic acceleration.

313.6 It is essential that, during the one-year effort, national and regional in-  
stitutes everywhere bring into full operation the programs and systems that  
they have now devised. National communities should enter the Five Year  
Plan confident that the acquisition of knowledge, qualities and skills of ser-

vice by large contingents of believers, with the aid of a sequence of courses,  
will proceed unhindered. Ample attention must also be given to further  
systematization of teaching efforts, whether undertaken by the individual or  
directed by the institutions. In this respect, the International Teaching Cen-  
ter has identified certain patterns of systematic expansion and consolidation  
for relatively small geographical areas consisting of a manageable number of  
localities. Through the collaboration of Counselors and National Spiritual  
Assemblies, several “Area Growth Programs” are being established in each  
continent. They will be carefully monitored during the Twelve Month Plan  
and their methods will be refined so that this approach can be incorporated  
into subsequent Plans.

313.7 Strategies to advance the process of entry by troops cannot ignore chil-  
dren and junior youth, if the victories won in one generation are not to be  
lost with the passage of time. It is imperative, then, that at this point in the  
process of systematization of the teaching work, definite steps be taken to  
ensure that the vision of the community fully embraces its younger mem-  
bers. The education of children, an obligation enjoined on both parents and  
institutions, requires special emphasis so as to become thoroughly integrated  
into the process of community development. This activity should be taken  
to new levels of intensity during these twelve months and then be further  
raised in the years immediately after. That the programs of most institutes  
in the world provide for the training of children’s class teachers represents an  
element of strength. Spiritual Assemblies and Auxiliary Board members will  
need to mobilize these newly trained human resources to meet the spiritual  
requirements of children and junior youth.

313.8 The period of the Twelve Month Plan will be marked by great activity  
in society at large as the twentieth century draws to a close. Already keen  
interest is being shown by leaders of thought in the destiny of the coming  
generations, and we hope that the fervor of the Bahá’í community, both in  
its internal operation and its interactions with society, will convey a sense of  
confidence in the future of humanity.

313.9 We will pray ardently in the Holy Shrines that Bahá’u’lláh will bless your  
exertions to bring the Four Year Plan to a triumphal conclusion.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

314  
Interfaith gathering in India in the presence of  
Pope John Paul II

12 DECEMBER 1999

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

314.1 The Universal House of Justice has received with joy reports of the pub-  
lic interreligious gathering organized by the Roman Catholic Church in  
New Delhi in the presence of Pope John Paul II during his recent visit to  
India. Designated representatives of the different religions were invited to  
briefly address the gathering, and Mrs. Zena Sorabjee spoke on behalf of the  
Bahá’ís. Such was the importance of this event as a further step in the rec-  
ognition of the Faith as a major religion in India that the Universal House  
of Justice wished to share with you copies of Mrs. Sorabjee’s address and  
a description of the occasion based on reports received from the National  
Spiritual Assembly of India and Mrs. Sorabjee.

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

315  
Application of the laws of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas

28 DECEMBER 1999

To the Bahá’ís of the World

Beloved Friends,

315.1 In the course of the Four Year Plan, we have been reviewing those laws of  
the Kitáb-i-Aqdas which are not yet universally applied, in order to deter-  
mine which of them it would be timely to implement now.

315.2 In every land we see a growing thirst for spiritual life and moral clarity.  
There is recognition of the ineffectiveness of plans and programs for human  
betterment which are not rooted in lives of spiritual awareness and ethical  
virtue. Who should be better equipped to satisfy this longing than those  
who are already inspired by the Teachings of Bahá’u’lláh and aided by His  
Power?

315.3 We have determined, therefore, that it is imperative for all the believers to  
deepen their awareness of the blessings conferred by the laws which directly  
foster the devotional life of the individual and, thus, of the community.

The essentials of these laws are known to all Bahá’ís, but acquiring greater  
insight into their significance must include carrying out all the divinely  
revealed aspects of their observance. These are the laws which pertain to  
obligatory prayer, fasting and recitation of the Greatest Name ninety-five  
times a day.

315.4 Bahá’u’lláh asserts: “One who performeth neither good deeds nor acts  
of worship is like unto a tree which beareth no fruit, and an action which  
leaveth no trace. Whosoever experienceth the holy ecstasy of worship will  
refuse to barter such an act or any praise of God for all that existeth in the  
world. Fasting and obligatory prayer are as two wings to man’s life. Blessed  
be the one who soareth with their aid in the heaven of the love of God, the  
Lord of all worlds.”

315.5 The friends have long been familiar with the great importance which  
Bahá’u’lláh attaches to daily obligatory prayer and to the observance of the  
fast, but a number of aspects of the law, such as those concerning ablutions,  
traveling and the compensation for prayers missed, remained to be made  
universally applicable. This step is now taken. Thus all elements of the laws  
dealing with obligatory prayer and fasting are, without any exception, now  
applicable.

315.6 We have also decided that it is timely for Bahá’ís in every land to take  
to their hearts the words of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas: “It hath been ordained that  
every believer in God, the Lord of Judgment, shall, each day, having washed  
his hands and then his face, seat himself and, turning unto God, repeat  
Alláh-u-Abhá’ ninety-five times. Such was the decree of the Maker of the  
Heavens when, with majesty and power, He established Himself upon  
the thrones of His Names.”[[378]](#footnote-378)315-1 Let all experience the spiritual enrichment  
brought to their souls by this simple act of worshipful meditation.

315.7 The spiritual growth generated by individual devotions is reinforced  
by loving association among the friends in every locality, by worship as  
a community and by service to the Faith and to one’s fellow human be-  
ings. These communal aspects of the godly life relate to the law of the  
Mashriqu’l-Adhkár which appears in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas. Although the time  
has not come for the building of local Mashriqu’l-Adhkárs, the holding of  
regular meetings for worship open to all and the involvement of Bahá’í com-  
munities in projects of humanitarian service are expressions of this element  
of Bahá’í life and a further step in the implementation of the Law of God.

315.8 Bahá’u’lláh has written: “We have adorned the heaven of utterance with  
the stars of divine wisdom and holy ordinances as a bounty on Our part.  
Verily, We are the Ever-Forgiving, the Most Generous. O friends of God  
throughout the regions! Know ye the value of these days and cling unto  
whatsoever hath been sent down from God, the Most Great, the Most  
Exalted. Verily, He remembereth you in the Most Great Prison, and in-  
structeth you in that which will cause you to draw nigh unto a station that  
delighteth the eyes of the pure in heart. Glory rest upon you and upon those  
who have attained unto that living fountain which floweth forth from My  
wondrous Pen.”

315.9 It is our prayer at the Sacred Threshold that the greater attention to the  
spiritual heart of the Teachings which these laws express will enhance the  
devotion of the friends to the Source of all bounties and attract to the Cause  
the receptive souls among His spiritually famished children.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

316  
Passing of Amatu’l-Bahá Rúḥíyyih Khánum

19 JANUARY 2000

To the Bahá’ís of the World

316.1 In the early hours of this morning, the soul of Amatu’l-Bahá Rúḥíyyih  
Khánum, beloved consort of Shoghi Effendi and the Bahá’í world’s last re-  
maining link with the family of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, was released from the limita-  
tions of this earthly existence. In the midst of our grief, we are sustained by  
our confidence that she has been gathered to the glory of the Concourse on  
High in the presence of the Abhá Beauty.

316.2 For all whose hearts she touched so deeply, the sorrow that this irreparable  
loss brings will, in God’s good time, be assuaged in awareness of the joy that  
is hers through her reunion with the Guardian and with the Master, Who  
had Himself prayed in the Most Holy Shrine that her parents be blessed  
with a child. Down the centuries to come, the followers of Bahá’u’lláh will  
contemplate with wonder and gratitude the quality of the services—ardent,  
indomitable, resourceful—that she brought to the protection and promo-  
tion of the Cause.

316.3 In her youth, Amatu’l-Bahá had already distinguished herself through  
her activities in North America, and later, both with her dear mother and  
on her own, she had rendered valuable service to the Cause in Europe. Her  
twenty years of intimate association with Shoghi Effendi evoked from his  
pen such accolades as “my helpmate,” “my shield,” “my tireless collaborator  
in the arduous tasks I shoulder.” To these tributes he added in 1952 his  
decision to elevate her to the rank of Hand of the Cause of God, after the  
death of her illustrious father.

316.4 The devastating shock of the beloved Guardian’s passing steeled her re-  
solve to lend her share, with the other Hands of the Cause, to the triumph  
of the Ten Year Crusade, and subsequently to undertake, with characteristic  
intrepidity, her historic worldwide travels.

316.5 A life so noble in its provenance, so crucial to- the preservation of the  
Faith’s integrity, and so rich in its dedicated, uninterrupted and selfless ser-  
vice, moves us to call for befitting commemorations by Bahá’í communities  
on both national and local levels, as well as for special gatherings in her  
memory in all Houses of Worship.

316.6 With yearning hearts, we supplicate at the Holy Threshold for infinite  
heavenly bounties to surround her soul, as she assumes her rightful and  
well-earned position among the exalted company in the Abhá Kingdom.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

317  
Invitation to members of National Spiritual Assemblies  
for funeral service in Holy Land for Amatu’l-Bahá  
Rúḥíyyih Khánum

19 JANUARY 2000

To National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

317.1 The Universal House of Justice, recognizing the longing of friends in  
every part of the world to pay their tribute to the Hand of the Cause of God  
Amatu’l-Bahá Rúḥíyyih Khánum, has decided that one or, at the most, two  
members of each National Spiritual Assembly are permitted and welcome  
to come to the Holy Land to attend her funeral, if financial and other  
circumstances allow them to do so. The funeral will take place in Haifa at

2 o’clock on the afternoon of Sunday 23 January 2000. Kindly inform the  
Bahá’í World Center immediately of the name(s) of your member(s) who  
will be coming.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

318  
Funeral service for Amatu’l-Bahá Rúḥíyyih Khánum

26 JANUARY 2000

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

318.1 Further to its message of 19 January 2000 concerning the passing of  
Amatu’l-Bahá Rúḥíyyih Khánum, the Universal House of Justice has asked  
us to convey the following.

318.2 On the afternoon of 23 January, in a light rain, the blessed remains of  
Rúḥíyyih Khánum were laid to rest in Haifa, following a funeral service  
at the House of the Master and graveside prayers attended by more than  
1100 believers. The interment took place in a plot of land which had been  
converted into a garden by Shoghi Effendi, directly across the street from  
the Master’s House. The participants came from near and far, and included  
24 Continental Counselors, representatives of 76 National Spiritual Assem-  
blies, and pilgrims, as well as members of the institutions and volunteers  
serving at the Bahá’í World Center. Among them, too, were senior officials  
from the Canadian and United States embassies, representatives of the Is-  
raeli government, the mayors of ‘Akká and Haifa, and other prominent  
Israeli citizens.

318.3 The House of Justice is deeply gratified that such a wide representation  
of believers was able to come to the Holy Land on very short notice to pay  
final respects on behalf of all the friends throughout the world who could  
not be present. Moreover, it warmly appreciates the various expressions of  
sympathy and love received at the World Center through many messages  
and gifts of flowers. It is also pleased that news of Rúḥíyyih Khánum’s pass-  
ing and funeral has been given coverage by the world press and electronic  
media.

318.4 Enclosed for your interest is a copy of the printed program of the funeral  
service.

318.5 Without doubt, the memory of a life so inestimably precious, so extraor-  
dinarily dynamic as that of Amatu’l-Bahá will infuse the Bahá’í institutions  
and individual friends everywhere with renewed resolve and redoubled  
energy.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

FOR DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

319  
Passing of Adib Taherzadeh,  
member of the Universal House of Justice

27 JANUARY 2000

To the Bahá’ís of the World

319.1 The passing of our dearly loved co-worker, Adib Taherzadeh, has deep-  
ened our sorrows. We recall with admiration his devoted and unremitting  
services to the Cause of God for over half a century. His exemplary enthusi-  
asm for the teaching work and his capacity to inspire the believers endeared  
him to all who knew him. As a self-sacrificing pioneer, as a champion of the  
Covenant, as a member of the National Spiritual Assemblies of the British  
Isles and of the Republic of Ireland, as a member of the Continental Board  
of Counselors in Europe, and as a member of the Universal House of Jus-  
tice, he evinced complete consecration, unshakeable faith, and unyielding  
resolve.

319.2 At an early point in his life he was seized by the desire to make available  
to his fellow believers in the West the riches of the history and teachings of  
the Faith. It was this longing that found expression in the body of writings  
that will remain forever associated with his memory.

319.3 We extend our heartfelt sympathy to the bereaved family, most particu-  
larly to his dear wife and beloved children, and assure them of our fervent  
prayers in the Holy Shrines for bountiful rewards to be vouchsafed to him  
in the Abhá Kingdom.

319.4 All National Assemblies are advised to hold memorial gatherings in his  
name, including devotional programs in his honor in all Houses of Worship.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

320  
Passing of Abaineh Merhatsion, member of  
Continental Board of Counselors for Africa

10 FEBRUARY 2000

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of Ethiopia

320.1 The untimely passing of much-loved and highly admired Abaineh Mer-  
hatsion has filled our hearts with sorrow. His self-effacement, wisdom and  
patience combined to leave after him a record of exemplary service, includ-  
ing his membership on the National Spiritual Assembly of Ethiopia, and  
subsequently on the Continental Board of Counselors for Africa. Kindly  
convey to his dear family the assurance of our fervent prayers in the Holy  
Shrines for the progress of his noble soul in the Abhá Kingdom.

320.2 We advise you to hold memorial gatherings in his honor throughout  
Ethiopia, and are requesting all National Spiritual Assemblies on the Afri-  
can Continent to hold similar meetings. The National Spiritual Assembly  
of Uganda is being asked to hold a memorial service at the Mother Temple  
of Africa.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

321  
Three Bahá’ís in Iran sentenced to death

11 FEBRUARY 2000

To selected National Spiritual Assemblies

321.1 The Universal House of Justice has just received from Iran the distressing  
news that death sentences have been reaffirmed for two members of the  
Bahá’í community there and a further death sentence has been passed on a  
third believer.

321.2 You will recall that our letter dated 14 November 1997 informed you that  
three friends—Mr. Sirus Zabihi-Moghaddam, Mr. Hedayat Kashefi-Naja-  
fabadi and Mr. Ataollah Hamid Nasirizadeh—were arrested in Mashhad in  
late 1997. Early in 1998, branch #8 of the Revolutionary Court in Mashhad  
sentenced the first two to death and Mr. Nasirizadeh to ten years’ imprison-  
ment. It was the same court that sentenced to death Mr. Ruhollah Rohani,  
who was executed on 21 July of that year. The three other sentences were

subsequently set aside by the Supreme Court on the grounds that the pris-  
oners had not been permitted to have lawyers for their defense, as entitled  
under the law, and a retrial was accordingly ordered. That retrial took place  
in branch #3 of the Revolutionary Court in Mashhad, and in October 1998  
the original verdicts were reaffirmed. An appeal was subsequently made.  
(See our email of 1 December 1998.)

321.3 On 28 May 1999, the United Nations Commission on Human Rights  
Representative, Professor Maurice Copithorne, was assured by Iran’s Per-  
manent Representative to the United Nations in Geneva that “the Supreme  
Court decided to reject the verdict of capital punishment for the defendants  
and sent their cases to another competent court for a retrial.” … We have  
now been informed that the verdicts, which were conveyed orally to the pris-  
oners on 3 February, confirm the previous sentences: death for Mr. Zabihi-  
Moghaddam and Mr. Kashefi-Najafabadi and ten years’ imprisonment in  
Kirman for Mr. Nasirizadeh.

321.4 Further, the same court has now imposed a death sentence on Mr.  
Manuchehr Khulusi, who had been arrested in Birjand some eight months  
ago and subsequently transferred to the prison in Mashhad. It is not known  
what charges were brought against Mr. Khulusi, but it is clear that he was  
arrested because of his Bahá’í activities.

321.5 The court that rendered these judgments is composed of a single judge,  
a Mr. Ni‘mati. The prisoners have been given only 20 days to lodge a pro-  
test against their sentences, in which circumstance their cases may then be  
referred to a second court for review. As you will note, part of this very brief  
period has already elapsed and, at this point, the outcome of their protest  
is not certain.

321.6 Relatives of the prisoners have appealed for international action to pre-  
vent the carrying out of the verdicts and the imminent execution of three  
innocent individuals ….

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

322  
Passing of Laurie Arbab,  
former member of National Spiritual Assembly  
of Colombia and Director of Ruhi Institute

18 FEBRUARY 2000

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of Colombia

322.1 DEEPLY SADDENED UNTIMELY PASSING DEAR LAURIE ARBAB WHOSE PURITY  
HEART, STEADFASTNESS PURPOSE DISTINGUISHED HER NEARLY FOUR DECADES  
SERVICE BAHÁ’U’LLÁH, INCLUDING PERIOD MEMBERSHIP NATIONAL SPIRITUAL  
ASSEMBLY COLOMBIA. AS DIRECTOR OF ORIGINAL RUHI INSTITUTE SHE FORGED  
METHODS, MORALE, MATERIALS OF DYNAMIC APPROACH TO ADVANCEMENT CAUSE.  
WORLD CENTER GREATLY INDEBTED HER SUBSEQUENT CONTRIBUTION CURATOR  
HOLY PLACES’ HISTORICAL COLLECTION.

322.2 EXTEND LOVING CONDOLENCES FAMILY, FRIENDS, ASSURING OUR HEARTFELT  
PRAYERS HOLY SHRINES PROGRESS HER LUMINOUS SOUL.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

323  
Passing of Mildred Mottahedeh

20 FEBRUARY 2000

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

323.1 We are deeply grieved at the passing of Mildred Mottahedeh, so es-  
teemed, so greatly loved, so staunch and trusted a supporter and defender  
of the Cause of Bahá’u’lláh. With her departure from this earthly life the  
Bahá’í world community has lost an outstanding figure of the opening ep-  
ochs of the Formative Age of the Bahá’í Dispensation.

323.2 Her more than half a century of tireless endeavor in its service involved  
her in teaching and administrative activities at the local, national, conti-  
nental and international levels. At the same time she maintained a rigorous  
schedule as a businesswoman, a contributor to the arts, and a promoter of  
humanitarian works. To these manifold tasks, she brought the combined  
resources of a selfless spirit, a compassionate heart, a creative mind, a practi-  
cal sense, and a leonine will tempered by humility, candor and wit.

323.3 She remained for almost three decades at the forefront of the external  
affairs work of the Bahá’í International Community and in the service of  
the world center of the Faith, culminating in her membership on the Inter-  
national Bahá’í Council, the first globally elected Bahá’í body.

323.4 With assured hearts, we supplicate in the Holy Shrines for the progress  
of her illumined soul throughout the divine worlds. Our loving sympathy is  
extended to the members of her family and all others who mourn her loss.  
National Spiritual Assemblies are urged to hold befitting memorial gather-  
ings in her honor in all Houses of Worship and other centers.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

324  
Clarification on application of Bahá’í laws

23 FEBRUARY 2000

To an individual believer

Dear Bahá’í Friend,

324.1 The Universal House of Justice received your emailed letter of 6 Febru-  
ary 2000 and appreciates your suggestion for a procedure to be followed  
when Bahá’í laws are applied. You provide a very interesting perspective and  
the House of Justice has asked us to send you the following comments.

324.2 The way in which the House of Justice currently takes such actions is  
largely dictated by the nature of the law in each case and on the condition of  
the Bahá’í community at the time. The method adopted may not be suitable  
for publication in a special legal bulletin or for the specification of the sacred  
Texts on which the law rests.

324.3 The fundamental aspects of the laws of obligatory prayer and fasting  
have long been known to the believers and applied by them in varying  
degrees depending upon their awareness of their importance. The details  
which remained to be applied universally were quite secondary in relation  
to the vital spiritual significance of the laws themselves. It was with this  
in mind that the announcement made by the House of Justice did not go  
into such matters as the verses of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas and the Questions and  
Answers in which these details can be found. It wishes the friends to register  
in their understanding the basic concepts of these laws and the importance  
of observing them. Then, as individuals study the Texts, they will undoubt-

edly have questions which can be answered as they arise. In due course the  
House of Justice will provide National Spiritual Assemblies with references  
which they can use in replying to such questions.

324.4 You will note that the course followed in the universal application of the  
law of Ḥuqúqu’lláh was different to the above. In that case the House of  
Justice circulated a compilation of the texts concerning Ḥuqúqu’lláh and a  
codification of the law for the believers to study and then, because a date  
of application was necessary, announced a specific date from which the law  
would be applied to all believers. Since that time, although the Deputies  
and Representatives of the Trustee of Ḥuqúqu’lláh have been actively pur-  
suing the education of the friends in this law, they have been instructed not  
to attempt to give detailed answers to questions of computation, since this  
is something which the House of Justice has preferred to leave to the discre-  
tion of the individual believers as they themselves study the texts of the law  
and strive to apply it.

324.5 This approach to the application of laws into a community’s life is clearly  
very different from the one you outline as being the norm in civil society,  
but the House of Justice feels that you will understand, at least in the case of  
these laws of conscience, why special approaches are desirable in order not  
to obscure the essentials of the laws by paying too much attention to detail  
in the initial stages.

324.6 There is, moreover, an aspect of Bahá’í law at the present time which dif-  
fers from most civil laws, namely, that genuine ignorance of a law is accept-  
able as an excuse for not adhering to it. This makes possible the education  
of the Bahá’ís as laws are applied and also allows new believers time to ac-  
custom themselves to the principles and laws of the Faith. It is an important  
factor in the evolution of Bahá’í communities, institutions and individuals,  
whether observance is solely a matter of personal conscience, as in the case  
of the laws of prayer and fasting, or is enforceable by the institutions of the  
Cause as are the laws of marriage.

324.7 Undoubtedly, as the structure of Bahá’í law evolves, the Universal House  
of Justice will have to consider some general form or procedure for formal-  
izing the application of laws and this may well include publication in a  
specified bulletin, as you indicate is the procedure in relation to civil law in  
certain countries.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

325  
Registration of Bahá’í marriages in Iran

28 FEBRUARY 2000

To selected National Spiritual Assemblies

325.1 The Universal House of Justice has just received news concerning action  
by the Iranian government that will have the important effect of permitting  
the registration of Bahá’í marriages in that country. For quite a number of  
years, as you know, the Bahá’í community of Iran has been seeking a way by  
which Bahá’í marriages and the birth of Bahá’í children could be officially  
registered and also validated on identity cards. The new situation could  
well have come about because of the high number of Bahá’í marriage cases  
and the steadfastness of the individuals involved in refusing to register their  
Bahá’í marriages under any other religious designation.

325.2 It has now been learned that the head of the Iranian judiciary recently  
issued a circular letter to all registry offices throughout the country, stating  
that any couple who appear before the latter officials, acknowledging that  
they are husband and wife, may be registered without being required to  
state their religious affiliation. An official certification may then be issued  
and supplied to the couple concerned. At the same time, the judiciary has  
issued a related instruction to the registry offices with respect to the issuance  
of birth certificates and identity cards. Couples whose personal status has  
been validated by the aforementioned official certification are now to have  
such information entered on their identity cards, acknowledging that they  
are recognized as husband and wife. Thereafter, they should experience no  
difficulty in registering children of the marriage.

325.3 This new development removes at a stroke one of the most troublesome  
problems that has long handicapped the members of the Iranian Bahá’í  
community. The arrangement provides ample proof of what Bahá’í repre-  
sentatives abroad have consistently maintained; namely, that the govern-  
ment of Iran is able, if it so wishes, to find ways within existing laws and  
regulations, to accord Bahá’ís the same freedoms enjoyed by all other Ira-  
nian citizens ….

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

326  
Date for formation of Regional Bahá’í Councils

12 MARCH 2000

To all National Spiritual Assemblies,

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

326.1 In a letter addressed to you under the date of 30 May 1997, the Univer-  
sal House of Justice announced its decision to establish Regional Bahá’í  
Councils as a new element of Bahá’í administration, between the local and  
national levels.[[379]](#footnote-379)326-1 These institutions are formed only with the permission  
of the House of Justice in certain countries where the growing complexity  
of the issues which are facing National Spiritual Assemblies requires this  
development. As specified by the House of Justice case by case for the coun-  
tries directly concerned, a Regional Council is established either through  
election by the members of the Local Spiritual Assemblies in a region or  
through appointment by the National Spiritual Assembly, which receives  
recommendations of candidates from Local Spiritual Assemblies in the  
region. The date set for formation of Regional Councils has been 23 May,  
the anniversary of the Declaration of the Báb according to the Gregorian  
calendar.

326.2 To keep you informed of essential aspects of the evolution of Regional  
Councils, we have been asked to convey the following.

326.3 In view of the experience gained over a period of several years, the House  
of Justice has recognized that it would be more practical to set a new date  
for the formation of these institutions. Henceforth, then, the election or ap-  
pointment of Regional Councils will take effect every year on 26 November,  
the Day of the Covenant. The formation processes will, of course, have to  
be set in motion in sufficient time to be concluded on this date.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

FOR DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

327  
Election of new member  
to the Universal House of Justice

20 MARCH 2000

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

327.1 We warmly welcome Kiser Barnes as the newly elected member of the  
Universal House of Justice.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

328  
The Training Institutes and systematic growth

23 MARCH 2000

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

328.1 The International Teaching Center has prepared the enclosed document  
entitled “Training Institutes and Systematic Growth,” which represents a  
sequel to the one dated April 1998 on the subject of institutes made avail-  
able to the delegates at the Eighth International Bahá’í Convention. The  
Universal House of Justice feels that the document will be of considerable  
interest to those concerned with the operation of training institutes.[[380]](#footnote-380)328-1

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

FOR DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

329  
Appointment of new Counselor  
to the International Teaching Center

28 MARCH 2000

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

329.1 With joyful hearts we announce the appointment of Zenaida Ramirez as  
a Counselor member of the International Teaching Center.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

330  
Resignation and membership  
on Regional Bahá’í Councils

16 APRIL 2000

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of Brazil

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

330.1 The Universal House of Justice received your email letter … in which  
you ask a number of questions regarding resignation and membership on  
Regional Bahá’í Councils. We have been asked to reply to you as follows ….

330.2 To begin, we are reminded in letters written on behalf of the beloved  
Guardian that service as an elected member of a Bahá’í institution is “a  
bounty, a privilege and a unique responsibility” which “all the friends should  
stand ready to accept … unless they are definitely incapacitated and could  
not possibly take up office.” Further, we find that,

330.2a … the Guardian wishes you to make clear to all the believers that  
membership in a Bahá’í Assembly or Committee is a sacred obligation  
which should be gladly and confidently accepted by every loyal and  
conscientious member of the community, no matter how humble and  
inexperienced.[[381]](#footnote-381)330-1

330.3 It is, therefore, clear that a member of an elected body such as a Regional  
Council in Brazil should not resign from serving, except in extremely rare  
cases. With this in mind, we turn to the questions raised in your email.

330.4 You indicate that one situation that has occurred is when a believer is  
elected to both a Regional Council and a Local Spiritual Assembly. Further,  
you state that the procedure you have adopted in such cases is the same as  
when a believer is elected to both the National Spiritual Assembly and a  
Local Spiritual Assembly, that is, you consider his or her resignation from  
the Local Assembly justified.

330.5 In this connection, we are instructed to point out that the House of Jus-  
tice does not approve the automatic resignation of a member of a National  
Assembly from a Local Assembly, but rather asks that the circumstances  
of each case be considered separately. Normally those elected to a Local  
Assembly and the National Assembly should make every effort to serve on  
both bodies. The House of Justice has stated that

330.5a If it is too much of a burden and impractical for an individual member  
to assume the responsibilities of serving on both the National and the  
Local Assembly, he should present his case to both bodies, and seek  
consultation. Each case should be considered separately, depending  
on the circumstances of each member. It may be found that if a Na-  
tional Assembly member is an officer of the Local Spiritual Assembly,  
his resignation as officer of the Assembly, instead of the membership  
of that Assembly, may solve the problem for that individual.[[382]](#footnote-382)330-2

330.6 In the event that a solution cannot be found, however, membership on  
the National Spiritual Assembly would then take precedence over member-  
ship on the Local Assembly. The same principles would apply in the case of  
a believer who is elected to both a Regional Council and a Local Assembly.  
In such an instance, the Local Assembly would accept the resignation at its  
own discretion. Only if unusual circumstances arise would the case need to  
be referred to the National Assembly.

330.7 Another situation described in your email is one in which a member of  
a Regional Council is not able to participate in the meetings of the Coun-  
cil, either occasionally owing to professional obligations or for prolonged

periods. In this connection, you ask what degree of flexibility the National  
Assembly has in replacing Council members. Here again, the principles  
are clear in the case of an elected body. In a letter written on behalf of  
the Guardian, we read the following in relation to membership on a Local  
Spiritual Assembly:

330.7a … It is only too obvious that unless a member can attend regularly  
the meetings of his Local Assembly, it would be impossible for him to  
discharge the duties incumbent upon him, and to fulfill his responsi-  
bilities, as a representative of the community. Membership in a Local  
Spiritual Assembly carries with it, indeed, the obligation and capacity  
to remain in close touch with local Bahá’í activities, and ability to  
attend regularly the sessions of the Assembly.[[383]](#footnote-383)330-3

330.8 Further, we share with you the instructions below from the Guardian:

330.8a … it is establishing a dangerous precedent to allow Assemblies to  
put a time limit on non-attendance of their members at meetings of  
the S.A. [Spiritual Assembly], beyond which that person is automati-  
cally dropped from the Assembly and a vacancy declared …. There  
should be no time limit fixed by Assemblies beyond which a person  
is dropped. Every case of prolonged absence from the sessions of the  
Assembly should be considered separately by that Assembly, and if the  
person is seen to not want to attend meetings, or to be held away from  
them indefinitely because of illness or travel, then a vacancy could  
legitimately be declared and a new member be elected.[[384]](#footnote-384)330-4

330.9 Clearly, then, no hard and fast rules should be made as to the length of  
the period of absence of an elected member of a Regional Council from  
its meetings before a vacancy is declared, and each case would need to be  
decided on its own merit. This is not to say that a National Assembly may  
not bring to a Council’s attention any problem it notes in the attendance  
of the members of a Council. Yet, as in the case of a Local Assembly, it is  
the Regional Council itself which should conclude that a vacancy should be

declared—this, presumably, after observing that the member in question  
does not attend meetings, despite repeated encouragement and attempts  
to remove possible impediments. However, unlike a Local Assembly which  
can declare a vacancy and call for a by-election at its own discretion, the  
Regional Council would need to refer the case to the National Assembly for  
final decision. In the event that a vacancy is declared, it would be filled as  
specified in item 2.2.5 of the 30 May 1997 statement, that is, “by the person  
who had the next highest number of votes on the ballot in the preceding  
election.”[[385]](#footnote-385)330-5

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

FOR DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

2000–2001

The Twelve Month Plan

331  
Riḍván Message 2000

RIḌVÁN 2000

To the Bahá’ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

331.1 We bow our heads in gratitude to the Lord of Hosts, our hearts brim-  
ming with joy, as we witness how marvelous a difference four years have  
made since the launching of the global Plan now concluded at this Festival  
of Splendors. So marked was the progress achieved during this period that  
our world community attained heights from which bright new horizons for  
its future exploits can clearly be discerned.

331.2 The quantitative difference resulted mainly from a more critical qualita-  
tive difference. The culture of the Bahá’í community experienced a change.  
This change is noticeable in the expanded capability, the methodical pat-  
tern of functioning and the consequent depth of confidence of the three  
constituent participants in the Plan—the individual, the institutions and  
the local community. That is so because the friends concerned themselves  
more consistently with deepening their knowledge of the divine Teachings  
and learned much—and this more systematically than before—about how  
to apply them to promulgating the Cause, to managing their individual and  
collective activities, and to working with their neighbors. In a word, they  
entered into a learning mode from which purposeful action was pursued.  
The chief propellant of this change was the system of training institutes  
established throughout the world with great rapidity—an accomplishment  
which, in the field of expansion and consolidation, qualifies as the single  
greatest legacy of the Four Year Plan.

331.3 In the increased capacity of individuals to teach the Faith, as shown in  
the thrust of individual initiatives; in the improved ability of Spiritual As-  
semblies, Councils and committees to guide the endeavors of the friends; in  
the introduction of new patterns of thought and action which influenced  
the collective behavior of the local community—in all such respects the sys-  
tem of training institutes demonstrated its indispensability as an engine of  
the process of entry by troops. By extending their operation through local  
study circles, many institutes magnified their capacity to cover wide regions  
with their programs. Mongolia, for instance, set up 106 study circles and,  
as a result, recorded a significant rise in the number of new believers. Con-

current with these kinds of developments, the members of our worldwide  
community also gave more attention to drawing on the power of prayer,  
to meditating on the sacred Word, and to deriving the spiritual benefits of  
participation in devotional gatherings. It is through the workings of these  
elements of an intensified individual and collective transformation that the  
size of the community is increasing. Although the number of new believers  
has as yet only slightly surpassed those of recent years, it is immensely grati-  
fying to see that this increase is now geographically widespread, is engaging  
ever-larger segments of the community, and is successful in integrating new  
declarants into the life of the Cause.

331.4 So salutary, so promising a condition of the Faith also owes much, be-  
yond measure, to the advisory influence, collaborative role and practical  
work of the Institution of the Counselors which were amplified with respect  
to the formation and operation of institutes—an amplification that reflect-  
ed the timely stimulation imparted by a vibrant and ever alert International  
Teaching Center.

331.5 The central theme of the Four Year Plan—that of advancing the process  
of entry by troops—produced a high degree of integration of thought and  
action. It focused attention on a major stage of the evolution of the Bahá’í  
community that must be attained during the Formative Age; for until entry  
by troops is more widely sustained, the conditions will not be ripe for mass  
conversion, that breakthrough promised by Shoghi Effendi in his writings.  
The thematic focus of the Plan bore implications for all categories of Bahá’í  
activity; it called for a clarity of understanding which made possible sys-  
tematic and strategic planning as a prerequisite of individual and collective  
action. The members of the community came gradually to appreciate how  
systematization would facilitate the processes of growth and development.  
This raising of consciousness was a huge step that led to an upgrading of  
teaching activities and a change in the culture of the community.

331.6 The integrative aspects of the theme were evident in the efforts at plan-  
ning, building institutional capacity, and developing human resources. The  
threads connecting all these can be traced from the outset of the Plan to its  
very end. The December 1995 Conference of the Continental Boards of  
Counselors in the Holy Land marked the beginning. There the Counselors  
were oriented to the features of the Plan. This was followed by their con-  
sultations with National Spiritual Assemblies in national planning sessions  
that moved subsequently to the regional level, involving Auxiliary Board  
members, Local Spiritual Assemblies and committees. Thus, at all levels,

elements of the Bahá’í administration became involved in the planning pro-  
cess, and reached beyond this stage to that of implementation, at which the  
institutional capacity to cope with entry by troops had to be created. Two  
major steps were taken in this regard: one was the establishment of training  
institutes; the other was the formal establishment and widespread introduc-  
tion of Regional Bahá’í Councils as a feature of the administration between  
the local and national levels to strengthen the administrative capacity of  
certain communities where the growing complexity of the issues facing Na-  
tional Spiritual Assemblies required this development. Equally of relevance  
to integrating the essentials of the process were the strategies defined for  
the work in social and economic development, which is a critical part of  
consolidation, and in external affairs, which is a vital factor in enabling the  
Faith to manage the consequences of its emergence from obscurity. The  
combined effect produced resounding results, the enumeration of which  
would far exceed the compass of these pages. We are moved, however, to  
cite certain highlights that illustrate the scope of the Plan’s achievements.

331.7 In the Holy Land, the construction of the Terraces and the buildings  
on the Arc forged ahead with every assurance of meeting the announced  
deadline for their completion at the end of this Gregorian year. Moreover,  
the building in Haifa to which we referred in our last Riḍván message in  
connection with the expanded size of pilgrimage groups is ready for use as  
of this Riḍván. In this same connection, architectural plans were approved  
for the much-needed facility to be built at Bahjí to accommodate pilgrims  
and other Bahá’í and non-Bahá’í visitors. The translation of the Texts for  
the expected new volume of Bahá’u’lláh’s Writings has been completed and  
preparations are under way for its publication.

331.8 Strides in expansion and consolidation were manifest in ways other than  
those already mentioned: in pioneering, proclamation, the publication of  
literature, the use of the arts, the formation of Spiritual Assemblies, and ad-  
vances of Bahá’í studies associations. Some 3,300 believers settled as long-  
and short-term international pioneers. That many countries usually on  
the receiving end had themselves dispatched pioneers abroad was a further  
indication of the maturation of national communities. True to the mandate  
addressed to their members, the Canadian and United States communities  
excelled in the number of pioneers that left their shores and in the much  
greater number of traveling teachers, including a significant representation  
of youth. Especially noteworthy, too, was the heartening response of believ-

ers of African descent in the United States to the call that Bahá’í teachers  
travel to Africa.

331.9 Proclamation of the Cause involved a variety of actions which included  
the sponsoring of a wide range of occasions—anniversaries, commemora-  
tions, discussion groups, exhibits, and the like—that made it possible for  
large numbers of people to become acquainted with the teachings of the  
Faith. The Houses of Worship were magnetic centers for visitors who en-  
tered their doors in increasing numbers, especially in India, where some five  
million people were received during the last year. Added to such activities  
were the multiple uses of the media to get the Bahá’í message across. In  
the United States, some 60,000 inquirers responded to a media campaign  
designed by the National Teaching Committee. Worldwide, knowledge of  
the Faith was spread through the appearance, more frequently than before,  
of unsolicited, sympathetic articles in the print media. There was a similar  
broadening of exposure through readiness on the part of radio and television  
stations to include regular Bahá’í programs; this was so in such countries as  
the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Liberia. Such fortunate devel-  
opments were crowned by the independent choice of international media  
establishments to use the Shrine of the Báb and the Terraces as the site for  
the telecast of the Holy Land’s segment of the worldwide media program  
celebrating the arrival of the year 2000.

331.10 The use of the arts became an important feature in the proclamation,  
teaching, deepening and devotional activities of the worldwide community.  
The arts attracted young people, who applied them to their teaching and  
deepening activities principally through the numerous drama and dance  
workshops active in many parts of the world. But the dynamics of the arts  
went far beyond singing and dancing to involve a range of imaginative ac-  
tivities that grounded people in the Cause. Where folk art was used, particu-  
larly in Africa, the teaching work was greatly enhanced. For example, Ghana  
and Liberia each mounted a Light of Unity Project for promoting the arts in  
teaching. In India, the Communal Harmony Group had a similar purpose.

331.11 Mostly at the urging of the Counselors and with the support of the  
Continental Fund, a boost was given to the translation and publication of  
Bahá’í literature especially in Africa and Asia. Moreover, the Kitáb-i-Aqdas  
appeared in a complete Arabic edition and in other languages.

331.12 While the restriction of the formation of Local Spiritual Assemblies to  
the first day of Riḍván, which took effect in 1997, produced the anticipated

decrease in the number of these institutions, the fall was not drastic. The  
number has since held its ground and a sound process of consolidation is  
in place. Seven new pillars of the Universal House of Justice were raised up,  
bringing the total of National Spiritual Assemblies to 181.

331.13 Particularly gratifying has been the gathering momentum, during these  
four years, of Bahá’í scholarly activity, which forged ahead with the vital  
task of reinforcing the intellectual foundations of the Faith’s work. Two  
invaluable results have been the impressive enrichment of Bahá’í literature  
and the production of a body of dissertations examining various contem-  
porary problems in the light of Bahá’í principles. The network of Asso-  
ciations of Bahá’í Studies, celebrating this year its twenty-fifth anniversary,  
welcomed five new affiliates during the Plan. Reflective of the diversity and  
creativity that this field of service is attracting were the holding of Papua  
New Guinea’s first Bahá’í studies conference and the Japanese Associa-  
tion’s ground-breaking focus on the spiritual origins of traditional Japanese  
scholarship.

331.14 Progress in the field of social and economic development was decidedly  
qualitative, although figures showing an increase of projects were also im-  
pressive. Annually reported activities grew from some 1,600 at the beginning  
of the Plan to more than 1,900 nearing its end. The movement towards a  
more systematic approach remained the dominant characteristic of the work  
during this period. To promote consultation and action on the principles  
of social and economic development, the Office of Social and Economic  
Development at the Bahá’í World Center sponsored 13 regional seminars  
in which an estimated 700 representatives from 60 countries participated.  
This Office also attended to the devising of pilot projects and materials  
suitable for the mounting of organized campaigns to foster youth empower-  
ment and literacy, community health worker training, the advancement of  
women, and moral education. An example was the program in Guyana that  
trained more than 1,500 literacy facilitators; another was the completion in  
Malaysia of eight modules for the advancement of women, which became  
the basis for training sessions held in Africa, Asia and Latin America. A plan  
to integrate Bahá’í radio stations with the work of training institutes was  
initiated in the Guaymi region of Panama. As institutes have the potential  
to provide training for social and economic development, a movement in  
that direction involved a dozen institutes, which are currently experiment-  
ing with such efforts in areas including literacy, community health worker  
training, and vocational training. A number of Bahá’í-sponsored and

Bahá’í-inspired agencies have devoted their energies to projects, such as  
the one which involved collaboration with the World Health Organization  
in combating river blindness in Cameroon; more than 30,000 individuals  
have received the needed medication through this Bahá’í project. Another  
instance is the private university in Ethiopia, Unity College, whose stu-  
dent body has risen to 8,000. Another is Landegg Academy in Switzerland,  
which, while expanding and consolidating its academic program, extended  
highly appreciated assistance in the ongoing quest for a remedy to the hor-  
rendous social consequences of conflict in the Balkans. Yet another is Núr  
University in Bolivia, which, in a collaborative project with Ecuador, offered  
training to more than 1,000 school teachers in its moral leadership program.  
In this field of social and economic development, such evidences of capac-  
ity building were a great benefit to the purposes of the Plan.

331.15 Guided by the external affairs strategy communicated to National Spiri-  
tual Assemblies in 1994, the community’s capacity in the fields of diplo-  
matic and public information likewise expanded at an astonishing rate,  
placing the Bahá’í community in a dynamic relationship with the United  
Nations, governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the  
media. The strategy focused activities at international and national levels  
on two key objectives: to influence the processes towards world peace, and  
to defend the Faith. Through the measures adopted for the defense of our  
dearly loved coreligionists in Iran, the Bahá’í International Community won  
a new measure of respect and support that created opportunities for other  
aims of the strategy to be pursued. To meet the challenge of the intrac-  
table situation in Iran, our institutions and external affairs agencies devised  
new approaches to activating available instruments of governments and the  
United Nations. The case of the persecutions in Iran occupied the attention  
of the highest authorities on the planet. Indeed, the news that an Iranian  
court had reaffirmed death sentences for two of the friends and imposed a  
similar sentence on a third evoked a sharp response from the President of  
the United States, who issued a clear admonition to Iran. As a consequence  
of the interventions of world leaders and the United Nations, the executions  
of Iranian Bahá’ís virtually stopped and the number of those sentenced to  
long-term imprisonment was drastically reduced.

331.16 While we have welcomed these interventions, we acclaim the self-sacri-  
ficing spirit, the fortitude, and the indomitable faith of our brothers and  
sisters in Iran that have invested such efforts with potency. These manifest  
qualities of the soul baffle their compatriots as to the stamina with which

they withstand the assaults so viciously and so relentlessly unloosed against  
them. How else could one explain that so few have been able to stand up to  
so many for so long? How else could they have aroused the active concern  
of the world when even a single one of them faces the threat of death? Iran’s  
tragedy is that the assailants have until now failed to see that the divine prin-  
ciples for which these persecuted ones have sacrificed their possessions and  
even their lives contain the very solutions that would satisfy the yearnings of  
a population in its hour of discontent. But there can be no doubt whatever  
that the systematic tyranny to which our Iranian friends have so cruelly been  
subjected will ultimately yield to the Almighty Power guiding the mysteri-  
ous proceedings toward their assured destiny in all its promised glory.

331.17 With regard to the other objective of the external affairs strategy, the lines  
of action were guided by four themes—human rights, the status of women,  
global prosperity, and moral development. Our records show a huge step  
forward in the work on human rights and the status of women. With regard  
to the former, the United Nations Office prosecuted a creative program of  
human rights education which has, so far, served as a means of building the  
capacity of no fewer than 99 National Spiritual Assemblies for diplomatic  
work. Regarding the status of women, the existence of 52 national offices for  
the advancement of women, the contributions of numerous Bahá’í women  
and men to conferences and workshops at all levels, the selection of Bahá’í  
representatives to crucial positions on key NGO committees, including the  
one that serves the United Nations Development Fund for Women, show  
how the followers of Bahá’u’lláh assiduously promote His principle of the  
equality of women and men.

331.18 At the same time an array of initiatives are disseminating information  
about the Bahá’í Faith to various publics. These include such innovative  
undertakings as: the launching of “The Bahá’í World” Web site, which is  
already averaging 25,000 visits a month; the issuing of a statement entitled  
*Who is Writing the Future?*, which is helping the friends everywhere talk about  
contemporary issues; the airing since last November on the World Wide  
Web of “Payam-e-Doost,” the Persian-language radio program broadcast  
for an hour weekly in the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area—a pro-  
gram which is available at all times throughout the world on the Internet;  
and the implementation of a highly original television program, applying  
moral principles to day-to-day problems, which has won the warm endorse-  
ment of government authorities in Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria,

Croatia, Hungary, Romania, Slovenia, and the former Yugoslav Republic  
of Macedonia.

331.19 A phenomenon that has gathered force as the century draws to its end is  
that the people of the world have arisen to express their aspirations through  
what has come to be known as the “organizations of civil society.” It must be  
a source of great satisfaction to Bahá’ís everywhere that the Bahá’í Interna-  
tional Community as an NGO representing a cross-section of humankind  
has won such trust as a unifying agent in major discussions shaping the fu-  
ture of humankind. Our principal representative at the United Nations was  
appointed to co-chair a committee of non-governmental organizations—a  
position that is giving the Bahá’í International Community a leading role  
in the organization of the Millennium Forum. This gathering, called by  
UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan and scheduled to be held in May, will  
give organizations of civil society an opportunity to formulate views and  
recommendations on global issues which will be taken up at the subsequent  
Millennium Summit in September of this year to be attended by heads of  
state and government.

331.20 Humanity’s awakening to the spiritual dimensions of the changes occur-  
ring in the world has a special significance for Bahá’ís. The interfaith dia-  
logue has intensified. During the Four Year Plan it increasingly involved the  
Faith as a recognized participant. The Parliament of the World’s Religions  
held in Cape Town last December brought together some 6,000 attendees,  
among whom was a strong Bahá’í delegation. Bahá’ís served on both the  
South African and International Boards of Directors that planned the event.  
For Bahá’ís, interest in the occasion arose particularly from the fact that  
the first mention of the Name of Bahá’u’lláh at a public gathering in the  
West had occurred at the Parliament held in Chicago in 1893. Two inter-  
religious events held in Jordan last November included Bahá’ís as invited  
participants: a conference on conflict and religion in the Middle East, and  
the annual meeting of the World Conference on Religion and Peace. Bahá’í  
representatives attended events in Vatican City and New Delhi sponsored  
by the Roman Catholic Church; on the latter occasion, in the presence of  
Pope John Paul II, Counselor Zena Sorabjee was one of the representatives  
of religions addressing the gathering. In the United Kingdom, the Faith was  
placed in the public arena when Bahá’í representatives joined members of  
eight other major religions for an interfaith celebration of the new millen-  
nium in the Royal Gallery of Westminster Palace, where, in the presence

of Royalty, the Prime Minister, the Archbishop of Canterbury and other  
distinguished persons, reference was made to the gathering of the “nine  
major religions of the United Kingdom.” In Germany, for the first time  
Bahá’ís were included in an interfaith dialogue. This reversed a long-stand-  
ing attitude of Christian denominations which had avoided contact with  
the Faith owing to a book written by a Covenant-breaker and issued by a  
Lutheran publishing house in 1981. The remedy was provided in a 600-  
page scholarly rebuttal written by three Bahá’ís and published in 1995 by a  
leading non-Bahá’í firm, representing a signal victory for the German Bahá’í  
community. An English translation was published in the last year of the  
Plan. Interfaith dialogue took an unusual form when at Lambeth Palace in  
1998 representatives of the World Bank and of nine major religions held  
a meeting which led to the formation of the World Faiths Development  
Dialogue. The announced aim of the Dialogue is to try to bridge the gap  
between the faith communities and the World Bank in order to enable them  
to work together more effectively to overcome world poverty. The frequency  
and wide embrace of interfaith gatherings represent a new phenomenon in  
the relations among the religions. It is apparent that the various religious  
communities are striving to achieve the spirit of friendliness and fellowship  
among themselves that Bahá’u’lláh urged His followers to show towards the  
followers of other religions.

331.21 The concentrated endeavor of the Bahá’í community in these four years  
occurred at a time when the wider society grappled with a torrent of con-  
flicting interests. In this brief but intensely dynamic span, the forces at  
work in the Bahá’í community and throughout the world proceeded with  
relentless acceleration. In their wake were revealed more conspicuously than  
before the social phenomena to which Shoghi Effendi alluded. More than  
six decades ago, he had called attention to the “simultaneous processes of  
rise and of fall, of integration and of disintegration, of order and chaos,  
with their continuous and reciprocal reactions on each other.” These twin  
processes did not continue in isolation from those specific to the Bahá’í  
community but at times proceeded in such a way as to invite, as has already  
been shown, the direct involvement of the Faith. They seemed to run at  
opposite sides of the same corridor of time. On one side, wars fomented by  
religious, political, racial or tribal conflict raged in some 40 places; sudden,  
total breakdown of civil order paralyzed a number of countries; terrorism as  
a political weapon became epidemic; a surge of international criminal net-  
works raised alarm. Yet on the opposite side, attempts at implementing and

elaborating the methods of collective security were earnestly made, bringing  
to mind one of Bahá’u’lláh’s prescriptions for maintaining peace; a call was  
raised for an international criminal court to be established, another action  
that accords with Bahá’í expectations; to focus attention on the imperative  
need for an adequate system to deal with global issues, world leaders are  
scheduled to meet in a Millennium Summit; new methods of communica-  
tions have opened the way for everyone to communicate with anyone on  
the planet. The economic disintegration in Asia threatened to destabilize  
the world economy, but it prompted efforts both to remedy the immediate  
situation and to find ways of bringing a sense of equity to international  
trade and finance. These are but a few examples of the two contrasting but  
interactive tendencies operating at this time, confirming Shoghi Effendi’s  
inspired summation of the forces at work in God’s greater plan, “whose  
ultimate objectives are the unity of the human race and the peace of all  
mankind.”

331.22 At the conclusion of these four eventful years, we have arrived at a por-  
tentous convergence of ends and beginnings in measures of Gregorian time  
and the Bahá’í era. In one instance, this convergence entails the wrapping  
up of the twentieth century and, in the other, opens a new stage in the  
unfolding of the Formative Age. The perspective from these two frames  
of time prompts us to reflect on a vision of world-shaping trends that have  
synchronized, and to do so in the context of the insight so graphically pro-  
jected by Shoghi Effendi at the inception of the Arc he conceived. During  
the course of the Plan, this vision assumed a brilliant clarity as the construc-  
tion projects advanced on Mount Carmel, as world leaders took bold steps  
towards fashioning the structures of a global political peace, and as local  
and national Bahá’í institutions moved to new levels in their evolution. We  
carry with us a sacred and enduring memory of the twentieth century that  
stirs our energies even as it sets our path: It is of that seminal moment in  
the history of humankind when the Center of the Covenant of Bahá’u’lláh,  
during an unparalleled ministry, designed the architecture of a new World  
Order and when, subsequently during some of the most devastating years,  
the Guardian of the Faith devoted his utmost energies to raising up the  
structures of an Administrative System that, at the end of the century,  
stands before the gaze of the world in the wholeness of its essential form.  
We come thus to a bridge between times. The capacities developed through  
a century of struggle and sacrifice by a handful of intoxicated lovers of  
Bahá’u’lláh must now be applied to the inescapable tasks remaining to the

Formative Age, whose many epochs of unremitting labor will lead to that  
Golden Age of our Faith when the Most Great Peace will envelop the earth.

331.23 We begin at this Riḍván with a Twelve Month Plan. Brief though it is, it  
must and will suffice to accomplish certain vital tasks and to lay the ground  
for the next twenty-year thrust of the Master’s Divine Plan. What was so  
carefully begun four years ago—the systematic acquisition of knowledge,  
qualities and skills of service—must be augmented. Wherever they exist,  
national and regional institutes must activate to the full the programs and  
systems they have adopted. New institutes must be formed where such needs  
have been identified. Greater steps must be taken to systematize the teach-  
ing work undertaken through individual initiative and institutional spon-  
sorship. It is partly for this purpose that in several areas of each continent  
the Counselors and the National Assemblies have established “Area Growth  
Programs.” The results will provide a body of experience for the benefit  
of future Plans. The individual, the institutions and the local community  
are urged to focus their attention on these essential tasks, so as to be fully  
prepared for the five-year enterprise to begin at Riḍván 2001—an enterprise  
that will take the Bahá’í world to the next phase in the advancement of the  
process of entry by troops.

331.24 But beyond giving attention to these tasks, there is a pressing challenge to  
be faced: Our children need to be nurtured spiritually and to be integrated  
into the life of the Cause. They should not be left to drift in a world so laden  
with moral dangers. In the current state of society, children face a cruel  
fate. Millions and millions in country after country are dislocated socially.  
Children find themselves alienated by parents and other adults whether they  
live in conditions of wealth or poverty. This alienation has its roots in a  
selfishness that is born of materialism that is at the core of the godlessness  
seizing the hearts of people everywhere. The social dislocation of children  
in our time is a sure mark of a society in decline; this condition is not,  
however, confined to any race, class, nation or economic condition—it cuts  
across them all. It grieves our hearts to realize that in so many parts of  
the world children are employed as soldiers, exploited as laborers, sold into  
virtual slavery, forced into prostitution, made the objects of pornography,  
abandoned by parents centered on their own desires, and subjected to other  
forms of victimization too numerous to mention. Many such horrors are in-  
flicted by the parents themselves upon their own children. The spiritual and  
psychological damage defies estimation. Our worldwide community cannot

escape the consequences of these conditions. This realization should spur us  
all to urgent and sustained effort in the interests of children and the future.

331.25 Even though children’s activities have been a part of past Plans, these  
have fallen short of the need. Spiritual education of children and junior  
youth is of paramount importance to the further progress of the commu-  
nity. It is therefore imperative that this deficiency be remedied. Institutes  
must be certain to include in their programs the training of teachers of  
children’s classes, who can make their services available to local communi-  
ties. But although providing spiritual and academic education for children  
is essential, this represents only a part of what must go into developing  
their characters and shaping their personalities. The necessity exists, too, for  
individuals and the institutions at all levels, which is to say the community  
as a whole, to show a proper attitude towards children and to take a general  
interest in their welfare. Such an attitude should be far removed from that  
of a rapidly declining order.

331.26 Children are the most precious treasure a community can possess, for in  
them are the promise and guarantee of the future. They bear the seeds of  
the character of future society which is largely shaped by what the adults  
constituting the community do or fail to do with respect to children. They  
are a trust no community can neglect with impunity. An all-embracing  
love of children, the manner of treating them, the quality of the attention  
shown them, the spirit of adult behavior toward them—these are all among  
the vital aspects of the requisite attitude. Love demands discipline, the cour-  
age to accustom children to hardship, not to indulge their whims or leave  
them entirely to their own devices. An atmosphere needs to be maintained  
in which children feel that they belong to the community and share in its  
purpose. They must lovingly but insistently be guided to live up to Bahá’í  
standards, to study and teach the Cause in ways that are suited to their  
circumstances.

331.27 Among the young ones in the community are those known as junior  
youth, who fall between the ages of, say, 12 and 15. They represent a special  
group with special needs as they are somewhat in between childhood and  
youth when many changes are occurring within them. Creative attention  
must be devoted to involving them in programs of activity that will engage  
their interests, mold their capacities for teaching and service, and involve  
them in social interaction with older youth. The employment of the arts in  
various forms can be of great value in such activity.

331.28 And now we wish to address a few words to parents, who bear the  
primary responsibility for the upbringing of their children. We appeal to  
them to give constant attention to the spiritual education of their children.  
Some parents appear to think that this is the exclusive responsibility of the  
community; others believe that in order to preserve the independence of  
children to investigate truth, the Faith should not be taught to them. Still  
others feel inadequate to take on such a task. None of this is correct. The  
beloved Master has said that “it is enjoined upon the father and mother, as a  
duty, to strive with all effort to train the daughter and the son,” adding that,  
“should they neglect this matter, they shall be held responsible and worthy  
of reproach in the presence of the stern Lord.” Independent of the level of  
their education, parents are in a critical position to shape the spiritual devel-  
opment of their children. They should not ever underestimate their capac-  
ity to mold their children’s moral character. For they exercise indispensable  
influence through the home environment they consciously create by their  
love of God, their striving to adhere to His laws, their spirit of service to  
His Cause, their lack of fanaticism, and their freedom from the corrosive  
effects of backbiting. Every parent who is a believer in the Blessed Beauty  
has the responsibility to conduct herself or himself in such a way as to elicit  
the spontaneous obedience to parents to which the Teachings attach so high  
a value. Of course, in addition to the efforts made at home, the parents  
should support Bahá’í children’s classes provided by the community. It must  
be borne in mind, too, that children live in a world that informs them of  
harsh realities through direct experience with the horrors already described  
or through the unavoidable outpourings of the mass media. Many of them  
are thereby forced to mature prematurely, and among these are those who  
look for standards and discipline by which to guide their lives. Against this  
gloomy backdrop of a decadent society, Bahá’í children should shine as the  
emblems of a better future.

331.29 Our expectations are alive with the thought that the Continental Coun-  
selors will gather in the Holy Land in January 2001 on an occasion that will  
celebrate the occupation by the International Teaching Center of its perma-  
nent seat on the Hill of God. Auxiliary Board members from throughout  
the world will participate with them in what will undoubtedly turn out to be  
one of the historic happenings of the Formative Age. The coming together  
of such a constellation of Bahá’í officers must by its very nature produce  
untold benefits for a community which will again be close to ending one  
Plan and embarking on another. As we contemplate the implications, we

turn our hearts in gratitude to the very dear Hands of the Cause of God  
‘Alí-Akbar Furútan and ‘Alí Muḥammad Varqá, who by their residence in  
the Holy Land hold aloft the torch of service which the beloved Guardian  
lit in their hearts.

331.30 With this Twelve Month Plan, we cross a bridge to which we shall  
never return. We launch this Plan in the earthly absence of Amatu’l-Bahá  
Rúḥíyyih Khánum. She remained with us to the virtual end of the twen-  
tieth century as a beam of the light that had shone during that incom-  
parable period in the history of the human race. In the Tablets of the  
Divine Plan, the Master lamented His inability to travel throughout the  
world to raise the Divine call, and in the intensity of His disappoint-  
ment He penned the hope: “Please God, ye may achieve it.” Amatu’l-  
Bahá responded with boundless energy, touching far-flung spots of the  
earth in the 185 countries that were privileged to receive her inimitable  
gifts. Her example, which will retain forever its splendor, illumines the  
hearts of thousands upon thousands throughout the planet. Against the  
inadequacy of any other gesture, might we all not dedicate our humble  
efforts during this Plan to the memory of one for whom teaching was  
the primary purpose, the perfect joy of life?

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

332  
Restoration of the National Spiritual Assembly  
of the Bahá’ís of Indonesia

RIḌVÁN 157

To the Bahá’ís of Indonesia

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

332.1 With the greatest of happiness we extend our loving greetings to you  
on the long-awaited occasion of the restoration of the National Spiritual  
Assembly of the Bahá’ís of Indonesia after a lapse of almost three decades.

332.2 Your Bahá’í community owes its origin to the arrival in Batavia over a  
century ago of Jamal Effendi and Mustafa Rumi and their subsequent travel  
to many parts of the region. It entered a period of accelerated growth dur-  
ing the Ten Year Crusade, aided by an influx of dedicated pioneers from  
other lands, including the Hand of the Cause Rahmatu’llah Muhajir, but

its progress was arrested by the enforced dissolution of the elected Bahá’í  
institutions.

332.3 Although deprived of their institutions, members of your community  
held fast to the Cause of God in the face of misunderstanding and hostility  
in some quarters. We are moved to express our admiration and gratitude for  
the heroism and tenacity manifested during the years of adversity. Who can  
doubt that it was this fidelity and steadfastness which attracted the limitless  
blessings of Bahá’u’lláh through which the barriers to your progress have  
been removed? Our profound gratitude is offered also to the dear friends  
who guided your activities with consummate wisdom during the years of  
deprivation, most recently as members of the Bahá’í Committee for Indo-  
nesia, and whose endeavors were powerfully reinforced by the Continental  
Counselors and their helpers.

332.4 An exciting new chapter now commences, in the annals of the Faith in  
Indonesia, leading it forward inexorably to that blessed time when the Faith  
can be openly proclaimed and multitudes will find spiritual fulfillment by  
entering the sanctuary of the Cause of Bahá’u’lláh. However, at this time, it  
is most important that the believers throughout Indonesia continue to avoid  
actions which could attract attention from unfriendly elements and could  
even lead to calls for the reimposition of the restrictions from which you so  
recently emerged. Through turning to your National Assembly, cooperating  
fully with it, and offering it your wholehearted obedience, your community  
will be able to develop along sound lines.

332.5 The continued striving to effect the spiritual transformation prescribed  
by Bahá’u’lláh; the persistent endeavor to acquire a deeper understanding  
of the Teachings of Bahá’u’lláh; the conducting of regular classes for Bahá’í  
children; the encouragement and orientation of youth; the strengthening of  
your training institutes; teaching the Faith with discretion and restraint; the  
consolidation and multiplication of your Local Spiritual Assemblies—these  
must rank among the major duties to which you are summoned at this  
auspicious time, as your national community takes its rightful place with its  
sister communities throughout the world embarking on the One Year Plan.

332.6 Be assured of our ardent prayers on your behalf in the Holy Shrines, that  
the divine confirmations may continually be showered upon you.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

333  
International financial collaboration goals

3 MAY 2000

To selected National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

333.1 At the outset of the Four Year Plan, forty-one selected National Spiritual  
Assemblies were advised of the new approach the Universal House of Justice  
had decided to take in the assignment of international financial collabora-  
tion goals during the Plan. Each of these Assemblies was asked to gauge  
how much it could contribute towards the acquisition and improvement of  
property and equipment by other national communities over the following  
four years. They were informed that, on the basis of their own estimates, the  
House of Justice would call upon them to assist communities in other parts  
of the world as specific needs came to its attention.

333.2 This approach has proved to be highly effective, allowing needs and  
resources to be readily matched and goals to be completed expeditiously.  
In all, approximately US$2,000,000 was pledged by those National As-  
semblies that responded to the call of the House of Justice to participate  
in this initiative, and a total of some US$1,300,000 has been allocated for  
capital expenditures in national communities in various parts of the Bahá’í  
world. Given the success of the initiative, the House of Justice has decided  
to carry it forward into the Twelve Month Plan and will assign goals bearing  
in mind the unused portion of the pledges made by the National Assemblies  
concerned.

333.3 The Universal House of Justice has requested us to express to you its  
warm gratitude for your participation in this important enterprise.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

FOR DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

334  
Release of Bahá’í prisoner in Iran

10 MAY 2000

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

334.1 We are pleased to be able to inform you that the Universal House of  
Justice has just been notified by the Friends in Iran that Mr. Manúchihr  
Khulúṣí, who had been held in Mashhad under sentence of death, has been  
released. It is not clear what gave rise to his release nor the status of the  
verdict against him.

334.2 At the time of his arrest on 9 June 1999, Mr. Khulúṣí was visiting Bírjand  
for a meeting with the responsible Friends of that town. About six days  
later he was moved to a prison in Mashhad, where he was held in solitary  
confinement for some time, and his interrogation involved beating. The  
charges brought against Mr. Khulúṣí are not known, but it is clear that  
they related to his being a Bahá’í. His trial took place in Branch 3 of the  
Islamic Revolutionary Court in Mashhad on 7 and 8 September 1999, and  
the death sentence was announced on 3 February 2000. Mr. Khulúṣí was  
not permitted to meet with his lawyer, and his attempts to submit an ap-  
peal against the verdict within the 20-day period allowed were denied. His  
wife succeeded in submitting a statement to Branch 1 of the Revolutionary  
Courts, and sent a copy by post to Branch 3 of the Supreme Court.

334.3 The House of Justice is delighted at Mr. Khulúṣí’s release, and prays that  
it will presage similar treatment for the eleven other dear friends known to  
be unjustly held in Iranian prisons by reason of their Faith, and particularly  
for the five under sentence of death ….

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

335  
Clarification on the role of the  
Regional Bahá’í Councils

16 MAY 2000

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of South Africa

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

335.1 The Universal House of Justice has received your email … in which you  
pose a number of questions related to Regional Bahá’í Councils ….

335.2 In reference to your first question, the establishment of administrative  
committees where Local Spiritual Assemblies are not yet functioning con-  
stitutes an important step in the development of local Bahá’í communities.  
Appointing such committees is a function of the National Spiritual Assem-  
bly; however, it can certainly delegate this task to the Regional Councils, if  
it so wishes.

335.3 Your second question is whether or not a Regional Bahá’í Council can  
accept or dissolve a Local Spiritual Assembly in its area of jurisdiction. Al-  
though the prerogative of recognition of Local Spiritual Assemblies rests  
with the National Spiritual Assembly, procedures for accepting Local As-  
semblies are determined at the discretion of the National Assembly. The  
question of dissolving Local Assemblies is another matter; it should not be  
delegated by the National Assembly to the Regional Councils at this time.  
The Councils can, of course, make recommendations to the National As-  
sembly in this respect.

335.4 As to your final query, you quote a passage concerning the need for newly  
enrolled believers to understand that there is an administration in the Faith  
which must be obeyed and ask whether this applies to Regional Councils.  
Clearly for a Regional Council to carry out the range of responsibilities  
with which it has been entrusted, it has to have the complete support of the  
friends, and its decisions should carry due weight. Each of these decisions is  
made within the context of one of the functions delegated by the National  
Assembly to the Regional Council. The response of the friends will be com-  
mensurate with the nature of that function.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

336  
Release of publication on  
obligatory prayer and fasting

22 MAY 2000

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

336.1 We are pleased to send you the enclosed copies of a new publication of  
Bahá’í Writings entitled *The Importance of Obligatory Prayer and Fasting*.  
This work has been prepared for the Bahá’í world by the Research Depart-  
ment at the request of the Universal House of Justice in connection with  
the recent application of additional laws related to the devotional life an-  
nounced by the House of Justice in its message of 28 December 1999.[[386]](#footnote-386)336-1 It  
contains authorized versions prepared at the Bahá’í World Center of forty-  
eight newly translated extracts from Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá  
as well as six previously untranslated prayers by Bahá’u’lláh for the Fast.

336.2 You are welcome to share its contents with the believers in whatever man-  
ner you deem appropriate. The enclosed copies of the release edition are  
intended as samples. Additional copies will not be made available from the  
World Center, although electronic copies of the text can be forwarded to  
you upon request. No doubt in time, through your own publishing arrange-  
ments, printed editions will become available in many languages.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

FOR DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

337  
The Bahá’í Administrative Order

18 JULY 2000

To an individual believer

Dear Bahá’í Friend,

337.1 The Universal House of Justice received your letter of 31 May 2000 and  
has asked us to send you the following reply.

337.2 To your question “What do I have to think of the promotion of a Bahá’í  
democratization?” there is both a simple reply and a more complex one, and  
the House of Justice feels that it is desirable to approach the matter from  
both points of view.

337.3 Firstly, as a Bahá’í who has given many decades of outstanding service in  
your community, you understand that the Bahá’í Administrative Order is  
an integral part of the Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh; it is a divinely conceived  
system which, as the Guardian explained in *The Dispensation of Bahá’u’lláh*,  
“incorporates within its structure certain elements which are to be found in  
each of the three recognized forms of secular government, without being  
in any sense a mere replica of any one of them, and without introducing  
within its machinery any of the objectionable features which they inher-  
ently possess. It blends and harmonizes, as no government fashioned by  
mortal hands has as yet accomplished, the salutary truths which each of  
these systems undoubtedly contains without vitiating the integrity of those  
God-given verities on which it is ultimately founded.”[[387]](#footnote-387)337-1

337.4 It is the continuing task of Bahá’ís to increase their understanding of the  
principles on which the Administrative Order is founded, and to improve  
the faithfulness with which they implement these principles in their actions.  
Indeed one of the specific needs of this period in the development of the  
Faith is the evolution of national and local Bahá’í institutions. If, therefore,  
by “the promotion of a Bahá’í democratization” is meant the furthering of  
an increasingly responsible participation in the work of the community by  
its individual members, this is highly meritorious, and should be a con-  
tinual endeavor of Bahá’í institutions.

337.5 That is the simple answer. However, if the intention is that the Bahá’í  
Administrative Order should be altered to more closely accord with current  
concepts of political democracy, a more complex series of issues arises. In  
*The Dispensation of Bahá’u’lláh*, Shoghi Effendi lists evidences “of the non-  
autocratic character of the Bahá’í Administrative Order and of its inclina-  
tion to democratic methods in the administration of its affairs,”[[388]](#footnote-388)337-2 but this  
does not justify a proposal to change the system which has been established  
in the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and in the elucidations of  
Shoghi Effendi. Such an effort, whether or not described as “the promotion

of a Bahá’í democratization,” would be contrary to the clear teachings of  
the Faith. Consideration of the various specific questions included in your  
letter will help to clarify this distinction.

337.6 In the second paragraph of your letter you say that you understand that  
the Bahá’í World Order is “at least 80%, a theocratic-aristocratic order.”  
Inasmuch as the Order of Bahá’u’lláh is an integral part of the divine Rev-  
elation that He, as a Manifestation of God, has given us, one could say that  
this Order is essentially theocratic, but inasmuch as it is entirely devoid of  
any kind of clergy or priesthood, it is not at all a “theocracy” in the sense in  
which the term is generally used and understood.

337.7 Similarly, the quality of aristocracy (rule by the best) as it appears in  
the Faith is in sharp contrast to what is generally understood by this term.  
Free from electioneering or such external pressures as those coming from  
economic power or manipulation of the press, the believers seek to elect for  
membership on their governing institutions those persons whom they regard  
as best qualified for such office. The elected members are then responsible to  
God and to their consciences, rather than to those who elect them. You are  
undoubtedly familiar with Shoghi Effendi’s words in *Bahá’í Administration*  
on the attitude and responsibility of members of Assemblies:

337.7a The duties of those whom the friends have freely and conscientiously  
elected as their representatives are no less vital and binding than the  
obligations of those who have chosen them. Their function is not to  
dictate, but to consult, and consult not only among themselves, but  
as much as possible with the friends whom they represent. They must  
regard themselves in no other light but that of chosen instruments for  
a more efficient and dignified presentation of the Cause of God. They  
should never be led to suppose that they are the central ornaments of  
the body of the Cause, intrinsically superior to others in capacity or  
merit, and sole promoters of its teachings and principles. They should  
approach their task with extreme humility, and endeavor, by their  
open-mindedness, their high sense of justice and duty, their candor,  
their modesty, their entire devotion to the welfare and interests of the  
friends, the Cause, and humanity, to win, not only the confidence  
and the genuine support and respect of those whom they serve, but  
also their esteem and real affection. They must, at all times, avoid  
the spirit of exclusiveness, the atmosphere of secrecy, free themselves  
from a domineering attitude, and banish all forms of prejudice and

passion from their deliberations. They should, within the limits of  
wise discretion, take the friends into their confidence, acquaint them  
with their plans, share with them their problems and anxieties, and  
seek their advice and counsel. And, when they are called upon to ar-  
rive at a certain decision, they should, after dispassionate, anxious and  
cordial consultation, turn to God in prayer, and with earnestness and  
conviction and courage record their vote and abide by the voice of the  
majority, which we are told by our Master to be the voice of truth,  
never to be challenged, and always to be whole-heartedly enforced.  
To this voice the friends must heartily respond, and regard it as the  
only means that can ensure the protection and advancement of the  
Cause.[[389]](#footnote-389)337-3

337.8 As already noted above, the way in which believers become members  
of the elected institutions is democratic. It is, indeed, far more democratic  
than the methods by which the members of most parliaments are elected.  
The Bahá’í electoral system is entirely free from the power and bargaining of  
parties and factions, and from the manipulations of vested interests. Each  
voter is free to cast his or her ballot for whomever he or she chooses.

337.9 Even in the best democracies nowadays the driving incentive in elections  
is the wish of each politician to obtain power so as to be able to carry out  
the program that he particularly favors—an election becomes a competition  
which the self-promoting candidates either “win” or “lose.” The electorate  
is treated as a mass to be swayed, by rhetoric and various forms of induce-  
ment, to support one or other candidate. In the Bahá’í system, however, the  
voters are the active force and the motive which impels them is to choose  
those individuals who are best suited to serve on the institution. The per-  
sons elected are passive in the electoral process (except in their role as voters)  
and accept election as an obligation to serve the community in response to  
the wish of the electorate. In other words, the systems differ in their essential  
spirit: one is a seeking for power, the other is an acceptance of responsibility  
for service.

337.10 You mention several things which you describe as the most significant  
democratic principles and values. Among them are transparency, account-  
ability, freedom of the press and critical dialogue. Here too, just as the

spirit underlying the Bahá’í system differs from that impelling most current  
democratic systems, so do the methods of implementing these principles  
and the attitude of those involved.

337.11 In general one can say that modern democracies have been established  
as the outcome of attempts to limit the power of absolute monarchy, of  
dictatorships, or of certain dominant classes. This may have come about  
gradually through the centuries, or tumultuously by a series of revolutions.  
Thus, even when democratic constitutions and structures have been estab-  
lished, there remains a suspicion of authority as such, and a tension between  
the degree of freedom accorded to individual citizens and the imposition of  
sufficient public discipline to protect the weak against the selfish pursuits of  
the strong among the citizenry. The operation of transparency, accountabil-  
ity, freedom of the press and critical dialogue is thus imbued with a spirit  
of partisanship that easily descends into the merciless invasion of personal  
privacy, the dissemination of calumny, the exaggeration of mistrust, and  
the misuse of the news media at the hands of vested interests. The reaction  
of those who attempt to protect themselves against such distortions of the  
system produces secretiveness, concealment of uncomfortable facts, and  
reciprocal misuse of the media—in all, a perpetuation of disharmony in  
the social fabric.

337.12 In contrast to these patterns bred by traditional antagonisms, the Bahá’í  
system is based upon the ideals of unity, harmony, justice, diversity and  
forbearance in the building of a divinely conceived administrative struc-  
ture through a process of mutual learning and discovery. As already noted,  
the element of power-seeking is entirely absent. All members of a Bahá’í  
community, no matter what position they may temporarily occupy in the  
administrative structure, are expected to regard themselves as involved in a  
learning process, as they strive to understand and implement the laws and  
principles of the Faith. As part of this process, the Assemblies are encour-  
aged to continually share their hopes and cares and the news of develop-  
ments with the members of the community and to seek their views and  
support. There are, of course, matters such as the personal problems of a  
believer which he (or she) brings to his Assembly for advice, the amounts  
of the contributions of individual believers to the Fund, and so forth, in  
relation to which the Assembly must observe strict confidentiality. As in any  
just system of government the proper balance has to be sought and found  
between extremes. In this connection, you will recall Shoghi Effendi’s state-  
ment in *Bahá’í Administration*:

337.12a Let us also bear in mind that the keynote of the Cause of God is  
not dictatorial authority but humble fellowship, not arbitrary power,  
but the spirit of frank and loving consultation. Nothing short of the  
spirit of a true Bahá’í can hope to reconcile the principles of mercy  
and justice, of freedom and submission, of the sanctity of the right  
of the individual and of self-surrender, of vigilance, discretion, and  
prudence on the one hand, and fellowship, candor, and courage on  
the other.[[390]](#footnote-390)337-4

337.13 Wherever one finds malfunctioning in a Bahá’í community, it can be  
traced to a failure to follow properly the laws, principles and methods laid  
down in the Writings. The overcoming of such shortcomings is part of the  
learning process in which all Bahá’ís are involved. The continual aim of the  
institutions of the Bahá’í community—whether it be through the operation  
of summer schools and training institutes, through the development of the  
Nineteen Day Feasts and National Conventions, or through day-to-day in-  
teraction among the friends—is to empower the individual believers so that  
they will learn how to live their lives with increasing knowledge, wisdom,  
unity and fruitfulness in conformity with the Teachings of Bahá’u’lláh.

337.14 Further, in addition to the Spiritual Assemblies, the Bahá’í Adminis-  
trative Order also contains the institutions of the Continental Boards of  
Counselors and their Auxiliary Boards. Their endeavors, with the individu-  
als, the community and the institutions, are intended to help maintain the  
true spirit of the Faith, to counsel the governing institutions and to assist  
them to attain the high ideals set before them by Bahá’u’lláh and the Master.  
As the House of Justice wrote in a letter dated 24 April 1972: “The existence  
of institutions of such exalted rank, comprising individuals who play such  
a vital role, who yet have no legislative, administrative or judicial authority,  
and are entirely devoid of priestly functions or the right to make authorita-  
tive interpretations, is a feature of Bahá’í administration unparalleled in the  
religions of the past.”[[391]](#footnote-391)337-5 The House of Justice went on to comment that,  
only as the Bahá’í community grows, and the believers are increasingly able  
to contemplate its administrative structure uninfluenced by concepts from  
past ages, will the vital interdependence of these two arms of the adminis-

tration be properly understood and the value of their interaction be fully  
recognized.

337.15 Two other issues raised by you also deserve attention. Direct election of  
the main institutions of a society can hardly be regarded as a significant  
democratic principle. In the United States of America, for example, the  
president is elected by an electoral college of individuals chosen in state elec-  
tions. In some other countries the president is elected by the parliament, not  
by the people. However, whether direct election is a democratic principle  
or not, it cannot be applied in the Bahá’í Faith because it is stated in the  
Sacred Writings that the Universal House of Justice must be elected in a  
three-stage election and National Spiritual Assemblies must be the outcome  
of a two-stage election.

337.16 Finally, there is the question of the membership of the Universal House  
of Justice being restricted to men. This, likewise, is a provision of the Sacred  
Writings, as stated clearly by both ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and the Guardian. It should  
be viewed in the light of the principle mentioned above, that election to in-  
stitutions of Bahá’í administration is regarded as a summons to service and  
not as an accession to power. It is also significant that the Universal House  
of Justice has itself written that the fact that its membership is restricted  
to men cannot be used as an indication that men excel women or that the  
Bahá’í principle of the equality of the sexes is not valid. As you know, it is  
a mandate of the Universal House of Justice to ensure the establishment  
of the equality of men and women, and you are undoubtedly aware of the  
vigor with which the Bahá’ís are putting this into effect. This matter was  
discussed at some length in a letter written on 31 May 1988 to the National  
Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of New Zealand, a copy of which is en-  
closed for your information.

337.17 The House of Justice hopes that these comments will help you to resolve  
the confusion which you indicate is troubling you.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

FOR DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

338  
Message to the International Bahá’í Youth Conference  
in Karachi, Pakistan

20 JULY 2000

To the Friends gathered at the Asian International Youth Conference,  
Karachi, Pakistan, 21–23 July 2000

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

338.1 We send our loving greetings to the friends gathered at the International  
Bahá’í Youth Conference held in Karachi at this central stage of the Twelve  
Month Plan.

338.2 Our confident hope is that the youth, both in Pakistan and throughout  
Asia, will increasingly be one of the strongest instruments in advancing  
the process of entry by troops. For this to happen, Bahá’í youth, like all  
Bahá’ís, need to fortify their faith by immersing themselves repeatedly and  
frequently in the study of the Creative Word of God. One of the major  
purposes of training institutes is to help make this enrichment possible. Our  
hope is that great numbers of youth will not only participate in the courses  
of the institutes, but will themselves assume the responsibilities of tutors  
and facilitators. Such a development will serve both Bahá’ís and the wider  
society in your countries.

338.3 Now that the knowledge of the name of the Faith has spread widely,  
and ever more people are becoming aware of its Teachings, the public in  
many places is watching the Bahá’í community to see how these life-giving  
principles of Bahá’u’lláh are affecting the daily lives of His followers. The  
verities of the Faith must become increasingly demonstrated in the way its  
adherents serve humanity, champion justice and promote unity. In a letter  
written to a National Spiritual Assembly on his behalf shortly before his  
passing the beloved Guardian explained:

338.3a The Bahá’ís are the leaven of God, which must leaven the lump of  
their nation. In direct ratio to their success will be the protection  
vouchsafed, not only to them but to their country. These are the im-  
mutable laws of God, from which there is no escape ….[[392]](#footnote-392)338-1

338.4 The challenge facing you at this important gathering is to consider how  
you can become this leaven, an example to masses of people who are des-  
perately seeking somewhere to turn for spiritual help.

338.5 As you are aware, the Twelve Month Plan emphasizes the importance  
of the Bahá’í education of children and junior youth. Youth, who are so  
often the role models of their younger siblings and friends, have a unique  
opportunity in this regard. In responding to this opportunity, you will be  
astonished how you yourselves will be enriched.

338.6 As you consult together over the next few days, drawing upon the wis-  
dom and experience of Counselors Vicente Samaniego and Rosalie Tran,  
you may be sure that our prayers will be surrounding you.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

339  
Message to the Youth Conference  
in Vancouver, Canada

20 JULY 2000

To the Friends gathered at the Youth Conference in Vancouver,

20–24 July 2000

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

339.1 You come together at a time of immense promise for the national com-  
munity to which you belong. It would be difficult to exaggerate the strengths  
that the Cause in Canada has developed, at the threshold of a new century.  
The level of unity that has been achieved, the energy and competence be-  
ing displayed by your Regional Councils, the financial sacrifices that the  
Canadian believers are so wholeheartedly making to support the work of  
the Cause internationally, the trust and respect that the community’s collec-  
tive efforts have won from governmental and non-governmental institutions  
alike, its extraordinary record of service in both the teaching and pioneer-  
ing fields overseas, and most recently the dramatic mobilization of human  
resources across your vast country through the Canadian believers’ embrace  
of the institute program being promoted by your National Assembly—such  
a brilliant demonstration of spiritual power must excite the admiration of  
any fair-minded observer.

339.2 In all of these great advances, Canadian Bahá’í youth have taken an in-  
creasingly vital role. In doing so you have developed capacities that distin-  
guish you in Canadian society, however progressive, however highly trained,  
however materially well-endowed various segments of that society may be.  
You need to ask yourselves how these impressive capacities can best be used.

339.3 One evening, in the home of Mr. and Mrs. Sutherland Maxwell in Mon-  
treal, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá summed up in a few intensely poignant words both the  
crisis He saw engulfing humankind and the sole means of deliverance:

339.3a Today the world of humanity is walking in darkness because it is out  
of touch with the world of God. That is why we do not see the signs  
of God in the hearts of men …. When a divine spiritual illumination  
becomes manifest in the world of humanity, when divine instruction  
and guidance appear, then enlightenment follows, a new spirit is real-  
ized within, a new power descends, and a new life is given. It is like  
the birth from the animal kingdom into the kingdom of man. When  
man acquires these virtues, the oneness of the world of humanity  
will be revealed …. Then will the justice of God become manifest,  
all humanity will appear as the members of one family, and every  
member of that family will be consecrated to cooperation and mutual  
assistance.[[393]](#footnote-393)339-1

339.4 It is to this divine illumination that you have turned your hearts. It is  
the force of this spiritual enlightenment—sharply focused in the institute  
process—that is opening your minds even wider to the possibilities of the  
Cause of God. And it is not surprising that, for those who are exposed to  
such influences, the experience does indeed seem like the birth from an old  
condition to an entirely new one.

339.5 With hearts filled with admiration for all that your community is ac-  
complishing and with the brightest hopes for the contributions that you as  
youth will particularly bring to the great adventure ahead, we urge you to  
make a wholehearted commitment to this vision of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Like the  
rest of the world, Canadian society stands in urgent need of moral trans-  
formation. Such transformation, as amply evidenced by decades of conten-

tious history, cannot be achieved through political passion, the conflict of  
vested interests, or technical recipes. What is called for is a spiritual revival,  
as a prerequisite to the successful application of political, economic and  
technological instruments. But there is a need for a catalyst. Be assured that,  
in spite of your small numbers, you are the channels through which such a  
catalyst can be provided.

339.6 Be not dismayed if your endeavors are dismissed as utopian by the voices  
that would oppose any suggestion of fundamental change. Trust in the ca-  
pacity of this generation to disentangle itself from the embroilments of a  
divided world. To discharge your responsibilities, you will have to show  
forth courage, the courage of those who cling to standards of rectitude, who  
champion the cause of justice, whose lives are characterized by purity of  
thought and action, and whose purpose is directed by love and indomitable  
faith.

339.7 As one of the co-executors of the Divine Plan, your community’s mandate  
is not, of course, limited to Canada. It is worldwide, and this global perspec-  
tive must frame both your deliberations and your endeavors. Be confident  
that, as you turn your hearts and minds to the challenge facing you, you will  
be surrounded by our ardent prayers at the Holy Threshold that Bahá’u’lláh  
will empower you to realize your highest aspirations.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

340  
Commemorative events for world peace

15 AUGUST 2000

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

340.1 The Universal House of Justice has asked us to call to your attention  
the convening of the Millennium World Peace Summit of Religious and  
Spiritual Leaders that is to be held at the United Nations headquarters in  
New York on 28–31 August 2000. At the invitation of the organizers, the  
Faith will be represented by Mr. Albert Lincoln, Secretary-General of the  
Bahá’í International Community.

340.2 A call has been made for religious communities throughout the world to  
join in a Day of Prayer for World Peace on 28 August, the opening day of

the Summit. Although this information has just in the last few days reached  
the Bahá’í World Center, the Universal House of Justice feels that it merits  
a positive response on the part of the Bahá’í community. We have therefore  
been asked to suggest that you take whatever action is possible under the  
circumstances. The response of the friends might well include their joining  
with members of other religions in the spirit of interfaith cooperation.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

341  
Update on Bahá’í prisoners in Iran

18 AUGUST 2000

To selected National Spiritual Assemblies

341.1 The following news has just been received from the Friends in Iran.

341.2 1. **Prisoners under sentence of death in Mashhad**. The Supreme Court,  
having examined the cases of Mr. Sirus Dhabihi Muqaddam and Mr. He-  
dayat Kashefi-Najafabadi, has ruled that the verdicts against them are un-  
sound, and has referred them to another court. The families of the prisoners  
are reported to have noticed a great change in the attitude of the authorities  
towards both themselves and the Bahá’í prisoners, and hopes are high that  
their cases may be dismissed. It is not known whether this information also  
applies to Mr. Ata’ullah Hamid Nasirzadih, who is serving a ten-year prison  
sentence, having been arrested with the other two friends in November 1997.

341.3 2. **Restoration of properties**. Six believers, understood to be among those  
briefly detained during the raids on BIHE personnel in the fall of 1998,  
had to surrender the title deeds of their properties for possible confisca-  
tion. They are the only Bahá’ís known to have been treated in this way at  
the time. The Iranian courts found no evidence to support the accusations  
that were brought against these friends—espionage and working against  
the Islamic Republic—and have offered their confiscated properties back  
to them, ordering that the deeds be returned to their owners, as the charges  
against them had not been substantiated ….

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

342  
International millenial gatherings  
concerning global issues

24 SEPTEMBER 2000

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

342.1 In its Riḍván 2000 message, the Universal House of Justice pointed  
with keen anticipation to the occurrence this year of millennial gatherings  
concerned with global issues needing urgent solutions, and with how the  
United Nations is to address them. During the first week of this month,  
the United Nations Millennium Summit, the last and most significant of  
three related events, convened in New York with the participation of the  
largest number of heads of state and of government ever to be assembled.  
In view of the historic importance of this and the two earlier occasions,  
and considering the prominent involvement of representatives of the Bahá’í  
International Community in all three, the House of Justice has directed us  
to convey the following.

342.2 In calling for a gathering of world leaders at the 2000 session of the Gen-  
eral Assembly, the Secretary-General of the United Nations also suggested  
the merit of their inviting the views and recommendations of organizations  
of civil society; this gave birth to the idea of a Millennium Forum. Another  
thought that won the warm support of the Secretary-General was that a  
meeting of religious and spiritual leaders devoted to peace would enhance  
the work of the United Nations.

342.3 Thus, the Millennium Forum, the first of these major gatherings,  
brought together on 22–26 May more than 1,000 representatives of non-  
governmental organizations from more than 100 countries “to consult about  
the role of the United Nations in confronting the great global challenges  
facing humanity in the 21st Century.” They focused their consultations  
on the following specific topics: 1) peace, security and disarmament; 2)  
eradication of poverty, including debt cancellation and social development;  
3) human rights; 4) sustainable development and environment; 5) facing  
the challenges of globalization: achieving equity, justice and diversity; and  
6) strengthening and democratizing the United Nations and international  
organizations.

342.4 As a result, the participants in the Millennium Forum adopted a declara-  
tion, for presentation to world leaders at the subsequent Millennium Sum-  
mit, in which they set forth their vision and made their recommendations  
for revitalizing the United Nations. “In our vision,” these representatives  
of civil society declared, “we are one human family, in all our diversity,  
living on one common homeland and sharing a just, sustainable and peace-  
ful world, guided by universal principles of democracy, equality, inclusion,  
voluntarism, non-discrimination and participation by all persons …. It is  
a world where peace and human security, as envisioned in the principles of  
the United Nations Charter, replace armaments, violent conflict and wars.  
It is a world where everyone lives in a clean environment with a fair distribu-  
tion of the earth’s resources. Our vision includes a special role for the dyna-  
mism of young people and the experience of the elderly and reaffirms the  
universality, indivisibility and interdependence of all human rights—civil,  
political, economic, social and cultural.”

342.5 The Millennium Peace Summit of Religious and Spiritual Leaders, which  
was held on 28–31 August and involved more than 1,000 attendees, con-  
stituted the second of these gatherings. The “very specific purpose” of this  
meeting of religious leaders was, as stated in the introductory statement of  
the program, “to further the prospects for peace among peoples and nations,  
and within every individual.” The outcome of this Peace Summit was the  
adoption and signing of a declaration committing the participants to global  
peace. Noting that “the United Nations and the religions of the world have  
a common concern for human dignity, justice and peace,” accepting that  
“men and women are equal partners in all aspects of life and children are  
the hope of the future,” and acknowledging that “religions have contributed  
to the peace of the world but have also been used to create division and fuel  
hostilities,” the declaration resolved to “collaborate with the United Nations  
and all men and women of goodwill locally, regionally and globally in the  
pursuit of peace in all its dimensions.”

342.6 As you were previously informed in our letter of 15 August 2000, the  
Secretary-General of the Bahá’í International Community, Mr. Albert  
Lincoln, represented the Faith on this occasion. He was listed among the  
“Pre-eminent World Religious and Spiritual Leaders” in attendance and was  
afforded the opportunity both to offer a Bahá’í prayer during the opening  
ceremony and to speak during the third plenary session held in the General  
Assembly Hall on the second day of the event. His oral presentation was

an abridged version of his written statement, the full text of which was  
distributed to the participants, as shown in the enclosure.

342.7 The Millennium Summit, the third and culminating event, was held in  
response to a resolution of the General Assembly that expressed the convic-  
tion that “the year 2000 constitutes a unique and symbolically compelling  
moment to articulate and affirm an animating vision of the United Nations  
in the new era.” On the last day, the leaders of more than 150 nations  
unanimously adopted a declaration that began by asserting: “We, Heads of  
State and Government, have gathered at United Nations Headquarters in  
New York from 6 to 8 September 2000, at the dawn of a new Millennium,  
to reaffirm our faith in the Organization and its Charter as indispensable  
foundations of a more peaceful, prosperous and just world.”

342.8 Highlighting certain “fundamental values”—freedom, equality, soli-  
darity, tolerance, respect for nature, shared responsibility—the leaders  
resolved to work towards such objectives as: peace, security and disarma-  
ment; development and the eradication of poverty; protecting our common  
environment; human rights, democracy and good governance; protecting  
the vulnerable; meeting the special needs of Africa; and strengthening the  
United Nations. They made a firm commitment to world peace and world  
order, concluding their declaration on this resounding note: “We solemnly  
reaffirm, on this historic occasion, that the United Nations is the indispens-  
able common house of the entire human family, through which we will seek  
to realize our universal aspirations for peace, cooperation and development.  
We therefore pledge our unstinting support for these common objectives,  
and our determination to achieve them.”

342.9 It is striking that the spokesman of civil society called upon by the  
Secretary-General of the United Nations to address so historic a gathering  
was Mr. Techeste Ahderom, the principal representative of the Bahá’í In-  
ternational Community to the United Nations. He was accorded this honor  
because as its co-chair he had presided at the United Nations Millennium  
Forum. After all the national leaders had spoken and before the Summit  
had adopted its declaration on 8 September, Mr. Ahderom made a speech in  
which he conveyed to that unprecedented assemblage a report of the Forum.  
The text of his speech is enclosed herewith.

342.10 For any observer imbued with the Bahá’í vision of peace and its inher-  
ent processes, the substance and implications of these recent events, seen  
together with previous world conferences that during the last decade also  
involved leaders of nations, must be gratifying indeed to contemplate. It

must, too, be doubly thrilling to realize that at so early a stage in the Bahá’í  
era, representatives of our international community took part so notably in  
these occurrences that have set down milestones along the way towards that  
new World Order so clearly foreshadowed by the Pen of Bahá’u’lláh.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

FOR DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

343  
Continental Pioneer Committees

29 SEPTEMBER 2000

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

343.1 Over recent months the Universal House of Justice has been consulting  
with the International Teaching Center regarding the role of the Conti-  
nental Pioneer Committees in facilitating the movement of pioneers and  
traveling teachers. In the light of these discussions, the Teaching Center has  
suggested that certain changes be made to the responsibilities of the Com-  
mittees. The enclosed statements of the present-day purpose and character  
of the Committees and of their responsibilities have been prepared by the  
Teaching Center to reflect these changes. The Universal House of Justice  
has approved that these documents now supersede the ones dated January  
1990. We have been instructed to share them with all National Spiritual  
Assemblies.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

FOR DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

**CONTINENTAL PIONEER COMMITTEES**

**A statement on their present-day purpose and character**

**5 September 2000**

***Prepared by the International Teaching Center***

343.2 The launching of the Three Year Plan in 1993 marked the beginning  
of a new stage in the promotion of international pioneering and travel-  
teaching. The pioneer call raised by the Universal House of Justice at that  
time, which encouraged the friends to arise from any part of the globe to

pioneer or travel-teach in any other part in need of assistance, resulted in  
a massive movement of believers in the international field. No longer was  
a distinction made between sending and receiving national communities,  
rather the entire Bahá’í world was asked to contribute to the expanding  
pool of pioneers and traveling teachers. Homefront pioneering, too, has  
witnessed a dramatic upsurge in recent years. As the human resources of  
each national community have grown through the instrumentality of the  
training institute, those eager to serve on the home front have increasingly  
arisen. Simultaneous to these developments, the responsibilities of the Con-  
tinental Pioneer Committees have evolved. This statement of their present-  
day purpose and character and the attached document, describing their  
responsibilities in some detail, have been prepared to reflect their current  
role and in anticipation of still greater accomplishments.

343.3 The members of the Continental Pioneer Committees are invited to  
serve in that capacity by the Universal House of Justice for a term of three  
years. While some of the Committees are responsible for an entire continen-  
tal area, others are zonally based within a continent. All Committees oper-  
ate under the supervision of the International Teaching Center and serve  
primarily as executive agencies that facilitate the movement of pioneers and  
traveling teachers. This they achieve through the efficient management of  
information and by acting as channels for the disbursement of the Interna-  
tional Deputization Fund.

343.4 The Continental Pioneer Committees obtain their information from  
a number of sources, among them the National Spiritual Assemblies and  
their committees, individual believers, reference materials containing gen-  
eral information on various countries, as well as reports from pioneers and  
traveling teachers in the field. However, the Continental Counselors, with  
whom the Committees have a close relationship, constitute their princi-  
pal source of information. Through consultation with the Counselors, the  
Committees not only gain access to extensive experience and knowledge of  
the needs and potentialities of each country, but are also able to evaluate the  
information collected from various sources, set priorities, propose action,  
and obtain a more accurate understanding of their role as facilitators of  
pioneer and traveling teacher movement across the continent. It is hoped  
that serious attention will continue to be given to maintaining efficient lines  
of communication between the Pioneer Committees and the Continental  
Boards of Counselors. With this aim in mind, the full membership of each  
Continental Pioneer Committee, or at least the Secretary, should meet from

time to time with the respective Board of Counselors for consultation re-  
garding the needs and opportunities in the continent.

343.5 In general, the Continental Pioneer Committees are concerned with  
facilitating the movement of individual pioneers and traveling teachers. In  
doing so, they can go far in seeing that those entering this field of service are  
directed towards a destination where their services can best be utilized, thus  
ensuring that the needs of the Cause are adequately and swiftly met. There  
will, however, be occasions when the institutions of the Faith in a region or  
country rich in human resources initiate projects designed to mobilize the  
believers and deploy them for service in other areas where opportunities are  
waiting to be optimized. Here the Committees will also have a vital role to  
play in helping to maintain the steady flow of the friends from one area to  
another.

343.6 In all that they do, the Continental Pioneer Committees are expected  
to be keen and alert. The institutions of the Faith and individual believers  
should be able to depend on the reliability, experience, and knowledge of  
the Committees. Pioneers and traveling teachers will continue to make a  
valuable contribution to the advancement of the Faith in the years ahead,  
and the Continental Pioneer Committees are one of the instruments placed  
at the disposition of the Bahá’í world to assist the believers who wish to serve  
the Cause in this field of endeavor.

344  
Appointment of Continental Counselors

29 OCTOBER 2000

To the Bahá’ís of the World

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

344.1 The Day of the Covenant, 26 November 2000, marks the commence-  
ment of a new five-year term of service for members of the Continental  
Boards of Counselors for the Protection and Propagation of the Faith. The  
number of these high-ranking officers of the Cause remains at eighty-one.  
We are happy to announce the names of the Counselors now appointed.

344.1a **AFRICA (19 Counselors)**: Beth Allen, George Allen, Beatrice Asare,  
Asfaw Tessema, Niaz Bushrui, Mehraz Ehsani (Trustee of the Con-  
tinental Fund), Clément-Thyrrel Feizouré, Kobina Fynn, Ibrahim

Galadima, Kamaye Moussa, Eddy Lutchmaya, Enos Makhele, Maina  
Mkandawire, Rachel Ndegwa, Muḥammad Otmani, Ahmad Parsa,  
Garth Pollock, Antoinette Ziehi, Tiati à Zock.

344.1b **THE AMERICAS (19 Counselors)**: Eugene Andrews, Eloy Anello,  
Stephen Birkland, Gustavo Correa, Irma Nelly de Dooki, ‘Abdu’l-Mis-  
sagh Ghadirian, Angélica Huerta, Antônio Gabriel Marques, Hervé  
Masrour, Catherine Monajjem, Rebequa Murphy, Carmen Elisa de  
Sadeghian, Arturo Serrano, Crystal Shoaie, David Smith, Marilyn  
Smith, Leticia de Solano, Rodrigo Tomás (Trustee of the Continental  
Fund), Dorothy Whyte.

344.1c **ASIA (19 Counselors)**: Fadel Ardakani, Baatar Uransaikhan, Nida-  
vanur Baskaran, Irene Chung, Jabbar Eidelkhani, Bijan Farid, Elena  
Grouzkova, David Huang (Trustee of the Continental Fund), Hu-  
maida Jumalon, Lee Lee Ludher, Delafruz Nassimova, Lori Noguchi,  
Jaya Gopan Ramasamy, Lateef Rashid, Foad Reyhani, Payam Shoghi,  
Zena Sorabjee, George Soraya, Rosalie Tran.

344.1d **AUSTRALASIA (11 Counselors)**: Beatrice Benson, Donald Blanks,  
David Chittleborough (Trustee of the Continental Fund), Jalal Mills,  
Sírús Naráqí, Manijeh Reyhani, Heather Simpson, Henry Tamashiro,  
Erama Ugaia, Robin White, Fereidoun Yazdani.

344.1e **EUROPE (13 Counselors)**: Fevziye Baki, Alla Borets, Uta von Both,  
Firouzeh Moghbel, Paul Öjermark, Patrick O’Mara (Trustee of the  
Continental Fund), Shahriar Razavi, Ihan Sezgin, Nosrat Tirandaz,  
Nicola Towfigh, Larissa Tsutskova, Sohrab Youssefian, Ivo Zerbes.

344.2 The following believers, whose contributions to the advancement of the  
Faith have earned our profound appreciation, are being relieved of the du-  
ties of membership on the Boards of Counselors:

344.2a Borhanoddin Afshin, Ben Ayala, Hooshidar Balazadeh, Patricia Coles,  
Parvine Djoneydi, Wilma Ellis, Tod Ewing, Shidan Fat’he-Aazam,  
Linda Gershuny, Louis Hénuzet, Hizzaya Hissani, Nobuko Iwakura,  
Abbas Katirai, Zekrullah Kazemi, Kim Myungjung, Jacqueline Left  
Hand Bull, Betra Majmeto, Peter McLaren, Alejandra Miller, Perin

Olyai, Nabil Perdu, Maija Pihlainen, Ruth Pringle, Polin Rafat, Dan-  
iel Ramoroesi, Shapour Rassekh, Cyrus Rohani, Vicente Samaniego,  
Isabel de Sánchez, Bruce Saunders, Errol Sealy, Edith Senoga, Farhad  
Shayani, Tiberiu Vajda, Lally Warren, Wingi Mabuku.

344.3 We are confident that these distinguished friends will continue to display  
the utmost valor and self-sacrifice in the pathway of service to Bahá’u’lláh.  
Our fervent prayers at the Holy Threshold will surround each of them.

344.4 The accomplishments of the Four Year Plan, now being consolidated,  
have established a pace of growth that is certain to gain added momentum.  
The Five Year Plan, to be launched at Riḍván, holds immense promise. In  
the discharge of their responsibilities for the propagation and protection of  
the Faith, the Counselors and the Auxiliary Board members will play a vital  
role, in collaboration with Spiritual Assemblies and Regional Councils, in  
ensuring that the design and implementation of programs of action, from  
the national to the local level, respond to the exigencies of the hour.

344.5 The Counselors in all continents are being called to the World Center to  
take part in deliberations on the general features of the Five Year Plan from  
9 to 13 January 2001. They will be joined by the Auxiliary Board members  
who will have gathered from throughout the world to participate in events  
marking the occupation by the International Teaching Center of its per-  
manent seat on Mount Carmel. The coming together of the Counselors  
and Auxiliary Board members in the Holy Land, for the first time, on so  
propitious an occasion, will give further impetus to the activity that they  
will be required to sustain.

344.6 It is our earnest prayer at the Sacred Threshold that these eighty-one de-  
voted souls will be assisted by grace from on high as they bend their energies  
to foster the systematic growth of the community worldwide.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

345  
Revision of codification of the law of Ḥuqúqu’lláh

26 NOVEMBER 2000

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

345.1 On 25 March 1987 you were sent a document titled “A Codification  
of the Law of Ḥuqúqu’lláh,” prepared by the Research Department at the  
Bahá’í World Center; this document is cross-referenced to the compila-  
tion “Ḥuqúqu’lláh, The Right of God.”[[394]](#footnote-394)345-1 At the request of the Universal  
House of Justice the Codification has recently been revised, to incorporate  
points made in certain of the quotations provided in the supplement to the  
compilation that was issued on 12 October 1992.

345.2 We now enclose a copy of the new revision of the Codification for circu-  
lation to the friends, to further assist in deepening their understanding of  
the law of Ḥuqúqu’lláh.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

**A CODIFICATION OF THE LAW OF ḤUQÚQU’LLÁH**

Prepared by the Research Department  
of the Bahá’í World Center in 1987,  
and revised in 1999, at the request of the Universal House of Justice

Preamble

345.3 Ḥuqúqu’lláh (The Right of God) is a great law (7)[[395]](#footnote-395)345-2 and a sacred institu-  
tion (72).[[396]](#footnote-396)345-3 Laid down in the Most Holy Book (the Kitáb-i-Aqdas), it is  
one of the key instruments for constructing the foundation and supporting  
the structure of the World Order of Bahá’u’lláh. It has far-reaching rami-

fications that extend from promoting the welfare of the individual to but-  
tressing the authority and extending the activity of the Head of the Faith. In  
providing a regular and systematic source of revenue for the Central Institu-  
tion of the Cause, Bahá’u’lláh has assured the means for the independence  
and decisive functioning of the World Center of His Faith.

345.4 By identifying this law as “The Right of God,” Bahá’u’lláh has re-em-  
phasized the nature of the relationship between human beings and their  
Creator as a Covenant based on mutual assurances and obligations; and, by  
designating the Central Authority in the Cause, to which all must turn, as  
the recipient of this Right, He has created a direct and vital link between  
every individual believer and the Head of his Faith that is unique in the  
structure of His World Order. This law enables the friends to recognize the  
elevation of their economic activity to the level of divine acceptability; it is  
a means for the purification of their wealth and a magnet attracting divine  
blessings. The computation and the payment of Ḥuqúqu’lláh, within the  
general guidelines set forth, are exclusively a matter of conscience between  
the individual and God (8, 104); demanding or soliciting the Ḥuqúqu’lláh  
is prohibited (8, 9, 38, 71, 96, 104): only appeals, reminders and exhor-  
tations of a general nature, under the auspices of the institutions of the  
Faith, are permissible (38, 70, 99, 104, 107). That the observance and en-  
forcement of this law, so crucial to the material well-being of the emerging  
Bahá’í commonwealth, should thus have been left entirely to the faith and  
conscience of the individual gives substance to, and sheds light on, what the  
beloved Master calls the spiritual solution to economic problems. Indeed,  
the implications of the law of Ḥuqúqu’lláh for the realization of a number  
of the principles of the Faith, such as the elimination of extremes of wealth  
and poverty, and a more equitable distribution of resources, will increas-  
ingly become manifest as the friends assume in ever greater measure the  
responsibility for observing it.

345.5 The fundamentals of the law of Ḥuqúqu’lláh are promulgated in the  
Kitáb-i-Aqdas. Further elaborations of its features are to be found in other  
Writings of Bahá’u’lláh, in Tablets from ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and in letters from  
Shoghi Effendi and the Universal House of Justice, mostly in response to  
questions raised by the friends. All these major references have been com-  
piled by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice and  
separately published. A study of that compilation makes it clear that the  
application of the law has been progressive, and will continue to be so, as its  
ramifications and subsidiary rulings are elucidated.

345.6 The following is a preliminary attempt at codifying the information  
in the Writings on the subject of Ḥuqúqu’lláh. It should be emphasized,  
however, that the friends should not attempt to read into it an element  
of rigidity or total comprehensiveness. The questions put to Bahá’u’lláh,  
the Master and Shoghi Effendi were from friends residing in places and  
times with infinitely simpler economic systems and relationships than those  
which obtain today. What can be learned from them are clear guiding prin-  
ciples whose application to changing and more complex conditions must  
be considered. The subject will undoubtedly occupy the Universal House  
of Justice in evolving legislation, as necessary, for a long time to come. As  
the Fourth Epoch of the Formative Age of our Faith unfolds before the  
eyes of an increasingly watchful humanity, the universal assumption of the  
obligation of Ḥuqúqu’lláh by the friends will be a clear sign of attaining to  
a new level of spiritual maturity by the community of the Greatest Name  
throughout the world.

A bounty granted by God

345.7 God, while being wholly independent of all created things, has in His  
bounty given us this law (7, 10, 63), for the progress and promotion of the  
Cause depend on material means (1). Obedience to this law enables the  
believer to be firm and steadfast in the Covenant (63), provides a reward in  
every world of the worlds of God (7), and is a unique test of true faith (62).

345.8 The Ḥuqúqu’lláh is to be offered joyfully and without hesitation (2, 9,  
32). When the Ḥuqúqu’lláh is offered in this spirit it will impart prosperity  
and protection to the friends, purify their worldly possessions (20, 31, 42,  
46, 48, 100), and enable them and their offspring to benefit from the fruits  
of their endeavors (48).

Determining the Ḥuqúqu’lláh

345.9 Everything that a believer possesses, with the exception of certain specific  
items, is subject once and only once to the payment of Ḥuqúqu’lláh.

A. Exempt from assessment to Ḥuqúqu’lláh are:

1. The residence and its needful[[397]](#footnote-397)345-4 furnishings (11).

2. The needful business and agricultural equipment which produce  
income for one’s subsistence (12, 67, 68).

B. Payment falls due:

1. Ḥuqúqu’lláh is payable as soon as a person’s assessable possessions  
reach or exceed the value of 19 mithqáls of gold (18, 19, 30). [19  
mithqáls equal approximately 2.2 troy ounces, or approximately  
69.2 grams (87, 105, 110).]

a) The amount to be paid is 19% of the value of the as-  
sessable property (10, 14).

b) The payment is due on whole units of 19 mithqáls of  
gold (15).

2. Ḥuqúqu’lláh is payable on further units of 19 mithqáls of gold  
when subsequently acquired possessions, after the deduction of  
the annual expenses, raise the value of the assessable property  
sufficiently. Among the expenses to be deducted are:

a) The general expenses of living (65, 66, 69, 78).

b) Losses and expenses incurred on the sale of possessions  
(103).

c) Sums which are paid to the state, such as taxes and  
duties (78).

3. When a person receives a gift or bequest it is to be added to his  
or her possessions and augments the total value in the same way  
as does an excess of annual income over expenditure (111).

4. If a property increases in value, Ḥuqúqu’lláh is not payable on  
that increase until it is realized, e.g., on the sale of the property.

5. If possessions decrease, such as through the expenses of a year  
exceeding the income received, Ḥuqúqu’lláh falls due again only  
after the loss has been made good and the total value of one’s  
assessable possessions is augmented (15–19, 30, 65–68, 78, 108,  
111).

6. The payment of debts takes precedence over the payment of  
Ḥuqúqu’lláh (22).

7. The payment of Ḥuqúqu’lláh is dependent on the person’s finan-  
cial ability to meet his obligations (24).

8. On the death of a believer, the completion of his/her payment of  
Ḥuqúqu’lláh is accomplished in the following manner:

a) The first charge on the estate is the expense of burial  
(22).

b) Secondly, the debts of the deceased must be paid (13).

c) The Ḥuqúqu’lláh still due on the property should then  
be paid. In establishing the value of the property on  
which Ḥuqúq has not already been paid, the follow-  
ing are among the deductions to be made: expenses of  
burial (22), debts of the deceased (13), loss of value of  
the assets when realized (103), and expenses incurred  
in realizing the assets (103).

C. Further notes on determining Ḥuqúqu’lláh:

1. It is left to the individual to decide which expenses are to be re-  
garded as “necessary” and therefore deductible in computing the  
annual accretion to savings, and which furnishings of the house-  
hold are to be regarded as “needful” and therefore exempt from  
the payment of Ḥuqúqu’lláh (57, 65–67, 69, 78, 80, 104–106,  
112).

2. Although references are made to annual payments of Ḥuqúqu’lláh,  
the time and method of payment are left to the discretion of the  
individual believer. There is, therefore, no obligation to liquidate  
one’s assets in haste in order to fulfill one’s current obligations to  
Ḥuqúqu’lláh (103).

3. Husband and wife are free to decide whether they want to honor  
their Ḥuqúqu’lláh obligations jointly or individually (109, 110).

4. The account of Ḥuqúqu’lláh should be kept separate from other  
contributions inasmuch as the disposition of the funds of the  
Ḥuqúqu’lláh is subject to decision by the Central Authority in  
the Cause to which all must turn, whereas the purposes of the  
contributions to other Funds may be determined by the donors  
themselves.

5. Payment of the Ḥuqúqu’lláh has priority over making contribu-  
tions to other Funds of the Faith (78, 79, 97, 100), as well as over  
the cost of pilgrimage (31). It is, however, left to the discretion  
of the believer whether or not to treat contributions to the Fund  
as an expense when arriving at the value of his or her property in  
calculating the sum due to be paid as Ḥuqúqu’lláh (105).

D. Additional notes, based on the first supplement to the Compilation:

1. Whereas a believer has discretion to decide whether to treat his  
or her contributions to the Funds of the Faith as an expense, or  
make them only out of money on which Ḥuqúqu’lláh has been

paid, he or she also has the discretion to treat some contributions  
in one way and some in the other. (Supp. 8)

2. One believer cannot discharge the obligation of another to pay  
Ḥuqúqu’lláh, nor can a payment to Ḥuqúqu’lláh be earmarked  
for any purpose or be made in honor of anyone. (Supp. 10)

3. The law of Ḥuqúqu’lláh imposes an obligation only on indi-  
vidual believers, not on Bahá’í institutions or corporate bodies.  
(Supp. 11)

4. Although the law provides a certain leeway in the timing of the  
payment of Ḥuqúqu’lláh, it should preferably be paid by a be-  
liever during the course of his or her life whenever it falls due,  
and the only payment to Ḥuqúqu’lláh which should need to be  
provided for by will is such additional liability as may be found.  
to exist when the believer’s affairs are reckoned up as at the date  
of death. (Supp. 12)

5. Each believer should learn not only how to calculate Ḥuqúqu’lláh  
during the course of his or her life, but also how to provide for the  
payment of the balance remaining at the date of death. (Supp. 12)

Applicability of the Law of Ḥuqúqu’lláh

345.10 For many decades the sacred law of Ḥuqúqu’lláh had been applied only to  
the believers from the Middle East. The worldwide application was insti-  
tuted by the Universal House of Justice as from Riḍván 1992, the beginning  
of the Holy Year marking the hundredth anniversary of the Ascension of  
Bahá’u’lláh.

Payment of Ḥuqúqu’lláh

345.11 The Ḥuqúqu’lláh is normally paid to the Trustee of Ḥuqúqu’lláh, his Depu-  
ties, or their appointed Representatives (35, 58). These persons issue re-  
ceipts and forward the funds to the Bahá’í World Center (56).

Management of the Ḥuqúqu’lláh

345.12 Decisions on the necessary ordinances concerning Ḥuqúqu’lláh (81, 100),  
as well as on its disposition, lie within the sole jurisdiction of the Central  
Authority in the Cause. The Ḥuqúqu’lláh can be employed for charitable  
purposes (62, 65, 75), or for other purposes useful to the Cause of God  
(77, 78).

346  
Message to the ASEAN Youth Conference in Thailand

23 DECEMBER 2000

To the Friends gathered at the seventh ASEAN Youth Conference in  
Thailand

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

346.1 You come together at a time of great promise for the region to which  
you belong. Each of your national communities made significant achieve-  
ments during the Four Year Plan, and these are being further consolidated  
during these critical twelve months. In a few short weeks the Continental  
Counselors and the Auxiliary Board members will gather in the Holy Land  
to deliberate on the features of the Five Year Plan to be launched at Riḍván.  
Your role in this mighty undertaking cannot be overemphasized, and we  
look to the youth in Southeast Asia with great expectations. You need to  
continue resolutely on the path of service which you have so brilliantly be-  
gun. Through the insights you gain from the study of the Teachings and  
the capabilities of service that you develop, you can each become a source  
of inspiration and moral leadership to the masses of youth around you. In  
your deliberations you will need to devise ways to attract your peers to the  
Faith and persuade them to join you in your systematic study of institute  
courses so that, galvanized by the same vision that spurs you to action, they  
will actively participate in your movement.

346.2 Be assured of our loving prayers in the Holy Shrines that your efforts may  
be reinforced by the Supreme Concourse.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

347  
Message to the Youth Conference in India

25 DECEMBER 2000

To the Friends gathered at the Youth Conference

of the Indian sub-continent

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

347.1 Since the outset of the Four Year Plan we have observed with great plea-  
sure the steadily increasing tempo of activity in the Indian sub-continent

and are well aware of the contribution that the youth have made to the  
advances achieved in recent years. We now see an able corps of devoted  
youth in each of your countries, touched by the spirit of the Faith and fired  
by the noble vision enshrined in the Writings, ready to play a significant role  
in the strengthening of the foundations of Bahá’í communities and in the  
spiritual regeneration of the society to which they belong.

347.2 Developing distinctive Bahá’í communities is a challenge you share with  
the rest of your fellow believers in that vast and promising region. You need  
to exert every effort to align your thoughts and actions with the Teachings  
and become the source of inspiration and encouragement to others. When  
you come across passive acceptance of the Faith, respond with passion for  
teaching. When you see compromise of principles in the name of expedi-  
ency, demonstrate an even greater sense of spiritual discipline. When you  
notice traces of tendencies that lead to division, show forth your ability to  
act as builders of unity. Aspire to the station of servitude at His Threshold.

347.3 Your national institute programs will help you develop your capabilities  
of service, which will need to be directed not only to your own commu-  
nities but to the society around you. The current generation of youth in  
the region is experiencing social change at a phenomenal rate. This change  
presents your peers with a host of unprecedented challenges, and the great  
majority finds itself in a state of utter confusion. Yet among them are many  
who aspire to create a new society in which justice prevails. Who but you,  
the dedicated servants of the Blessed Beauty, inspired and moved by His  
all-embracing vision of the new World Order, can show these youth the  
direction they seek? In your deliberations you will need to think of ways to  
attract your fellow youth to the Faith and persuade them to join you in your  
systematic study of the Teachings so that, galvanized by the same vision that  
spurs you to action, they can become active participants in your movement.  
Be assured of our loving prayers in the Holy Shrines that your efforts may  
be reinforced by the Supreme Concourse.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

348  
The Five Year Plan

9 JANUARY 2001

To the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counselors

Dearly loved Friends,

348.1 Five years ago, we called on the body of Counselors assembled in the  
Holy Land to aid the Bahá’í world to understand and shoulder the chal-  
lenges of systematic growth. The brilliant achievements of the Four Year  
Plan testify to the wholehearted response they made. Today, we ask for an  
equally great effort on your part, this time to ensure the successful launching  
of the Five Year Plan.

348.2 In your deliberations on the nature of this next stage in the unfoldment  
of the Divine Plan, you need to take into account the magnitude of the  
changes occurring in the fortunes of the Faith. At the World Center, the  
raising of the great edifices now standing on the Arc represents a major  
step in the consolidation of a divinely appointed Administrative Order. The  
Four Year Plan witnessed a remarkable increase in the institutional capacity  
of Bahá’í communities in every continent. The evolution of National and  
Local Spiritual Assemblies has visibly accelerated, and Regional Councils,  
where they have been established, have brought a new energy and effective-  
ness to the work of the Cause. With the birth and efflorescence of more  
than 300 training institutes, the Faith now possesses a powerful instrument  
for developing the human resources needed to sustain large-scale expan-  
sion and consolidation. Further, the ability of the Bahá’í community to  
influence the course of human affairs, both through its dealings with gov-  
ernments and organizations of civil society and through its endeavors in  
social and economic development, has been greatly enhanced. The Cause  
of Bahá’u’lláh stands at the threshold of a new epoch, at a moment in his-  
tory when, despite confusion and outbursts of fresh hostility, the world has  
made real strides towards peace. One clearly sees an increasing receptivity to  
His all-pervasive and resplendent Spirit.

348.3 Advancing the process of entry by troops will continue as the aim of  
the Five Year Plan—indeed the aim of the series of Plans that will carry  
the community to the end of the first century of the Formative Age. The  
acceleration of this vital process will be achieved through systematic activity

on the part of the three participants in the Plan: the individual believer, the  
institutions, and the community.

The training institute

348.4 A searching analysis of the Four Year Plan recently prepared for us by  
the International Teaching Center demonstrates that the training institute  
is effective not only in enhancing the powers of the individual, but also  
in vitalizing communities and institutions. The continued development of  
training institutes in the diverse countries and territories of the world, then,  
must be a central feature of the new Plan.

348.5 Drawing on the wealth of experience now accumulated in this area of  
endeavor, institutes will have to provide their communities with a constant  
stream of human resources to serve the process of entry by troops. Elements  
of a system that can meet the training needs of large numbers of believers  
have already been tested worldwide and have proven themselves. Study cir-  
cles, reinforced by extension courses and special campaigns, have shown their  
ability to lend structure to the process of spiritual education at the grassroots.  
The value of a sequence of courses, each one following the other in a logical  
pattern and each one building on the achievements of the previous ones, has  
become abundantly clear. Various models are emerging that provide insight  
into how such sequences can be used to create training programs. In one  
example the main sequence, much like the trunk of a tree, supports courses  
branching out from it, each branch dedicated to some specific area of train-  
ing. In another, several tracks of courses, each with its own focus, run parallel.  
Institutes will do well to examine these elements and approaches and employ  
them in a manner that responds to the opportunities before them.

348.6 At the outset of the Twelve Month Plan we underscored the need for  
Bahá’í children to be nurtured spiritually and to be integrated into the life  
of the Cause. There is every indication from the response of the friends  
thus far that a raised awareness of the importance of child education will,  
in fact, be a hallmark of this brief yet significant Plan. A new impetus has  
been given to Bahá’í children’s classes. Increased awareness has also brought  
to light opportunities to offer moral and spiritual education to children in  
general, as exemplified by the success of the efforts to introduce courses on  
the Bahá’í Faith into programs of official school systems.

348.7 That institutes are placing more and more emphasis on the training of  
teachers for children’s classes is a particularly encouraging sign. Other mea-

sures are equally essential if regular classes for every age are to be offered  
in Bahá’í communities throughout the world. In some countries, national  
and regional committees have been established to assist Local Spiritual  
Assemblies in the discharge of their responsibility to educate children. In  
these, the relationship between the committees and the training institute  
will steadily evolve as experience is gained, each agency enhancing the work  
of the other. But there are many countries in which the institute is the  
only structure developing the capacity to organize and maintain courses  
in locality after locality. As this approach is working well with youth and  
adults, and increasingly for junior youth, there is no reason why the train-  
ing institute should not also shoulder similar responsibility with respect  
to children, where necessary. As a general rule, institutes do not take on  
the administration of plans and programs for expansion and consolidation.  
Conducting children’s classes, however, is a unique enterprise, of special  
urgency. In those countries where the task is given to it, the institute be-  
comes a center of learning intensely engaged in the spiritual education of  
the friends from the tenderest age through adulthood.

Individual initiative in teaching

348.8 With the work of institutes growing in strength, attention has now to be  
given everywhere to systematizing teaching efforts. In the document “The  
Institution of the Counselors” just issued, we emphasize the role that the  
Auxiliary Board members and their assistants play in helping the friends to  
meet this challenge, both at the level of individual initiative and of collective  
volition. As individuals progress through institute courses, they deepen their  
knowledge of the Faith, gain insights, and acquire skills of service. Some of  
the courses devoted to teaching will no doubt treat the subject in general  
terms. Others will focus on various means of sharing Bahá’u’lláh’s message  
with specific segments of society, incorporating the wisdom gleaned from  
the teaching endeavors of the friends. This combined process of action,  
learning and training will endow communities with an ever-increasing num-  
ber of capable and eager teachers of the Cause.

348.9 Training alone, of course, does not necessarily lead to an upsurge in  
teaching activity.

348.10 In every avenue of service, the friends need sustained encouragement.  
Our expectation is that the Auxiliary Board members, together with their  
assistants, will give special thought to how individual initiative can be cul-  
tivated, particularly as it relates to teaching. When training and encourage-

ment are effective, a culture of growth is nourished in which the believers see  
their duty to teach as a natural consequence of having accepted Bahá’u’lláh.  
They “raise high the sacred torch of faith,” as was ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s wish, “la-  
bor ceaselessly, by day and by night,” and “consecrate every fleeting moment  
of their lives to the diffusion of the divine fragrance and the exaltation of  
God’s holy Word.”[[398]](#footnote-398)348-1 So enkindled do their hearts become with the fire  
of the love of God that whoever approaches them feels its warmth. They  
strive to be channels of the spirit, pure of heart, selfless and humble, pos-  
sessing certitude and the courage that stems from reliance on God. In such  
a culture, teaching is the dominating passion of the lives of the believers.  
Fear of failure finds no place. Mutual support, commitment to learning,  
and appreciation of diversity of action are the prevailing norms.

Systematic programs of growth

348.11 During the coming months, you will be helping national communities,  
whose circumstances differ widely, to formulate plans for systematic growth.  
There are many countries where increased institutional capacity, particu-  
larly at the level of the region, now makes it possible to focus attention on  
smaller geographic areas. Most of these will consist of a cluster of villages  
and towns, but, sometimes, a large city and its suburbs may constitute an  
area of this kind. Among the factors that determine the boundaries of a  
cluster are culture, language, patterns of transport, infrastructure, and the  
social and economic life of the inhabitants. The areas into which a region  
divides will fall into various categories of development. Some will not yet  
be open to the Faith, while others will contain a few isolated localities and  
groups; in some, established communities will be gaining strength through a  
vigorous institute process; in a few, strong communities of deepened believ-  
ers will be in a position to take on the challenges of systematic and acceler-  
ated expansion and consolidation.

348.12 Once the appropriate categories have been identified, national plans in  
these countries will need to make provision for the progressive opening of  
virgin areas through the settlement of homefront pioneers. Such goals can  
be met with relative ease if pioneers are experienced in institute programs  
and are able to use their methods and materials in raising- up a group of  
dedicated believers who can carry the work of the Faith forward in the area.

Precious indeed will be the privilege of those who, in the remaining years  
of the first century of the Formative Age, place their trust in God and arise  
with fervor to take the lead in carrying the light of Divine guidance to every  
part of their countries. It is our hope that this call for homefront pioneers  
will generate great enthusiasm among the friends and open before their eyes  
a new vista of possibilities to serve the Faith.

348.13 According to this scheme, national plans will also need to include provi-  
sion for the strengthening of other areas which, although open to the Faith,  
have yet to reach the level of development that prepares them for intensive  
activity. In those areas where strong communities with a corps of deepened  
believers exist, systematic programs for the expansion and consolidation of  
the Faith should be established forthwith. We have already indicated that  
the International Teaching Center has identified certain patterns of growth  
appropriate for relatively small geographical areas. Since then, it has ana-  
lyzed several pilot projects in various parts of the world, and its findings are  
highly encouraging. The lessons learned now provide a body of experience  
for the launching of programs for systematic growth in area after area. As  
you consult on this matter with National Spiritual Assemblies and Regional  
Councils, you will want to keep the Teaching Center informed.

348.14 It is important that national communities not rush into establishing inten-  
sive programs in an area before conditions are propitious. These conditions  
include: a high level of enthusiasm among a sizeable group of devoted and  
capable believers who understand the prerequisites for sustainable growth  
and can take ownership of the program; some basic experience on the  
part of a few communities in the cluster in holding classes for the spiritual  
education of children, devotional meetings, and the Nineteen Day Feast;  
the existence of a reasonable degree of administrative capacity in at least a  
few Local Spiritual Assemblies; the active involvement of several assistants  
to Auxiliary Board members in promoting community life; a pronounced  
spirit of collaboration among the various institutions working in the area;  
and above all, the strong presence of the training institute with a scheme  
of coordination that supports the systematic multiplication of study circles.

348.15 Programs initiated in such areas should aim at fostering sustainable  
growth by building the necessary capacity at the levels of the individual, the  
institution, and the community. Far from requiring grandiose and elaborate  
plans, these programs should focus on a few measures that have proven over  
the years to be indispensable to large-scale expansion and consolidation.  
Success will depend on the manner in which lines of action are integrated

and on the attitude of learning that is adopted. The implementation of such  
a program will require the close collaboration of the institute, the Auxiliary  
Board members and their assistants, and an Area Teaching Committee.

348.16 At the core of the program must lie a sound and steady process of expan-  
sion, matched by an equally strong process of human resource development.  
A range of teaching efforts needs to be carried out, involving both activities  
undertaken by the individual and campaigns promoted by the institutions.  
As the number of believers in the area rises, a significant percentage should  
receive training from the institute, and their capabilities be directed towards  
the development of local communities.

348.17 Our message of 26 December 1995 delineating the features of the Four  
Year Plan made reference to the stages through which a community passes  
as it develops. The experience that has been gained in the ensuing years in  
working with communities at various stages will prove valuable to programs  
of growth. One of the first steps in implementing the program may well  
be a survey to determine the condition of each locality in the area. Among  
the initial goals for every community should be the establishment of study  
circles, children’s classes, and devotional meetings, open to all the inhabit-  
ants of the locality. The observance of the Nineteen Day Feast has to be  
given due weight, and consistent effort should be made to strengthen the  
Local Spiritual Assemblies. Once communities are able to sustain the basic  
activities of Bahá’í life, a natural way to further their consolidation is to in-  
troduce small projects of social and economic development—for example,  
a literacy project, a project for the advancement of women or environmental  
preservation, or even a village school. As strength builds, the responsibility  
for an increasing number of lines of action is to be devolved onto the Local  
Spiritual Assemblies.

348.18 Throughout the endeavor, periodic meetings of consultation in the area  
need to reflect on issues, consider adjustments, and maintain enthusiasm  
and unity of thought. The best approach is to formulate plans for a few  
months at a time, beginning with one or two lines of action and gradu-  
ally growing in complexity. Those who are actively involved in the imple-  
mentation of plans, whether members of the institutions or not, should  
be encouraged to participate fully in the consultations. Other area-wide  
gatherings will also be necessary. Some of these will provide opportunity  
for the sharing of experience and further training. Others will focus on the  
use of the arts and the enrichment of culture. Together, such gatherings will  
support an intense process of action, consultation and learning.

348.19 The friends who participate in these intensive programs of growth should  
bear in mind that the purpose is to ensure that the Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh  
reaches the masses of humanity and enables them to achieve spiritual and  
material progress through the application of the Teachings. Vast numbers  
among the peoples of the world are ready, indeed yearn, for the bounties  
that Bahá’u’lláh alone can bestow upon them once they have committed  
themselves to building the new society He has envisioned. In learning to  
systematize their large-scale teaching work, Bahá’í communities are becom-  
ing better equipped to respond to this longing. They cannot withhold what-  
ever effort, whatever sacrifice, may be called for.

A spiritual enterprise

348.20 Clearly, the scheme described here, while suitable to many national com-  
munities, cannot be applied in every situation. We count on the ability  
of the Bahá’í institutions to create plans which, if not reflecting the total  
scheme above, will incorporate elements of its vision, according to the cir-  
cumstances of each national community. Bahá’í communities are, of course,  
engaged in a range of indispensable endeavors such as public information  
activity, proclamation efforts, external affairs work, production of literature,  
and complex social and economic development projects. Most certainly, as  
plans are devised, they will also address these challenges.

348.21 The nature of the planning process with which you will be helping the  
friends is in many ways unique. At its core it is a spiritual process in which  
communities and institutions strive to align their pursuits with the Will of  
God. The Major Plan of God is at work and the forces it generates impel  
humanity towards its destiny. In their own plans of action, the institutions  
of the Faith must seek to gain insight into the operation of these great  
forces, explore the potentialities of the people they serve, measure the re-  
sources and strengths of their communities, and take practical steps to enlist  
the unreserved participation of the believers. The nurturing of this process  
is the sacred mission entrusted to you. We have every confidence in your  
ability to achieve it. May Bahá’u’lláh bless and sustain you through His  
unfailing grace and mighty confirmations.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

349  
The Institution of the Counselors

12 JANUARY 2001

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

349.1 The Universal House of Justice has prepared the enclosed document on  
the institution of the Counselors, which describes in some detail the nature  
of that institution and its place in the Administrative Order. It has been  
given to the Continental Counselors and the Auxiliary Board members now  
gathered in the Holy Land for the events marking the occupation by the  
International Teaching Center of its permanent seat on Mount Carmel.

349.2 The document is a digest of the guidance previously issued on this sub-  
ject and consists of two parts. The first provides an overview of the various  
components of the institution and their duties, while the second is a list  
of statements addressing specific aspects of its functioning. The House of  
Justice hopes that this document will shed light not only on the responsi-  
bilities of the Counselors and their auxiliaries but also on the workings of  
the Administrative Order in general, and commends it to the study of the  
friends at all levels.

349.3 Five copies are being provided to each National Spiritual Assembly. Ad-  
ditional copies will not be made available from the World Center, although  
an electronic copy of the text can be forwarded to you upon request.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

FOR DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

350  
Inauguration of the International Teaching Center  
building on Mount Carmel

14 JANUARY 2001

To the Conference marking the inauguration  
of the International Teaching Center building

Dearly loved Friends,

350.1 We are filled with a sense of triumph as we reflect on the significance of  
the occupation by the International Teaching Center of its permanent seat

on the Mountain of the Lord. This occasion marks the beginning of what  
future generations will regard as a splendid chapter in the annals of our  
Faith.

350.2 What joy that the Hands of the Cause of God ‘Alí-Akbar Furútan and  
‘Alí-Muḥammad Varqá are able to participate in these proceedings! We ac-  
knowledge the great debt of gratitude owed to them and to the departed  
ones of their exalted rank for so much of what we have come to celebrate.

350.3 And how fitting it is that the Continental Counselors and their deputies  
from the five continents are here to witness such an auspicious beginning!  
The attendance of the Auxiliary Board members is so unusual a feature of  
the gathering that we are impelled to address our remarks particularly to  
them. Indeed, on no occasion in the past have the major constituents of the  
institution of the Counselors ever assembled in the Holy Land.

350.4 With joyous hearts, we extend to every member of the Auxiliary Boards  
a special and loving welcome. We hail this opportunity to greet and thank  
these officers of an institution the crucial importance of whose vital role in  
the progress of the Cause of Bahá’u’lláh is increasingly demonstrated as the  
Divine Plan unfolds. May we not at such a moment invoke, above all, the  
memory of him in whose divinely inspired mind the conception of Auxil-  
iary Boards took shape? Up until the time of his passing in 1957, Shoghi  
Effendi had called for the appointment of seventy-two such officers, who  
were evenly divided between the two Boards on each of the five continents;  
with the institutional evolution that has taken place since then, the number  
has increased to nearly one thousand.

350.5 With the International Teaching Center having settled into its position  
at the heart of a ramified, global institution, we can readily recognize the  
fruition of the system set to extend into the future the specialized func-  
tions of propagation and protection originally assigned to the Hands of the  
Cause—a system that has derived impetus from the guidance and example  
of these irreplaceable appointees of Shoghi Effendi. This achievement is in  
itself a thrilling indication of how well the Cause is faring.

350.6 In you, the Auxiliary Board members here assembled, is reflected the  
whole world of humanity. You hail from far-flung geographic regions and  
cultural backgrounds that make you truly representative of a cross-section  
of the human family. Your coming here both reaffirms the existence of a  
dynamic, global community and signalizes the possibilities for an advance  
in the process of entry by troops far beyond any record yet established. In

this latter regard, the value of your immediate future services cannot be  
overestimated.

350.7 The world’s crying need for the divine prescriptions is made plain by  
the ills afflicting society at every level in all parts of the planet. We must be  
swift in ministering to this need. Doing so largely depends upon the revo-  
lutionary vision, the creative drive and systematic effort of Auxiliary Board  
members and their assistants, who prompt and encourage individuals, insti-  
tutions and communities to act with dispatch, constancy and enthusiasm.  
Their operation at the grassroots, at the very wellspring, of individual and  
collective activity, makes manageable the fulfillment of this pressing need.

350.8 In contemplating the sublime purpose that has brought us together on  
this day, we find ourselves without words to describe adequately our won-  
derment at the evidences of Bahá’u’lláh’s handiwork. We stand too close to  
the moment to comprehend the magnitude of what has been so amazingly  
accomplished. But to ponder the circumstances attending seminal happen-  
ings of the past is to awaken in us all some sense of appreciation for their  
wonderful consequences in our time. The revelation of the Tablet of Car-  
mel, the interment of the remains of Bahá’u’lláh’s martyred Forerunner in  
the mausoleum constructed by the beloved Master, the creation by our dear  
Guardian of the Arc on the Hill of God—reflections on just such historic  
landmarks illumine our understanding and evoke gratitude in our hearts.

350.9 The journeys that brought you to these sacred precincts have launched  
you on spiritual adventures that will be celebrated in times to come as hav-  
ing imparted a new impetus to the advancement of the Cause. This is the  
hope and expectation we cherish. For as you drink deep of the rarefied spirit  
of the Holy Shrines and imbibe the guidance that will flow from the con-  
sultations in which you will participate, there can be no doubt that you will  
find yourselves endowed with a new confidence, a new power. With so rich  
an endowment, how can your endeavors fail? Most surely, you will bring  
a rejuvenated fervor and a reconsecrated effort to the compelling civilizing  
tasks you have accepted to perform at this potent juncture in the evolution  
of our glorious Faith.

350.10 Our supplications are intermingled with yours that the Blessed Beauty  
may abundantly confirm you in His service.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

351  
Conference of the Continental Counselors

16 JANUARY 2001

To the Bahá’ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

351.1 As we write you this message, the Conference of the Continental Coun-  
selors approaches a triumphant conclusion.

351.2 For eight days the Counselors from all the continents have consulted on  
the next phase of the process of entry by troops. While they were meeting  
during the first five days, 849 members of their Auxiliary Boards from 172  
countries were arriving at the Bahá’í World Center and paying their re-  
spects at the Holy Shrines in anticipation of the moment when they would  
all come together in a series of soul-stirring events: ascent of the newly  
built Terraces on Mount Carmel; circumambulation of the Shrine of the  
Báb; procession along the Arc path for a visit to the International Teaching  
Center Building; a devotional ceremony to mark the occupation by the  
Teaching Center of its permanent seat; and subsequent joint consultations  
concerning their indispensable role in the Five Year Plan on which the Bahá’í  
world will embark at Riḍván 2001.

351.3 The deliberations of the Counselors themselves have been the heart of  
these stupendous activities. Their consultations have been marked by a  
combination of sobriety and effervescence that has refined the character of  
their discussions and illumined understanding. It is clear from the confident  
atmosphere in which they have conferred that their institution has reached  
a new stage in its maturation. Even though they function principally as  
individuals, the Counselors across all Boards have become of one mind. By  
internalizing and integrating the lessons and experiences of systematization  
called for in the Four Year Plan, they have indeed been transformed into  
channels of unified thought. We appreciate that the new height in the evolu-  
tion of their institution is a reflection, too, of the measure to which, with  
their wise and constant advice, the Spiritual Assemblies and other institu-  
tions of the world community have evolved.

351.4 As the time for the Conference drew near, there were signs that the Faith  
had arrived at a point in its development beyond which a new horizon opens  
before us. Such intimations were communicated in our report last Riḍván  
of the change in culture of the Bahá’í community as training institutes

emerged, as the construction projects on Mount Carmel approached their  
completion, and as the internal processes of institutional consolidation and  
the external processes towards world unity became more fully synchronized.  
They were elaborated in the message we addressed to the Conference of the  
Continental Boards of Counselors a few days ago. But the extraordinary  
dynamics at work throughout the Conference crystallized these indications  
into a recognizable reality. With a spirit of exultation we are moved to an-  
nounce to you: the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh now enters the fifth epoch of its  
Formative Age.

351.5 Recognition of this milestone falls within the patterns established by  
Shoghi Effendi for marking measures of time in the history of the Cause; he  
foresaw among these a succession of epochs occurring in the Formative Age.  
It must fill every devoted follower of Bahá’u’lláh with joy and wonder that  
His Administrative Order has reached so important a point at so crucial a  
time, when so many members of the institution of the Counselors are gath-  
ered in splendid array at the World Center of His Faith. They will return to  
the far corners of the earth as torches aflame with the spirit of service. That  
they will pour fresh energy into their activities, there can be no doubt. Their  
efforts will surely widen the path leading to the success of the Twelve Month  
Plan, and through that to the launching at Riḍván of the five year enterprise  
that will be the first in a series of Plans to be pursued until the centenary of  
the Formative Age.

351.6 The Counselors will leave here anticipating their early consultations with  
National Spiritual Assemblies regarding the operation in their countries of  
the forthcoming Plan. With the involvement of their eager auxiliaries, they  
will assist, too, in quickly moving the requisite planning process to regional  
and local areas of the community in every land.

351.7 In the waning moments of these eventful days, our hearts are turned in  
humble gratitude to the Ancient Beauty for the abundance of the blessings  
He has bestowed. The very earth of Carmel is astir with the wonders of  
His grace as she responds to the redemptive call He raised in the Tablet  
bearing her name. His fervent wish expressed therein resounds in the souls  
of His lovers throughout the planet: “Oh, how I long to announce unto  
every spot on the surface of the earth, and to carry to each one of its cit-  
ies, the glad-tidings of this Revelation ….”[[399]](#footnote-399)351-1 The friends now gathered

amid the splendor at Carmel’s heart have heard it with new ears and have  
reaffirmed their pledge to respond to this divine longing. May their exploits  
in the Name of Bahá scatter more widely the fragrance of His Revelation,  
strengthen more firmly the foundation of His institutions, and embolden  
more resolutely the activities of His worldwide community, impelling for-  
ward the process by which troop after troop will enter into the stronghold  
of the Ark of Salvation.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

352  
Laws of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas not yet universally applied

8 FEBRUARY 2001

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

352.1 On 9 May 1993,[[400]](#footnote-400)352-1 each National Spiritual Assembly was sent a copy  
of a letter written to the National Spiritual Assembly of Iceland on 9 June  
1974,[[401]](#footnote-401)352-2 which listed those laws not at that time binding upon the Western  
world. The covering letter noted that the law of Ḥuqúqu’lláh had been made  
universally binding at Riḍván 1992. On 28 December 1999, the Universal  
House of Justice wrote to the Bahá’ís throughout the world informing them  
of the universal application of the remaining aspects of the laws of prayer  
and fasting.[[402]](#footnote-402)352-3

352.2 Therefore, to bring the information up to date, we have been asked to  
send you the enclosed list of laws not yet universally applied, to replace the  
one sent to you in May 1993.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

FOR DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

*LAWS OF THE KITÁB-I-AQDAS NOT YET UNIVERSALLY APPLIED*

28 DECEMBER 1999

352.3 Following the universal application of the laws on prayer, fasting and  
the recitation of the Greatest Name, the Universal House of Justice has  
provided the following list of laws noted in the Synopsis and Codification  
of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas which are not at present universally binding upon the  
friends. The numbers of the sections are given for ease of reference.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| IV.C.1.i | The laws governing betrothal. |
| IV.C.1.j | The law concerning the payment of a dowry by the groom to the bride on marriage. |
| IV.C.1.l & m | The laws concerning the traveling of a husband away from his wife. |
| IV.C.1.n & o | The laws relating to the virginity of the wife. |
| IV.C.2.b | That part of the divorce law relating to fines payable to the House of Justice. |
| IV.C.3 | The law of inheritance. This is normally covered by civil laws of intestacy at the present time. |
| IV.D.1.a | The law of pilgrimage. |
| IV.D.1.d | The law of the Mashriqu’l-Adhkár is gradually being put into effect. |
| IV.D.1.f | The Bahá’í Festivals are being celebrated by the western friends on their anniversaries in the Gregorian calendar until such time as the Universal House of Justice deems it desirable to pass supplementary legislation necessary for the full implementation of the Badí‘ calendar. |
| IV.D.1.j | The age of maturity applies only to Bahá’í religious duties as yet. On other matters it is subject to the civil law of each country. The age of administrative maturity in the Bahá’í community has, for the time being, been fixed at 21. |
| IV.D.1.k | For the burial of the dead the only requirements now binding in the West are to bury the body (not to cremate it), not to carry it more than a distance of one hour’s journey from the place of death, and to say the Prayer for the Dead of the deceased is a believer over the age of 15. |
| IV.D.1.p | The law of tithes. |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| IV.D.1.r | The law concerning the hunting of animals. |
| IV.D.1.t,  u, v &w | The law relating to the finding of lost property, the disposition of treasure trove, the disposal of objects held in trust and compensation for manslaughter are all designed for a future state of society. These matters are usually covered by the civil law of each country. |
| IV.D.1.y,  xiv, xv, xvi  & xvii | Arson, adultery, murder and theft are all forbidden to Bahá’ís, but the punishments prescribed for them in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas are designed for a future state of society. Such matters are usually covered by the civil laws of each country. |
| IV.D.1.y,  xxv, xxx, xxxi  & xxxii | The laws prohibiting the use of the type of pools which used to be found in Persian baths, the plung- ing of one’s hand in food, the shaving of one’s head and growth of men’s hair below the lobe of the ear. |

352.4 All the exhortations listed in section IV.D.3 are applicable universally at  
the present time insofar as it is possible for the friends to implement them;  
for example, the exhortation to teach one’s children to chant the Holy Verses  
in the Mashriqu’l-Adhkár can be literally carried out only on a limited scale  
at the present time, but the friends should, nevertheless, teach their children  
the Holy Writings as far as possible.

353  
Approval and testing of Persian radio broadcasts

14 MARCH 2001

To selected National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

353.1 We are pleased to inform you that the Universal House of Justice has  
approved a project involving radio broadcasts in Persian, entitled “Payam-  
e-Doost,” to reach the Cradle of the Faith, as well as Iranians in other parts  
of the world. Steps are currently being taken to make regular broadcasts  
possible in a few months time; however, for the success of the project your  
assistance is requested.

353.2 In order to test the transmissions of programs being broadcast, a three-  
day trial period will be held this coming Naw-Rúz. It is not clear which  
countries or regions will be able to receive the broadcast clearly, and which

will not be able to pick it up at all. You are therefore kindly asked to select  
a number of reliable Persian-speaking Bahá’ís in your communities, who  
will listen to the program, check the quality and strength of the signal, and  
report their findings to your Assembly immediately following the testing  
period, so that you can promptly pass this information to the Bahá’í World  
Center, no later than 30 March 2001.

353.3 Three hours of shortwave radio programs on the theme of Naw-Rúz have  
been prepared for this test and will be aired twice daily on 20, 21 and 22  
March 2001. The broadcast will be between 18:00–19:00 GMT each night  
on 5890 kilohertz, shortwave band, and repeated the same evening between  
19:00–20:00 GMT on 7480 kilohertz, shortwave band.

353.4 The friends should report whether they received any signal from each  
hour of the program during each day of the broadcast, whether the first or  
second broadcast each day produced a stronger signal or better reception,  
and in which city or area they sought the transmission. It is important, at  
this stage, to limit information about this project to the Bahá’ís assigned to  
the task, as wide publicity may jeopardize the launch of future programs.

353.5 Your assistance in this historic undertaking is much appreciated by the  
House of Justice.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

354  
Publication of *Century of Light*

1 APRIL 2001

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

354.1 We have been asked to forward to you a copy of the enclosed publication,  
*Century of Light*, produced at the request and under the supervision of the  
Universal House of Justice.

354.2 The purpose of the document, which quotes extensively from the Bahá’í  
Writings and the related commentaries of the Guardian, is to provide mem-  
bers of the Faith with a perspective on two defining processes that unfolded  
during the twentieth century: on the one hand, the sequence of events that

made the unification of humanity the principal feature of modern history  
and, on the other, the emergence from obscurity of the Cause of God and  
its Administrative Order. It is the hope of the House of Justice that editions  
in a range of languages will make this material accessible to the members of  
Bahá’í communities throughout the world.

354.3 Some believers may wish to share copies with non-Bahá’í friends who  
they believe would find the contents of particular interest, and there is  
no objection to their doing so on an individual basis. It should be clear,  
however, that *Century of Light* is primarily a resource for Bahá’í study and  
deepening. It is not a public information publication, nor is it intended as a  
presentation piece for public figures or the media.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

355  
Attitude of Bahá’ís and Bahá’í Institutions toward  
those who have withdrawn from the Faith

4 APRIL 2001

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

355.1 The International Teaching Center has sought elucidation of issues con-  
cerning the attitude of Bahá’ís and Bahá’í institutions towards those who  
have withdrawn from the Faith. In response, we have provided the following  
comments, which are being sent to you for your information and guidance.  
You are free to share this letter with the believers under your jurisdiction as  
you wish.

355.2 One’s beliefs are an internal and personal matter; no person or institution  
has the right to exert compulsion in matters of belief. Since there is a wide  
range of meanings in the Sacred Scriptures, there are bound to be differ-  
ent ways in which individuals understand many of the Bahá’í teachings.  
Nevertheless, it is necessary for the viability of the Bahá’í community that  
its members share a common understanding of essentials. This implies a  
commitment by each member to function within the framework established  
by such an understanding.

355.3 This framework includes, for example, cognizance of the existence of a  
Divine Revelation brought by Bahá’u’lláh, the Manifestation of God for this

age, and acceptance of the two primary duties prescribed by God, as ex-  
pressed in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, the Most Holy Book of the Bahá’í Revelation.  
These are: “recognition of Him Who is the Dayspring of His Revelation  
and the Fountain of His laws,” and observance of “every ordinance of Him  
Who is the Desire of the world. These twin duties,” the Aqdas firmly states,  
“are inseparable. Neither is acceptable without the other.”[[403]](#footnote-403)355-1

355.4 ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Whom Bahá’u’lláh appointed as the Interpreter of His  
writings, reaffirms these fundamentals of Bahá’í belief. In His Will and  
Testament He writes: “This is the foundation of the belief of the people of  
Bahá (may my life be offered up for them): ‘His Holiness, the Exalted One  
(the Báb), is the Manifestation of the Unity and Oneness of God and the  
Forerunner of the Ancient Beauty. His Holiness the Abhá Beauty (may my  
life be a sacrifice for His steadfast friends) is the Supreme Manifestation of  
God and the Dayspring of His Most Divine Essence. All others are servants  
unto Him and do His bidding.’”[[404]](#footnote-404)355-2

355.5 It is within the context of these statements of basic belief and practice  
that membership in the Bahá’í Faith is determined. Acknowledging that the  
matter of ascertaining the qualification of a true believer is a delicate and  
complex question, Shoghi Effendi, the appointee of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as Guard-  
ian of the Cause and authorized interpreter of its teachings, set down for  
Spiritual Assemblies the principal factors that must be taken into consider-  
ation before deciding whether a person may be regarded as a true believer or  
not: “Full recognition of the station of the Forerunner, the Author, and the  
True Exemplar of the Bahá’í Cause, as set forth in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Testament;  
unreserved acceptance of, and submission to, whatsoever has been revealed  
by their Pen; loyal and steadfast adherence to every clause of our Beloved’s  
sacred Will; and close association with the spirit as well as the form of the  
present day Bahá’í administration throughout the world ….”[[405]](#footnote-405)355-3

355.6 Viewed in the light of these texts, a statement that one wishes to with-  
draw from the Bahá’í community, but not from the Faith, is seen to be  
self-contradictory. The Bahá’í community must be seen in its proper light.  
The necessity for its existence as an inseparable element of the Faith itself

is explained by the stated purpose of the Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh: to bring  
about a Divine Civilization. The embodiment of that purpose and of the  
spirit breathed by Bahá’u’lláh into the world is the Order He has ordained,  
to which He refers in the Most Holy Book in asserting: “The world’s equilib-  
rium hath been upset through the vibrating influence of this most great, this  
new World Order. Mankind’s ordered life hath been revolutionized through  
the agency of this unique, this wondrous System—the like of which mortal  
eyes have never witnessed.”[[406]](#footnote-406)355-4

355.7 Normally, a Spiritual Assembly is called upon to make a decision in such  
matters only as the result of an action by an individual, either in declaring  
his belief in Bahá’u’lláh, or in stating that he wishes to withdraw from the  
Faith, or, very rarely, in persistently promoting concepts which are clearly  
inconsistent with the essentials of membership outlined above.

355.8 Acceptance of the Faith is the voluntary act of an individual and is reg-  
istered by the appropriate Bahá’í institution unless it has good reason not  
to do so. Likewise, a Bahá’í is free to leave the Faith voluntarily. When a  
member of the community informs the Assembly of his wish to withdraw,  
it would try to help him overcome whatever problems seem to be the cause  
of his desiring to take such a step. If he persists in his intention, the As-  
sembly would normally accept the withdrawal unless there were grounds for  
suspecting that he is acting insincerely out of some ulterior motive, such as  
to violate a Bahá’í law with impunity.

355.9 In spite of loving encouragement given by their Assemblies, not all  
Bahá’ís are active in the work of the community. This does not, of course,  
necessarily indicate withdrawal. An Assembly should carefully distinguish  
between those who are not active but still identify themselves with the Faith,  
and those whose inactivity indicates complete lack of interest and a wish to  
have nothing more to do with the Cause.

355.10 Once a person’s resignation from the Faith has been accepted, his status  
is that of a non-Bahá’í and—except as noted below—his relationship with  
Bahá’í institutions and individual believers is the same as that of any other  
non-Bahá’í. As in all human relationships, the closeness of this connection,  
and the warmth of friendship, depend upon personal factors.

355.11 Sometimes, after a person’s withdrawal from the Cause has been accept-  
ed, it becomes evident that his statements were insincere and were made

merely in order to evade Bahá’í law. The Assembly need not take any overt  
action in such a case, but would note the matter in its records. In other  
words, it would have to be cautious about accepting a subsequent declara-  
tion of belief from this individual until satisfied that it is made in good  
faith. Also, depending upon the circumstances, the Assembly might require  
him to rectify the action, taken in violation of Bahá’í law, which was the  
motive for his withdrawing from the Faith.

355.12 An analogous situation arises when a person who is engaged in some  
activity which he suspects would result in his being declared a Covenant-  
breaker withdraws from the Faith under the impression that this step would  
prevent such an outcome. The Universal House of Justice may conclude that  
the withdrawal provides adequate protection of the community from the  
individual in question. However, if he persists, following his withdrawal, in  
trying to undermine the Covenant or joins forces with Covenant-breakers,  
he may be judged to have broken the Covenant, and the friends would be  
told to have no association with him. Each such case would be considered  
in the context of its specific circumstances.

355.13 There is one other condition which should be mentioned. There are cer-  
tain former Bahá’ís whose actions do not necessarily constitute Covenant-  
breaking, but are seriously destructive. Where such people have shown that  
they are impervious to explanations or exhortations from the Bahá’í institu-  
tions, continued association with them can be burdensome and can exert a  
spiritually corrosive effect on the faith of believers. In such cases the Head of  
the Faith may simply advise the Bahá’ís to leave them to their own devices.

355.14 Thus, there are exceptional cases in which a former believer’s spiritual at-  
titude to the Faith may, to various degrees, create an estrangement between  
him and the Bahá’ís. In general, however, a person who has withdrawn from  
the Faith is regarded as being among the generality of humankind with  
whom the Bahá’ís are enjoined to associate “in joy and fragrance.”

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

356  
The Lesser Peace

19 APRIL 2001

To an individual believer

Dear Bahá’í Friend,

356.1 The principal issue raised in your letter is that of the timing for the oc-  
currence of the Lesser Peace, in light of your impression that the Bahá’í  
Writings anticipate its coming before the conclusion of the twentieth cen-  
tury; i.e., the end of December 2000.

356.2 Enclosed for your information is a copy of a memorandum prepared by  
the Research Department, at the request of the House of Justice, on the  
subject of the attainment of the unity of nations and the Lesser Peace. As-  
sembled in this document are a number of pertinent passages from authori-  
tative texts of the Faith.

356.3 In reviewing this material it becomes apparent that there is nothing in  
the authoritative Bahá’í Writings to indicate that the Lesser Peace would be  
established before the end of the twentieth century. However, there are clear  
statements affirming that the unity of nations would be, in the words of  
‘Abdu’l-Bahá, “securely established” during the twentieth century.

356.4 These statements, and others appearing in the enclosed document,  
should be viewed from the perspective that the evolution of the World  
Order of Bahá’u’lláh is an organic process proceeding in accordance with  
the Divine Will and animated by a spiritual reality. In response to a ques-  
tion, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá wrote: “The kingdom of peace, salvation, uprightness,  
and reconciliation is founded in the invisible world, and it will by degrees  
become manifest and apparent through the power of the Word of God!” As  
a result of consecrated human endeavor over decades, and indeed centuries,  
this spiritual reality is gradually expressed in physical form.

356.5 An orientation to process is apparent throughout the writings of ‘Abdu’l-  
Bahá and Shoghi Effendi concerning the attainment of world peace. For ex-  
ample, the Guardian reported the Master as having acclaimed actions taken  
at the conclusion of the First World War to have signalized “the dawn of the  
Most Great Peace.” This stands in contrast to preoccupation with the short  
term in the wider society today which focuses exclusively on events rather  
than on evolutionary processes.

356.6 You should also take note of the distinction between the unity of na-  
tions and the Lesser Peace. Shoghi Effendi, in response to questions from  
believers, clarified that “unity in the political realm,” to which ‘Abdu’l-Bahá  
referred in his enunciation of the seven candles of unity, “is a unity which  
politically independent and sovereign *states* achieve among themselves.” As  
expressed in the passages cited in the enclosed memorandum, the Lesser  
Peace will initially be a political unity arrived at by decision of the various  
governments of the world. The unity of nations can be taken as that unity  
which arises from a recognition among the peoples of the various nations,  
that they are members of one common human family.

356.7 The twentieth century has been distinguished by the emergence of the  
unity of nations, to which both Shoghi Effendi and the House of Justice  
have referred in the enclosed document. This movement, the evidence of  
which accumulates with each passing day, stands in sharp contrast to the  
nationalistic tenor of the nineteenth century, and is an evidence of the spirit  
of a new age moving in the hearts of humankind. Viewed from this per-  
spective, there can be no doubt that the promise of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has been  
fulfilled, and the unity of nations securely established in the century now  
concluded. The further expansion and strengthening of this consciousness  
of world solidarity in the years to come will have their effect in the political  
realm, and will influence the evolution towards world government.

356.8 It should not be imagined that the processes now moving in the world  
will be free from challenge or difficulty. There may well be setbacks, and  
conflicts may erupt periodically, as humanity proceeds towards the emer-  
gence and consolidation of the Lesser Peace, giving rise in due course to the  
establishment of the Most Great Peace.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

**MEMORANDUM**

19 APRIL 2001

To the Universal House of Justice

From the Research Department

Attainment of the Unity of Nations and the Lesser Peace

Introduction:

356.9 The Bahá’í Writings about world peace envisage the Most Great Peace  
coming as the culmination of two distinct processes which unfold gradu-  
ally over a lengthy period. One of these processes concerns the growth and  
development of the Bahá’í community, with the evolution of the Adminis-  
trative Order and its efflorescence in the World Order of Bahá’u’lláh. The  
other process, the subject of this memorandum, is associated with develop-  
ments in the wider society, notably the attainment of the unity of nations  
and the establishment of the Lesser Peace.

Unity of Nations and the Lesser Peace:

356.10 Shoghi Effendi refers to Bahá’u’lláh addressing “all the kings of the earth,  
summoning them to cleave to the Lesser Peace, as distinct from that Most  
Great Peace which those who are fully conscious of the power of His Revela-  
tion and avowedly profess the tenets of His Faith can alone proclaim and  
must eventually establish ….”[[407]](#footnote-407)356-1 In the words of Bahá’u’lláh:

356.10a Now that ye have refused the Most Great Peace, hold ye fast unto  
this, the Lesser Peace, that haply ye may in some degree better your  
own condition and that of your dependents.

356.10b O rulers of the earth! Be reconciled among yourselves, that ye may  
need no more armaments save in a measure to safeguard your ter-  
ritories and dominions. Beware lest ye disregard the counsel of the  
All-Knowing, the Faithful.

356.10c Be united, O kings of the earth, for thereby will the tempest of  
discord be stilled amongst you, and your peoples find rest, if ye be  
of them that comprehend. Should anyone among you take up arms

against another, rise ye all against him, for this is naught but manifest  
justice.[[408]](#footnote-408)356-2

356.11 In another passage, Bahá’u’lláh has related the Lesser Peace to the gather-  
ing together of world leaders at a convocation in which measures for unity  
and concord would be devised.

356.11a We pray God—exalted be His glory—and cherish the hope that  
He may graciously assist the manifestations of affluence and power  
and the daysprings of sovereignty and glory, the kings of the earth—  
may God aid them through His strengthening grace—to establish  
the Lesser Peace. This, indeed, is the greatest means for insuring the  
tranquillity of the nations. It is incumbent upon the Sovereigns of the  
world—may God assist them—unitedly to hold fast unto this Peace,  
which is the chief instrument for the protection of all mankind. It  
is Our hope that they will arise to achieve what will be conducive  
to the well-being of man. It is their duty to convene an all-inclusive  
assembly, which either they themselves or their ministers will attend,  
and to enforce whatever measures are required to establish unity and  
concord amongst men. They must put away the weapons of war, and  
turn to the instruments of universal reconstruction. Should one king  
rise up against another, all the other kings must arise to deter him.  
Arms and armaments will, then, be no more needed beyond that  
which is necessary to insure the internal security of their respective  
countries. If they attain unto this all-surpassing blessing, the people  
of each nation will pursue, with tranquillity and contentment, their  
own occupations, and the groanings and lamentations of most men  
would be silenced.[[409]](#footnote-409)356-3

356.12 The theme of a gathering to deliberate on the measures required for an  
enduring world peace is referred to in several other places in the Writings of  
Bahá’u’lláh, including:

356.12a The time must come when the imperative necessity for the holding of  
a vast, an all-embracing assemblage of men will be universally realized.

The rulers and kings of the earth must needs attend it, and, participat-  
ing in its deliberations, must consider such ways and means as will  
lay the foundations of the world’s Great Peace amongst men. Such a  
peace demandeth that the Great Powers should resolve, for the sake  
of the tranquillity of the peoples of the earth, to be fully reconciled  
among themselves. Should any king take up arms against another, all  
should unitedly arise and prevent him. If this be done, the nations  
of the world will no longer require any armaments, except for the  
purpose of preserving the security of their realms and of maintaining  
internal order within their territories. This will ensure the peace and  
composure of every people, government and nation.[[410]](#footnote-410)356-4

356.13 Subsequently ‘Abdu’l-Bahá specified one of the outcomes of this con-  
vocation to be a comprehensive treaty, the provisions of which would be  
binding on all governments:

356.13a True civilization will unfurl its banner in the midmost heart of  
the world whenever a certain number of its distinguished and high-  
minded sovereigns—the shining exemplars of devotion and determi-  
nation—shall, for the good and happiness of all mankind, arise, with  
firm resolve and clear vision, to establish the Cause of Universal Peace.  
They must make the Cause of Peace the object of general consulta-  
tion, and seek by every means in their power to establish a Union of  
the nations of the world. They must conclude a binding treaty and  
establish a covenant, the provisions of which shall be sound, invio-  
lable and definite. They must proclaim it to all the world and obtain  
for it the sanction of all the human race. This supreme and noble  
undertaking—the real source of the peace and well-being of all the  
world—should be regarded as sacred by all that dwell on earth. All  
the forces of humanity must be mobilized to ensure the stability and  
permanence of this Most Great Covenant. In this all-embracing Pact  
the limits and frontiers of each and every nation should be clearly  
fixed, the principles underlying the relations of governments towards  
one another definitely laid down, and all international agreements and  
obligations ascertained. In like manner, the size of the armaments of

every government should be strictly limited, for if the preparations  
for war and the military forces of any nation should be allowed to  
increase, they will arouse the suspicion of others. The fundamental  
principle underlying this solemn Pact should be so fixed that if any  
government later violate any one of its provisions, all the governments  
on earth should arise to reduce it to utter submission, nay the human  
race as a whole should resolve, with every power at its disposal, to de-  
stroy that government. Should this greatest of all remedies be applied  
to the sick body of the world, it will assuredly recover from its ills and  
will remain eternally safe and secure.[[411]](#footnote-411)356-5

356.14 Distinct from, but closely related to, this theme is the promise by ‘Abdu’l-  
Bahá, both orally and in writing, that the unity of nations will be established  
during the twentieth century, as an essential foundation for world peace.

356.15 In one of His talks, He stated:

356.15a I am most hopeful that in this century these lofty thoughts shall be  
conducive to human welfare. Let this century be the sun of previous  
centuries, the effulgences of which shall last forever, so that in times  
to come they shall glorify the twentieth century, saying the twentieth  
century was the century of lights, the twentieth century was the cen-  
tury of life, the twentieth century was the century of international  
peace ….[[412]](#footnote-412)356-6

356.16 As was reported in the *Montreal Daily Star* newspaper:

356.16a “Are there any signs that the permanent peace of the world will be  
established in anything like a reasonable period?” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was  
asked. “It will be established in this century,” He answered. “It will  
be universal in the twentieth century. All nations will be forced into  
it.”[[413]](#footnote-413)356-7

356.17 In commenting on other pronouncements of the Master on this theme,  
the House of Justice stated the following in a letter written on its behalf on  
29 July 1974:

356.17a It is true that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá made statements linking the establish-  
ment of the unity of nations to the twentieth century. For example:  
“The fifth candle is the unity of nations—a unity which, in this cen-  
tury, will be securely established, causing all the peoples of the world  
to regard themselves as citizens of one common fatherland.” And, in  
*The Promised Day is Come*, following a similar statement quoted from  
*Some Answered Questions*, Shoghi Effendi makes this comment: “This  
is the stage which the world is now approaching, the stage of world  
unity, which, as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá assures us, will, in this century, be se-  
curely established.”

356.18 However, attainment of the unity of nations should not be regarded as  
being synonymous with the establishment of the Lesser Peace. In answer to  
a question about the timing of the Lesser Peace, Shoghi Effendi stated, in  
a letter written on his behalf in 1946, that: “All we know is that the Lesser  
Peace and the Most Great Peace *will* come—their *exact* dates we do not  
know.”[[414]](#footnote-414)356-8

356.19 Nevertheless, the unity of nations can quite properly be regarded as one  
stage—and indeed a highly significant step—in the lengthy process of the  
establishment of the Lesser Peace. In response to a question from an indi-  
vidual, the House of Justice stated, in a letter written on its behalf on 31  
January 1985, that:

356.19a Bahá’u’lláh’s principal mission in appearing at this time in human  
history is the realization of the oneness of mankind and the establish-  
ment of peace among the nations; therefore, all the forces which are  
focused on accomplishing these ends are influenced by His Revela-  
tion. We know, however, that peace will come in stages. First, there  
will come the Lesser Peace, when the unity of nations will be achieved,  
then gradually the Most Great Peace—the spiritual as well as social

and political unity of mankind, when the Bahá’í World Common-  
wealth, operating in strict accordance with the laws and ordinances of  
the Most Holy Book of the Bahá’í Revelation, will have been estab-  
lished through the efforts of the Bahá’ís.

356.19b As to the Lesser Peace, Shoghi Effendi has explained that this will  
initially be a political unity arrived at by decision of the governments  
of various nations; it will not be established by direct action of the  
Bahá’í community ….

356.19c The Lesser Peace itself will pass through stages; at the initial stage  
the governments will act entirely on their own without the conscious  
involvement of the Faith; later on, in God’s good time, the Faith will  
have a direct influence on it in ways indicated by Shoghi Effendi in his  
“The Goal of a New World Order.”[[415]](#footnote-415)356-9

356.20 The progressive development of the Lesser Peace, including its consoli-  
dation, is clarified by the statement of the Guardian, in his letter of Riḍván  
105 B.E. to the friends in the East, concerning the duration of the Forma-  
tive Age:

356.20a Its duration is unknown and lies concealed within the treasury of  
God’s knowledge. Its termination will coincide with the establishment  
of this most perfect, this most mighty Order throughout the East  
and the West, the resplendent emergence of organic unity among  
the component parts of human society, and the consolidation of the  
foundations of the Lesser Peace among the governments and nations  
of the world.

356.21 Further elaboration was provided by the House of Justice when requested  
by an individual believer to clarify the following passage from the 1996  
Riḍván message:

356.21a However short the path to peace, it will be tortuous; however  
promising the anticipated event that will set its course, it must mature  
through a long period of evolution, with its attendant tests, setbacks

and conflicts, towards the moment when it will have emerged, under  
the direct influences of God’s Faith, as the Most Great Peace.

356.22 In the letter of 29 July 1996 sent on its behalf in reply to that individual,  
the House of Justice wrote:

356.22a Clearly, the emergence of the Lesser Peace will be a gradual process  
and its various stages will no doubt witness tests and setbacks, as well  
as great advances. It will certainly include, however, a development of  
historic importance: that point at which the majority of the world’s  
nation-states formally commit themselves to a global order comprising  
institutions and laws, and equipped with the means by which collec-  
tive decisions can be enforced. While we cannot at present foresee the  
precise form that this development will take, much less the point at  
which it will occur, we recognize that it is a feature of the process of  
the Lesser Peace.

356.23 With the emphasis being given in recent years to the comple-  
tion of the present phase in the construction of the Edifices of the  
Administrative Order on the slopes of Mount Carmel, some believ-  
ers have enquired whether there is a causative relationship between  
the accomplishment of this construction program and the establishment of  
the Lesser Peace. The Secretariat of the House of Justice responded to one  
such enquiry, in a letter of 14 December 1987, as follows:

356.23a The Universal House of Justice … has instructed us to say that  
it knows of nothing in the writings of the Faith to indicate that the  
establishment of the Lesser Peace depends on the completion of the  
Arc on Mount Carmel.

356.23b The passage which may have given rise to this conception may  
well be the statement made by the beloved Guardian which is pub-  
lished on pages 74–75 of *Messages to the Bahá’í World* …. You will  
note that in this passage the Guardian describes three things which  
will synchronize. It is important to note that he is describing, not  
events, but processes or developments and, although he says they will  
synchronize—a statement which in itself provides important guid-  
ance for the institutions of the Cause—he does not state that they are  
dependent one upon the other.

The events of the twentieth century:

356.24 It is useful to review some of the statements appearing in the Bahá’í  
Writings concerning the events in the twentieth century which represent  
stages in the progression of humanity towards the unity of nations and the  
Lesser Peace. In 1931 Shoghi Effendi characterizes the emergence of world  
mindedness in the following terms:

356.24a To the states and principalities just emerging from the welter of the  
great Napoleonic upheaval, whose chief preoccupation was either to  
recover their rights to an independent existence or to achieve their  
national unity, the conception of world solidarity seemed not only re-  
mote but inconceivable. It was not until the forces of nationalism had  
succeeded in overthrowing the foundations of the Holy Alliance that  
had sought to curb their rising power, that the possibility of a world  
order, transcending in its range the political institutions these nations  
had established, came to be seriously entertained. It was not until after  
the World War that these exponents of arrogant nationalism came to  
regard such an order as the object of a pernicious doctrine tending to  
sap that essential loyalty upon which the continued existence of their  
national life depended.[[416]](#footnote-416)356-10

356.25 A highly significant milestone in this process was the formation of the  
League of Nations after the First World War, an event which was praised by  
‘Abdu’l-Bahá, despite His warning that:

356.25a … although the League of Nations has been brought into existence,  
yet it is incapable of establishing universal peace.[[417]](#footnote-417)356-11

356.26 In the years leading up to the outbreak of the Second World War, Shoghi  
Effendi affirmed that:

356.26a Though the great outcry raised by post-war nationalism is growing  
louder and more insistent every day, the League of Nations is as yet in  
its embryonic state, and the storm clouds that are gathering may for  
a time totally eclipse its powers and obliterate its machinery, yet the

direction in which the institution itself is operating is most significant.  
The voices that have been raised ever since its inception, the efforts  
that have been exerted, the work that has already been accomplished,  
foreshadow the triumphs which this presently constituted institution,  
or any other body that may supersede it, is destined to achieve.[[418]](#footnote-418)356-12

356.27 He drew attention to “the most significant landmarks in its checkered  
history,” outstanding among which was its decision to impose collective  
sanctions upon a member which the League deemed to have committed an  
act of aggression. Shoghi Effendi pointed out that:

356.27a For the first time in the history of humanity the system of collec-  
tive security, foreshadowed by Bahá’u’lláh and explained by ‘Abdu’l-  
Bahá, has been seriously envisaged, discussed and tested. For the first  
time in history it has been officially recognized and publicly stated  
that for this system of collective security to be effectively established  
strength and elasticity are both essential—strength involving the use  
of an adequate force to ensure the efficacy of the proposed system,  
and elasticity to enable the machinery that has been devised to meet  
the legitimate needs and aspirations of its aggrieved upholders. For  
the first time in human history tentative efforts have been exerted by  
the nations of the world to assume collective responsibility, and to  
supplement their verbal pledges by actual preparation for collective  
action. And again, for the first time in history, a movement of public  
opinion has manifested itself in support of the verdict which the lead-  
ers and representatives of nations have pronounced, and for securing  
collective action in pursuance of such a decision.[[419]](#footnote-419)356-13

His vision of the significance of this action was not obscured by the appar-  
ent failure of the collective sanctions to accomplish their stated objective.

356.28 Shoghi Effendi affirmed that the goal of the process by which the League  
of Nations was established was that of attainment to “… the stage at which  
the oneness of the whole body of nations will be made the ruling principle  
of international life.”[[420]](#footnote-420)356-14

356.29 He elaborated on the details of this process some two decades later in  
1947, when the United Nations Organization had replaced the League of  
Nations and was itself proceeding along the path of development of its  
powers and functions, with his anticipation that this process:

356.29a … must, however long and tortuous the way, lead, through a series  
of victories and reverses, to the political unification of the Eastern and  
Western Hemispheres, to the emergence of a world government and  
the establishment of the Lesser Peace, as foretold by Bahá’u’lláh and  
foreshadowed by the Prophet Isaiah.[[421]](#footnote-421)356-15

356.30 Distinct from, but closely related to, this process of organizational devel-  
opment has been the emergence of a world consciousness. As long ago as  
1931, the Guardian referred to:

356.30a … the gradual diffusion of the spirit of world solidarity which is  
spontaneously arising out of the welter of a disorganized society.[[422]](#footnote-422)356-16

356.31 One decade later, he commented that:

356.31a The world is, in truth, moving on towards its destiny. The inter-  
dependence of the peoples and nations of the earth, whatever the  
leaders of the divisive forces of the world may say or do, is already an  
accomplished fact. Its unity in the economic sphere is now understood  
and recognized.[[423]](#footnote-423)356-17

356.32 As humanity was plunged into a world war which Shoghi Effendi de-  
scribed as “the titanic upheaval foreshadowed seventy years ago by the  
prophetic Pen of Bahá’u’lláh” and as the “long-predicted world-encircling  
conflagration,” he pointed out to the Bahá’ís that this great conflict was an  
“essential prerequisite to world unification.”[[424]](#footnote-424)356-18

Recent developments:

356.33 In recent years, the House of Justice has taken the opportunity provided  
by its Riḍván messages to draw the attention of the worldwide Bahá’í com-  
munity to the profound significance of the events occurring in the wider  
society as humanity exhibits a growing consciousness of the unity of the  
nations and peoples of the planet.

356.34 Particularly significant are the following passages taken from the October  
1985 statement *The Promise of World Peace* addressed to the peoples of the  
world:

356.34a Among the favorable signs are the steadily growing strength of the  
steps towards world order taken initially near the beginning of this  
century in the creation of the League of Nations, succeeded by the  
more broadly based United Nations Organization; the achievement  
since the Second World War of independence by the majority of all  
the nations on earth, indicating the completion of the process of na-  
tion building, and the involvement of these fledgling nations with  
older ones in matters of mutual concern; the consequent vast increase  
in cooperation among hitherto isolated and antagonistic peoples and  
groups in international undertakings in the scientific, educational,  
legal, economic and cultural fields; the rise in recent decades of an  
unprecedented number of international humanitarian organizations;  
the spread of women’s and youth movements calling for an end to  
war; and the spontaneous spawning of widening networks of ordinary  
people seeking understanding through personal communication.[[425]](#footnote-425)356-19

356.34b The tentative steps towards world order, especially since World War  
II, give hopeful signs. The increasing tendency of groups of nations  
to formalize relationships which enable them to cooperate in matters  
of mutual interest suggests that eventually all nations could overcome  
this paralysis. The Association of South East Asian Nations, the Ca-  
ribbean Community and Common Market, the Central American  
Common Market, the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance, the  
European Communities, the League of Arab States, the Organization  
of African Unity, the Organization of American States, the South

Pacific Forum—all the joint endeavors represented by such organiza-  
tions prepare the path to world order.[[426]](#footnote-426)356-20

356.34c The army of men and women, drawn from virtually every culture,  
race and nation on earth, who serve the multifarious agencies of the  
United Nations, represent a planetary “civil service” whose impres-  
sive accomplishments are indicative of the degree of cooperation that  
can be attained even under discouraging conditions. An urge towards  
unity, like a spiritual springtime, struggles to express itself through  
countless international congresses that bring together people from a  
vast array of disciplines. It motivates appeals for international projects  
involving children and youth. Indeed, it is the real source of the re-  
markable movement towards ecumenism by which members of histor-  
ically antagonistic religions and sects seem irresistibly drawn towards  
one another. Together with the opposing tendency to warfare and  
self-aggrandizement against which it ceaselessly struggles, the drive  
towards world unity is one of the dominant, pervasive features of life  
on the planet during the closing years of the twentieth century.[[427]](#footnote-427)356-21

356.35 The pace of change accelerated as the twentieth century approached its  
conclusion. In 1996 the House of Justice wrote:

356.35a … world leaders are often taking collective actions that, to a Bahá’í  
observer, signify a tendency towards a common approach by nations  
to solving world problems. Consider, for instance, the unusual fre-  
quency of the global occasions on which these leaders have gathered  
since the Holy Year four years ago, such as the one in observance of  
the Fiftieth Anniversary of the United Nations, at which the attending  
heads of state and heads of government asserted their commitment  
to world peace. Noteworthy, too, are the promptitude and spontane-  
ity with which these government leaders have been acting together  
in responding to a variety of crises in different parts of the world.  
Such trends coincide with the increasing cries from enlightened circles  
for attention to be given to the feasibility of achieving some form

of global governance. Might we not see in these swiftly developing  
occurrences the workings of the Hand of Providence, indeed the very  
harbinger of the monumental occasion forecast in our Writings?[[428]](#footnote-428)356-22

356.36 While in 1998 it commented that:

356.36a … amid the din of a society in turmoil can be discerned an unmistak-  
able trend towards the Lesser Peace. An intriguing inkling is provided  
by the greater involvement of the United Nations, with the backing  
of powerful governments, in attending to long-standing and urgent  
world problems; another derives from the dramatic recognition by  
world leaders in only recent months of what the interconnectedness  
of all nations in the matter of trade and finance really implies—a  
condition which Shoghi Effendi anticipated as an essential aspect of  
an organically unified world.[[429]](#footnote-429)356-23

356.37 Reviewing the significant events which occurred in the world over the  
past four years, the House of Justice stated at Riḍván 2000 that “world  
leaders took bold steps towards fashioning the structures of a global political  
peace” and that:

356.37a … attempts at implementing and elaborating the methods of col-  
lective security were earnestly made, bringing to mind one of  
Bahá’u’lláh’s prescriptions for maintaining peace; a call was raised for  
an international criminal court to be established, another action that  
accords with Bahá’í expectations; to focus attention on the imperative  
need for an adequate system to deal with global issues, world leaders  
are scheduled to meet in a Millennium Summit; new methods of com-  
munications have opened the way for everyone to communicate with  
anyone on the planet.[[430]](#footnote-430)356-24

356.38 A few months later, in reporting on millennial gatherings held in New  
York during the year 2000 to address global issues pertaining to peace—the

Millennium Forum in May, the Millennium Peace Summit of Religious and  
Spiritual Leaders in August, and the Millennium Summit of the leaders  
of more than 150 nations held in September—the House of Justice com-  
mented, in its message of 24 September 2000, that:

356.38a For any observer imbued with the Bahá’í vision of peace and its  
inherent processes, the substance and implications of these recent  
events, seen together with previous world conferences that during the  
last decade also involved leaders of nations, must be gratifying indeed  
to contemplate. It must, too, be doubly thrilling to realize that at so  
early a stage in the Bahá’í era, representatives of our international  
community took part so notably in these occurrences that have set  
down milestones along the way towards that new World Order so  
clearly foreshadowed by the Pen of Bahá’u’lláh.

357  
Riḍván Message 2001

RIḌVÁN 2001

To the Bahá’ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

357.1 With great joy in our hearts and high expectations, we come to this Riḍván  
season at a change of time, when a new state of mind is evident among us  
all. Abroad in our world community there is a heightened awareness of  
the value of process, the necessity of planning and the virtue of systematic  
action in fostering growth and in developing the human resources by which  
expansion can be sustained and consolidation assured. The coherence of  
understanding about these prerequisites of progress cannot be overvalued,  
nor can the importance of perpetuating them through well-ordered training  
be overestimated. And so the arrival of our community at such a moment  
of consciousness is an occasion of significance for us. We are deeply grate-  
ful to the Blessed Beauty to be able to recognize and acclaim it at the very  
beginning of the global enterprise being launched during these festive days.

357.2 The power of will generated by this consciousness characterized the con-  
ference of the Continental Counselors and the members of their Auxiliary  
Boards who gathered last January in the Holy Land. The event produced so  
illuminating an experience as to signalize the Faith’s entry into a new epoch,

the fifth of its Formative Age. Such a freshness of vitality as was displayed  
at this historic gathering came to be understood as a manifestation of the  
rising quality of activity throughout the community. Pursuit during the past  
year of the essentials for advancing the process of entry by troops confirmed  
this observation. The path was thus paved for the Five Year Plan, the first  
venture being entered upon in the Fifth Epoch.

357.3 In augmenting major efforts of the previous Four Year Plan that brought  
into being more than 300 training institutes, the Twelve Month Plan  
achieved its purpose. It gathered significance through the notable responses  
of institutions and individuals to the call for a greater focus on the spiritual  
nurturing of children and the involvement of junior youth in Bahá’í com-  
munity life. The training of teachers of children’s classes and the inclusion  
of junior youth in the institute process have become a regular part of Bahá’í  
activities in a number of countries. Despite its brevity, the Twelve Month  
Plan had an importance beyond the objectives specifically assigned. The  
Plan was a dynamic link between a highly eventful epoch in Bahá’í his-  
tory and the immensely promising prospects of a new one, for which its  
achievements have so well prepared the community. It has been etched in  
our annals, too, for the enduring effects of the Faith’s activities at the end of  
the twentieth century—a century that deserves to be reflected upon by any  
Bahá’í who wishes to understand the tumultuous forces that influenced the  
life of the planet and the processes of the Cause itself at a crucial time in  
humanity’s social and spiritual evolution. As an aid to so worthy an effort,  
*Century of Light*, a review of the twentieth century, was prepared at our  
request and under our supervision.

357.4 On many occasions during this one-year endeavor, the external affairs  
activities of the Faith were especially visible. Consider, for example, the  
instances of Bahá’í representatives’ having participated prominently in the  
millennial events that took place in May, August and September at the  
urging of the Secretary-General of the United Nations. The implications  
of so close and conspicuous an involvement of the Bahá’í International  
Community with the processes of the Lesser Peace will require the pas-  
sage of time to be properly understood. Among other highlights was the  
continental colloquium organized in India by the Institute for Studies in  
Global Prosperity, a new agency operating under the aegis of the Bahá’í  
International Community. Adopting the theme of “science, religion and  
development,” the conference featured the participation of leading non-  
governmental organizations of India, as well as that of institutions of such

renown as UNESCO, UNICEF, WHO and the World Bank. In October,  
the Bahá’í World News Service (BWNS) was launched on the Internet with  
the intention of reaching both Bahá’í and non-Bahá’í audiences with news  
stories about developments throughout the Bahá’í world.

357.5 The intensive activities at the Bahá’í World Center during the last year  
were, for the most part, made known to the friends through previous re-  
ports that included references to such achievements as the occupation by  
the International Teaching Center of its permanent seat on Mount Carmel;  
the Conference of Continental Counselors and the members of their Aux-  
iliary Boards held in the Holy Land last January; and the completion of the  
Mount Carmel projects, which are now receiving finishing touches in prepa-  
ration for the celebratory events in May. Last October, for the first time,  
pilgrims and visitors were received at the new Reception Center in Haifa,  
which became fully operational. At Bahjí the embellishment of the sacred  
site through the development of its gardens has proceeded continually; the  
effort has, however, received a boost from the new project initiated last year  
to construct a Visitors’ Center towards the northern end of the property  
beyond the Collins Gate. Scheduled for completion in the next few months,  
the structure is fully in place, and work is progressing in all areas, including  
finishing and landscaping. The new facilities will improve the ability of the  
World Center to receive increasing numbers of pilgrims, short-term Bahá’í  
visitors, and special guests.

357.6 To conclude this summary of the year, we rejoice in informing you that,  
after the lapse of almost three decades, the National Spiritual Assembly  
of the Bahá’ís of Indonesia was restored at the National Convention held  
in Jakarta last Riḍván. A ban imposed on Bahá’í activities in August 1962  
severely restricted the actions of the Indonesian Bahá’ís for all that time,  
but they remained steadfast and wise in their long-suffering until changed  
circumstances in that country resulted in the lifting of the ban. May we  
not venture to hope, then, that a similar happy report concerning our be-  
leaguered coreligionists in Iran, Egypt and other countries will not be too  
far distant?

357.7 Dear Friends: Two decades from now the Bahá’í world will celebrate the  
centenary of the inception of the Formative Age. We look back at the dawn-  
ing of the Age from the vantage point of attainments that could hardly have  
been imagined at the outset. Up ahead are horizons that urgently summon  
the community to even greater achievements in the short span separating it  
from that centennial. Those heights can and must be scaled. The Five Year

Plan, to which we call the urgent and sustained attention of the friends  
throughout the world, is intended to meet this challenge. It constitutes  
the first of a series of campaigns that will be pursued during these twenty  
years. This Plan marks the next phase in the aim to accomplish a significant  
advance in the process of entry by troops. It demands an acceleration of  
this vital process and, furthermore, insists upon continuity in systematic  
endeavor on the part of its three constituent participants: the individual, the  
institutions, and the community.

357.8 No need to elaborate on the requirements of the Plan, for these were  
set out in our message to the assembled Counselors in the Holy Land and  
subsequently shared with all National Spiritual Assemblies. Soon after their  
conference, the Counselors began consulting with the National Assemblies  
about the execution of the Plan in their respective jurisdictions. The Plan’s  
direction is therefore known to the friends everywhere, as regional and local  
preparations for pursuing its major aim are under way. There is a general  
awareness by now that efforts will be made to effect a deeper penetration of  
the Faith into more and more regions within countries. For example, where  
circumstances permit, local communities that exist in close proximity to  
each other will be mobilized to participate in intensive programs of growth.  
Other approaches will require methodical opening of new areas for which  
homefront pioneers must be raised up in the same consecrated spirit that  
prompted those who scattered abroad at earlier times to open virgin terri-  
tories across continents and seas. Suffice it to say that the process animating  
this divinely driven enterprise will eventually expand as related features are  
gradually introduced and systematically integrated into its operation.

357.9 A feature of the Fifth Epoch will be the enrichment of the devotional life  
of the community through the raising up of national Houses of Worship,  
as circumstances in national communities permit. The scheduling of these  
projects will be determined by the Universal House of Justice in relation to  
the advancement of the process of entry by troops within countries. This  
development will unfold throughout successive stages of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Di-  
vine Plan. Upon the completion of the Mother Temple of the West, the  
Guardian started a program of constructing continental temples. The first  
among these were the Mashriqu’l-Adhkárs in Kampala, Sydney and Frank-  
furt, which were built in response to Ten Year Plan goals. The Universal  
House of Justice continued along these lines with the building of Temples  
in Panama City, Apia, and New Delhi. But this continental stage has yet  
to be completed: one more edifice remains to be built. It is with profound

thankfulness and joy that we announce at this auspicious moment the deci-  
sion to proceed with this last project. During the Five Year Plan, erection of  
the Mother Temple of South America in Santiago, Chile, will commence  
and thus fulfill a wish clearly expressed by Shoghi Effendi.

357.10 Meanwhile, the time is propitious that further steps be taken at the World  
Center to develop the functions of the institutions occupying the new  
edifices on the Arc. The International Teaching Center having advanced  
significantly in its work, attention will be given particularly to organizing  
the work of the Center for the Study of the Texts. Enriching the translations  
into English from the Holy Texts will be a special object of this attention.  
The purpose of the institution is to assist the Universal House of Justice in  
consulting the Sacred Writings and to prepare translations and commentar-  
ies on the authoritative texts of the Faith. Moreover, in the Holy Land, a  
continued effort will be devoted towards the devising of measures to make  
possible a further increase in the number of pilgrims and visitors to the  
Bahá’í World Center.

357.11 In our Riḍván message five years ago, we announced the holding of a  
major event at the World Center to mark the completion of the projects on  
Mount Carmel and the opening of the Terraces of the Shrine of the Báb  
to the public. The moment is upon us, and we exult in the anticipation of  
welcoming friends from virtually all countries to programs that will extend  
over a five-day period, 21–25 May. We are also happy to say that steps are  
being taken to connect the Bahá’í world to the proceedings through live  
transmissions on the World Wide Web and by satellite, about which infor-  
mation is being provided. As the World Center focuses on the preparations,  
excitement is building up among the public in Haifa, where municipal  
authorities have undertaken to publish a book entitled *Bahá’í Shrine and  
Gardens on Mount Carmel, Haifa, Israel: A Visual Journey* to coincide with  
the event. Moreover, the Israel Postal Authority is pursuing its decision to  
release at the same time a commemorative stamp featuring the Terraces. The  
significance of the occasion lies principally in the pause it will allow for a  
review of the remarkable distance the Cause has covered in its development  
during the twentieth century. It will be time, too, for considering the future  
implications of the phenomenal accomplishments symbolized by the rise of  
the monumental structures on God’s holy mountain—a rise that opens the  
spiritual and administrative centers of our Faith to the gaze of the world.

357.12 As our community rejoices in these thrilling considerations, let every  
member bear in mind that there is no time for resting on laurels. Human-

ity’s current plight is too desperate to allow for even a moment’s hesitation  
in sharing the Bread of Life, which has come down from heaven in our time.  
Let there be no delay, then, in advancing the process that has every promise  
of success in ushering to the banquet table of the Lord of Hosts the souls of  
all that hunger after truth.

357.13 May He Who keeps watch over the destiny of His divine System guide  
and direct and confirm every effort you make towards the realization of the  
urgent tasks set before you.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

Glossary

Note: **Boldface** terms within entries are cross-references to other entries that define  
or amplify essential terms. A number of entries are based on explanations found  
in “Definitions of Some of the Oriental Terms Used in Bahá’í Literature” in *The  
Bahá’í World: An International Record*, Volume XVIII, 1979–1983, pp. 897–904.  
Other entries are based on explanations found in the notes and glossary in the  
Kitáb-i-Aqdas. References to *Tablets of the Divine Plan* cite Tablet and paragraph  
numbers, e.g., “TDP 6.8.”

A

**‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ** *Servant of Bahá*: the title assumed by ‘Abbás Effendi (23 May  
1844–28 November 1921), eldest son and appointed successor of Bahá’u’lláh  
and the Center of His Covenant. Upon Bahá’u’lláh’s ascension in 1892, ‘Abdu’l-  
Bahá became Head of the Bahá’í Faith in accordance with provisions revealed by  
Bahá’u’lláh in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas and the Book of the Covenant. Among the titles  
by which He is known are the Center of the Covenant, the Mystery of God, the  
Master, and the Perfect Exemplar of Bahá’u’lláh’s teachings. See **Tablets of the  
Divine Plan** and **Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá**.

**ABHÁ** *Most Glorious*. See **Alláh-u-Abhá**; **Yá Bahá’u’l-Abhá**.

**ABHÁ** **BEAUTY** A translation of *Jamál-i-Abhá*, a title of **Bahá’u’lláh**.

**ABHÁ KINGDOM** *The Most Glorious Kingdom*: the spiritual world beyond this  
world.

**ABHÁ PARADISE** See **Abhá Kingdom**.

**ADAMIC CYCLE** See **Cycle**.

**ADMINISTRATIVE ORDER** The international system for the administration  
of the affairs of the Bahá’í community. Ordained by Bahá’u’lláh, it is the agency  
through which the spirit of His revelation is to exercise its transforming effects on  
humanity and through which the **Bahá’í World Commonwealth** will be ushered  
in. Its twin, crowning institutions are the **Guardianship** and the **Universal House**

**of Justice**. The institutions that make it up and the principles by which it oper-  
ates are set forth in the writings of Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Its structure was  
further clarified and raised up by Shoghi Effendi during his ministry as Guardian  
of the Faith (1921–57). This process of elucidation continues through guidance  
from the Universal House of Justice, the supreme governing and legislative body of  
the Bahá’í Faith, which is supported by National and Local **Spiritual Assemblies**  
elected by members of the Bahá’í community. These local and national bodies are  
invested with the authority to direct the Bahá’í community’s affairs and to uphold  
Bahá’í laws and standards. They are also responsible for the education, guidance,  
and protection of the community. The Administrative Order also comprises the  
institutions of the **Hands of the Cause of God**, the **International Teaching Cen-  
ter**, and the **Continental Boards of Counselors** and their **Auxiliary Boards** and  
assistants, who bear particular responsibility for the protection and propagation  
of the Faith and share with the Spiritual Assemblies the functions of educating,  
counseling, and advising members of the Bahá’í community. Other institutions of  
the Administrative Order include **Ḥuqúqu’lláh**, the Bahá’í **Fund**, the **Mashriqu’l-  
Adhkár**, and the **Nineteen Day Feast**. The present Bahá’í Administrative Order  
is the precursor of the **World Order of Bahá’u’lláh** and is described by Shoghi  
Effendi as its “nucleus” and “pattern.”

**AFNÁN** *Twigs*: the Báb’s kindred; specifically, descendants of His three maternal  
uncles and His wife’s two brothers.

**AGES** The Bahá’í Dispensation is divided into three Ages: the Heroic, Forma-  
tive, and Golden Ages. The Heroic Age, also called the Apostolic or Primitive Age,  
began in 1844 with the Declaration of the Báb and spanned the ministries of the  
Báb (1844–53), Bahá’u’lláh (1852–92), and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá (1892–1921). The transi-  
tional event most often identified with the end of the Heroic Age and the beginning  
of the Formative Age is the passing of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in 1921. The Formative Age,  
also known as the Age of Transition or the Iron Age, began in 1921 when Shoghi  
Effendi, according to instructions in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Will and Testament, became  
the Guardian of the Cause of God and began to build Bahá’u’lláh’s Administrative  
Order. The Formative Age is the second and current Age; it is to be followed by  
the third and final Age, the Golden Age destined to witness the proclamation of  
the Most Great Peace and the establishment of the Bahá’í World Commonwealth.  
“The emergence of a world community, the consciousness of world citizenship,  
the founding of a world civilization and culture,” Shoghi Effendi wrote, “—all of  
which must synchronize with the initial stages in the unfoldment of the Golden  
Age of the Bahá’í Era—should, by their very nature, be regarded, as far as this  
planetary life is concerned, as the furthermost limits in the organization of human  
society, though man, as an individual, will, nay must indeed as a result of such a  
consummation, continue indefinitely to progress and develop.” See also **Dispensa-  
tion**; **Epochs**; **Bahá’í World Commonwealth**.

**AGHṢÁN** *Branches*: the sons and male descendants of Bahá’u’lláh.

**‘AKKÁ** A four-thousand-year-old seaport and prison-city in northern Israel sur-  
rounded by fortress-like walls facing the sea. In the mid-1800s ‘Akká became a  
penal colony to which the worst criminals of the Ottoman Empire were sent. In  
1868 Bahá’u’lláh and His family and companions were banished to ‘Akká by Sulṭán  
‘Abdu’l-‘Azíz. Bahá’u’lláh was incarcerated within its barracks for two years, two  
months, and five days. Restrictions were gradually relaxed, and He lived in a series  
of houses within ‘Akká until June 1877, when He moved outside the city walls to  
the Mansion of Mazra‘ih. Bahá’u’lláh named ‘Akká “the Most Great Prison.”

**ALLÁH-U-ABHÁ** *God is Most Glorious*: the **Greatest Name**, adopted as a greeting  
among Bahá’ís during the period of Bahá’u’lláh’s exile in Adrianople (1863–68).

**AMATU’L-BAHÁ RÚḤÍYYIH KHÁNUM** Née Mary Maxwell (1910–2000), also  
called Rúḥíyyih Rabbání; daughter of May Bolles Maxwell and Sutherland Max-  
well of Montreal, and wife of Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Bahá’í Faith. On  
26 March 1952, succeeding her illustrious father, she was appointed a Hand of the  
Cause of God residing in the Holy Land. *Rúḥíyyih* (meaning “spiritual”) is a name  
given to her by Shoghi Effendi on their marriage. *Khánum* is a Persian title meaning  
“lady,” “Madame,” or “Mrs.” The title *Amatu’l-Bahá* (meaning “Maidservant of  
Bahá”) was used by the Guardian in a cable to a conference in Chicago in 1953.  
*Rabbání* is a surname given to Shoghi Effendi by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.

**ANCIENT BEAUTY**  A translation of *Jamál-i-Qadím*, a name of God that is also  
used as a title of Bahá’u’lláh, Who is the latest Manifestation of God to human-  
kind. One cannot always say categorically in any passage whether the reference is to  
God, to Bahá’u’lláh, or to both.

**ANCIENT** **OF** **DAYS** See **Ancient Beauty**.

**APOSTOLIC** **AGE** See **Ages**.

**AQDAS** *Most Holy*. See **Kitáb-i-Aqdas, The**.

**ARC** The line of a curved path laid out by Shoghi Effendi on Mount Carmel,  
stretching across the Bahá’í properties near the Shrine of the Báb and centered  
on the Monument Gardens. On this Arc the seats of the “world-shaking, world-  
embracing, world-directing administrative institutions” of the World Order of  
Bahá’u’lláh are to be located (MA, pp. 32–33). Within the Arc are the resting-places  
of the Greatest Holy Leaf; her brother, the Purest Branch; and her mother, the  
Most Exalted Leaf. Edifices already constructed on the Arc include the Internation-  
al Bahá’í Archives building (completed in 1957), the seat of the Universal House of

Justice (completed in 1982 and occupied in 1983), the International Teaching Cen-  
ter, and the Center for the Study of the Texts. The International Bahá’í Library has  
yet to be completed. See also **Administrative Order**; **World Order of Bahá’u’lláh**.

**ARK** The word “ark” means, literally, a boat or ship, something that affords protec-  
tion and safety, or a chest or box. It is used in two senses in the Bible. In the first  
sense it refers to the Ark of Noah, which He was bidden to build of gopher wood  
to preserve life during the Flood. In the second sense it refers to the Ark of the Cov-  
enant, the sacred chest representing to the Hebrews God’s presence among them. It  
was constructed to hold the Tablets of the Law in Moses’ time and was later placed  
in the Holy of Holies in the Temple of Jerusalem. The Ark, as a symbol of God’s  
Law and the Divine Covenant that is the salvation of the people in every age and  
Dispensation, appears in various ways in the Bahá’í writings. Bahá’u’lláh refers to  
His faithful followers as “the denizens of the Crimson Ark”; He refers to the Ark  
of the Cause and also to the Ark of His Laws. A well-known passage in which this  
term is used appears in the Tablet of Carmel: “Ere long will God sail His Ark upon  
thee, and will manifest the people of Bahá who have been mentioned in the Book  
of Names.” Shoghi Effendi explains that the Ark in this passage refers to the Bahá’í  
Administrative Center on Mount Carmel and that the dwellers of the Ark are the  
members of the Universal House of Justice.

**ARMY OF LIGHT** Generally, the Bahá’í community, but more particularly the  
“heavenly armies … those souls,” according to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, “who are entirely  
freed from the human world, transformed into celestial spirits and have become  
divine angels. Such souls are the rays of the Sun of Reality who will illumine all the  
continents” (TDP 8.2).

**ÁSÍYIH KHÁNUM** *Navváb* (an honorific implying “Grace” or “Highness”); the  
*Most Exalted Leaf*: wife of Bahá’u’lláh and mother of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Bahíyyih Khá-  
num, and Mírzá Mihdí. She was married to Bahá’u’lláh in 1835, accompanied Him  
in His exiles, and died in 1886. Bahá’u’lláh named her His “perpetual consort in  
all the worlds of God.” Her resting-place is in the Monument Gardens on Mount  
Carmel, next to the tomb of Mírzá Mihdí and near that of the Greatest Holy Leaf.

**AUTHOR OF THE BAHÁ’Í REVELATION** **Bahá’u’lláh**.

**AUXILIARY BOARDS** An institution established by Shoghi Effendi in 1954 to  
act as “deputies, assistants and advisers” to the **Hands of the Cause of God** as  
they carry out their twin duties of protection and propagation. With the formation  
of the **Continental Boards of Counselors** in 1968, the Hands of the Cause of  
God were freed of responsibility for appointing, supervising, and coordinating the  
work of the Auxiliary Boards, and these functions were transferred by the Universal  
House of Justice to the Continental Boards of Counselors. There are two Auxiliary  
Boards, one for protection and one for propagation; members serve on one of the

two boards. In a letter dated 7 October 1973, the Universal House of Justice autho-  
rized the appointment of assistants to Auxiliary Board members.

B

**BÁB, THE** *The Gate*: title assumed by Siyyid ‘Alí Muḥammad (20 October 1819–9  
July 1850) after declaring His mission in Shíráz in 1844. The Báb’s station is two-  
fold: He is a Manifestation of God and the Founder of the Bábí Faith, and He is the  
Herald of Bahá’u’lláh. A detailed, moving, and authoritative work titled *The Dawn-  
Breakers* (written by Nabíl-i-Zarandí and translated by Shoghi Effendi) recounts the  
Báb’s life and His followers’ exploits. See Balyuzi, *The Báb*.

**BÁBÍYYIH, THE** *The Bábí place* or *the center of the Bábís*: a house in Mashhad,  
Iran, that served as a residence for Mullá Ḥusayn (the first of the **Letters of the Liv-  
ing**) and Quddús (also a Letter of the Living, whose rank was second only to that of  
the Báb) and as a place to which inquirers came to learn about the Bábí Faith. The  
Bahá’í historian Nabíl writes that “A steady stream of visitors, whom the energy and  
zeal of Mullá Ḥusayn had prepared for the acceptance of the Faith, poured into the  
presence of Quddús, acknowledged the claim of the Cause, and willingly enlisted  
under its banner. The all-observing vigilance with which Mullá Ḥusayn labored to  
diffuse the knowledge of the new Revelation, and the masterly manner in which  
Quddús edified its ever-increasing number of adherents, gave rise to a wave of  
enthusiasm which swept over the entire city of Mashhad, and the effects of which  
spread rapidly beyond the confines of Khurásán. The house of Bábíyyih was soon  
converted into a rallying center for a multitude of devotees who were fired with an  
inflexible resolve to demonstrate, by every means in their power, the great inherent  
energies of their Faith.” (DB, p. 267)

**BAHÁ’Í ELECTIONS** See **Elections**, **Bahá’í**.

**BAHÁ’Í FUND** See **Fund**.

**BAHÁ’Í INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY** An international body made up of  
Bahá’í institutions, local and national, continental and international, all closely  
interrelated, and comprising the worldwide membership of the Bahá’í Faith. Since  
1948 the Bahá’í International Community has been affiliated with the United Na-  
tions’ Office of Public Information. In 1967 the Universal House of Justice as-  
sumed the function (shouldered for many years by the National Spiritual Assembly  
of the Bahá’ís of the United States) of representing the Bahá’í International Com-  
munity in its capacity as a nongovernmental organization at the United Nations. In  
1970 the Bahá’í International Community was granted consultative status with the  
United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), and in 1976 it became  
affiliated with the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF, formerly named the  
United Nations Children’s Emergency Fund). It is also affiliated with the United

Nations Environment Program (UNEP). In its work with the United Nations, the  
Bahá’í International Community participates in meetings of United Nations bod-  
ies concerned with such issues as human rights, social development, the status of  
women, the environment, human settlement, food, science and technology, popu-  
lation, the law of the sea, crime prevention, substance abuse, youth, children, the  
family, disarmament, and the United Nations University.

**BAHÁ’Í WORLD CENTER** The world spiritual and administrative centers of the  
Bahá’í Faith located in the twin cities of ‘Akká and Haifa in Israel. See also **Arc**;  
**Administrative Order**.

**BAHÁ’Í WORLD COMMONWEALTH** The future Bahá’í community of na-  
tions, Shoghi Effendi explains, that will operate “solely in direct conformity with  
the laws and principles of Bahá’u’lláh” and will be animated wholly by His spirit.  
Its “supreme organ” will be the Universal House of Justice functioning in “the pleni-  
tude of its power.” Its advent will “signalize the long-awaited advent of the Christ-  
promised Kingdom of God on earth.” It will serve as both “the instrument and the  
guardian of the Most Great Peace.” Within the Bahá’í World Commonwealth “all  
nations, races, creeds and classes” will be “closely and permanently united,” and  
“the autonomy of its state members and the personal freedom and initiative of  
the individuals that compose them” will be “definitely and completely safeguarded.  
This commonwealth must, as far as we can visualize it, consist of a world legis-  
lature, whose members will, as the trustees of the whole of mankind, ultimately  
control the entire resources of all the component nations, and will enact such laws  
as shall be required to regulate the life, satisfy the needs and adjust the relation-  
ships of all races and peoples. A world executive, backed by an international Force,  
will carry out the decisions arrived at, and apply the laws enacted by, this world  
legislature, and will safeguard the organic unity of the whole commonwealth. A  
world tribunal will adjudicate and deliver its compulsory and final verdict in all and  
any disputes that may arise between the various elements constituting this universal  
system …. A world metropolis will act as the nerve center …, the focus towards  
which the unifying forces of life will converge and from which its energizing influ-  
ences will radiate.” The world commonwealth will include a system of international  
communication; an international auxiliary language; a world script and literature; a  
uniform and universal system of currency, weights, and measures; and an integrated  
economic system with coordinated markets and regulated channels of distribution.  
See also **World Order of Bahá’u’lláh**.

**BAHÁ’U’LLÁH** **The Glory of God**: title of Mírzá Ḥusayn-‘Alí Núrí (12 November  
1817–29 May 1892), Founder of the Bahá’í Faith. For accounts of His life, see  
Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*; Nabíl, *Dawn-Breakers*; and Balyuzi, *Bahá’u’lláh: The  
King of Glory*. Bahá’u’lláh is referred to by a variety of titles, including the Promised  
One of All Ages, the Blessed Beauty, the Blessed Perfection, the Morn of Truth, the  
Abhá Luminary, the Dayspring of the Most Divine Essence, the Ancient Beauty,

the Ancient Root, the Ancient of Days, the Author of the Bahá’í Revelation, the  
Mystic Dove, the Sovereign Revealer, the Judge, the Redeemer, the Divine Physi-  
cian, the Prince of Peace, the Pen of Glory, the Pen of the Most High, the Supreme  
Pen, the Lord of Hosts, and the Lord of the Age. See also **Book of the Covenant**;  
**Hidden Words**, **The Kitáb-i-Aqdas**, **The**.

**BAHÍYYIH KHÁNUM** *The Greatest Holy Leaf*; *the Most Exalted Leaf*: saintly  
daughter of Bahá’u’lláh and outstanding heroine of the Bahá’í Dispensation (1846–  
1932). Her death in 1932 marked the final end of the Heroic Age of the Bahá’í  
Faith, which had drawn to a close with the passing of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in 1921. A  
monument erected in her memory symbolizes the Bahá’í World Order; its location  
is Mount Carmel, within the Arc and in close proximity to the resting-places of her  
brother, Mírzá Mihdí; her mother, Ásíyih Khánum; and the wife of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá,  
Munírih Khánum. Her station as “foremost woman of the Bahá’í Dispensation”  
and her rank among women are paralleled only by such heroines of previous Dis-  
pensations as Sarah, Ásíyih, the Virgin Mary, Fáṭimih, and Ṭáhirih. For a compila-  
tion of Bahá’í writings about Bahíyyih Khánum and for some of her own letters, see  
*Bahíyyih Khánum: The Greatest Holy Leaf* (1982).

**BAHJÍ** *Delight*, *gladness*, *joy*: the name of the property north of ‘Akká where the  
Shrine of Bahá’u’lláh is situated and where Bahá’u’lláh lived from 1880 until His as-  
cension in 1892. Its extensive gardens were created by Shoghi Effendi and expanded  
by the Universal House of Justice. The Shrine of Bahá’u’lláh at Bahjí is the **Qiblih**  
of the Bahá’í world.

**BAYÁN** *Exposition*, *explanation*, *lucidity*, *eloquence*, *utterance*: the title given by the  
Báb to two of His major works, one in Persian, the other in Arabic. It is also used  
sometimes to denote the entire body of His writings.

**B.E. Bahá’í Era**: denotes the nineteen-month Badí‘ calendar, which is reckoned  
from 21 March 1844, the year of the Báb’s declaration of His mission.

**BEST BELOVED** See **Ancient Beauty**.

**BLESSED BEAUTY** A translation of *Jamál-i-Mubárak*, a title of Bahá’u’lláh. See  
also **Ancient Beauty**.

**BLESSED PERFECTION** A translation of *Jamál-i-Mubárak*, a title of Bahá’u’lláh.  
See also **Ancient Beauty**.

**BOOK OF THE COVENANT** A translation of *Kitáb-i-‘Ahd* (sometimes referred  
to as *Kitáb-i-‘Ahdí*, meaning “the Book of My Covenant”): Bahá’u’lláh’s last will and  
testament, designated by Him as His “Most Great Tablet” and alluded to by Him  
as the “Crimson Book.” The last Tablet revealed before His ascension, it was writ-

ten in His own hand and entrusted, shortly before His passing, to His eldest son,  
‘Abdu’l-Bahá. In it Bahá’u’lláh clearly designates ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as His successor and  
as the Center of His **Covenant**, providing for the continuation of divine authority  
over the affairs of the Faith in the future.

C

**CARMEL** See **Mount Carmel**.

**CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF THE TEXTS** The seat of an institution of  
Bahá’í scholars, which will assist the Universal House of Justice in consulting the  
Sacred Writings, and will prepare translations of and commentaries on the authori-  
tative texts of the Faith.

**CENTER OF THE COVENANT** A title of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá referring to His appoint-  
ment by Bahá’u’lláh as the successor to whom all must turn after Bahá’u’lláh’s pass-  
ing. See also **Covenant**; **Book of the Covenant**.

**CENTRAL FIGURES** A collective reference to Bahá’u’lláh, the Founder of the  
Bahá’í Faith; the Báb, Forerunner of Bahá’u’lláh and Founder of the Bábí Faith;  
and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, authorized Interpreter of the Bahá’í writings.

**CHIEF STEWARDS** See **Hands of the Cause of God**.

**CITY OF THE COVENANT** A title designated to New York City by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá,  
where he unveiled for Western believers the authority given to him by Bahá’u’lláh  
for the definitive interpretation of His Revelation.

**COMMUNITY OF THE MOST GREAT NAME** The Bahá’í community. See  
also **Greatest Name**.

**CONCOURSE ON HIGH** The company of holy souls of the spiritual world.

**CONSTITUTION OF THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE** A document  
adopted by the Universal House of Justice on 26 November 1972. It consists of  
two parts: the Declaration of Trust, which sets forth the origins and duties of the  
Universal House of Justice, and the By-Laws, which specify the terms under which  
the Universal House of Justice operates and define its relationship to other institu-  
tions of the Bahá’í Administrative Order.

**CONSULTATION** In Bahá’í usage, a technical term referring to the process of  
collective decision-making. The aim of Bahá’í consultation is to arrive at the best  
solution or to uncover the truth of a matter. Among the requisites for consultation  
that are set out in the Bahá’í writings are love, harmony, purity of motive, humil-

ity, lowliness, patience, and long-suffering. Individuals not only have the right to  
express their views, but they are expected to express them fully and with the utmost  
devotion, courtesy, dignity, care, and moderation. If unanimity is not achieved, de-  
cisions are arrived at by majority vote. Once a decision is reached, all parties, having  
had the opportunity to express their views fully, are to work together wholeheart-  
edly to implement it. If the decision is wrong, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says, through unity the  
truth will become evident and “the wrong made right.”

**CONTINENTAL BOARDS OF COUNSELORS** An institution of the Bahá’í Ad-  
ministrative Order established by the Universal House of Justice in 1968 to extend  
into the future the functions of protection and propagation of the Faith assigned  
to the Hands of the Cause of God by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in His Will and Testament.  
Its members are appointed to five-year terms by the Universal House of Justice  
and serve in five zones—Africa, the Americas, Asia, Australasia, and Europe. The  
International Teaching Center coordinates the work of the Continental Boards of  
Counselors, who are assisted in their work by Auxiliary Board members, whom they  
appoint and supervise. See also **Auxiliary Boards**; **Hands of the Cause of God**;  
**International Teaching Center**.

**CONTINENTAL FUND** See **Fund**.

**CONTINENTAL PIONEER COMMITTEES** Responsible for gathering and  
supplying information for and about pioneers and international traveling teachers.  
Their work complements the functions of the Continental Boards of Counselors  
and National Spiritual Assemblies. There are five such committees: one each for  
Africa, the Americas, Asia, Australasia, and Europe. Members are appointed by  
the Universal House of Justice; their work is directed by the International Teaching  
Center.

**COVENANT** Generally, an agreement or contract between two or more people,  
usually formal, solemn, and binding. The Universal House of Justice explains, in  
a letter dated 23 March 1975, that a religious covenant is “a binding agreement  
between God and man, whereby God requires of man certain behavior in return  
for which He guarantees certain blessings, or whereby He gives man certain boun-  
ties in return for which He takes from those who accept them an undertaking to  
behave in a certain way.” The Universal House of Justice also explains that there are  
two types of religious covenant: “There is … the Greater Covenant which every  
Manifestation of God makes with His followers, promising that in the fullness of  
time a new Manifestation will be sent, and taking from them the undertaking to  
accept Him when this occurs. There is also the Lesser Covenant that a Manifesta-  
tion of God makes with His followers that they will accept His appointed suc-  
cessor after Him. If they do so, the Faith can remain united and pure. If not, the  
Faith becomes divided and its force spent.” In the Bahá’í Dispensation the Greater  
Covenant refers to the renewal of God’s ancient Covenant through the appearance

of the twin Manifestations of God, the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh, and the promise of  
another Manifestation to come in the future after the passage of at least one thou-  
sand years. The Lesser Covenant, in this case, refers to Bahá’u’lláh’s Covenant with  
His followers, which establishes ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as the Center of the Covenant. It  
confers upon ‘Abdu’l-Bahá the authority to interpret Bahá’u’lláh’s writings in order  
“to perpetuate the influence” of the Faith and to “insure its integrity, safeguard it  
from schism, and stimulate its world-wide expansion.” The Lesser Covenant also  
establishes the Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice as the twin succes-  
sors of Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.

**COVENANT-BREAKER** A Bahá’í who attempts to disrupt the unity of the Faith  
by defying and opposing the authority of Bahá’u’lláh as the Manifestation of God  
for this Age, or His appointed successor, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, or after Him, the Guardian  
and the Universal House of Justice. Bahá’ís who continue, despite remonstrances,  
to violate the Covenant are expelled from the Faith by the Universal House of  
Justice. This provision preserves the unity of the Faith, which is essential to achiev-  
ing its cardinal purpose of unifying humankind. It also preserves the purity of  
Bahá’u’lláh’s teachings from the disruptive influence of egoistic individuals who,  
in past Dispensations, have been responsible for dividing every religion into sects,  
disrupting its mission, and frustrating to a large degree the intention of its Founder.  
See also Covenant.

**CRADLE OF THE FAITH** Iran, the homeland of the Bábí and Bahá’í Faiths and  
of Bahá’u’lláh, the Báb, and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.

**CRUSADE, TEN YEAR WORLD** The international teaching plan inaugurated  
by Shoghi Effendi in 1953 and completed in 1963, some six years after his death.  
It was the first global plan in which all national Bahá’í communities pursued their  
respective goals in one coordinated effort. It culminated with the first election of the  
Universal House of Justice at Riḍván 1963.

**CYCLE** A unit of time comprising the Dispensations of numerous consecutive  
Manifestations of God. For example, the Adamic, or Prophetic, Cycle began with  
Adam and ended with the Dispensation of Muḥammad. The Bahá’í Cycle began  
with the Báb and is to last at least five hundred thousand years.

D

**DANIEL’S PROPHECY** The prophecy contained in Daniel 12:12: “Blessed is he  
that waiteth, and cometh to the thousand three hundred and five and thirty days.”  
‘Abdu’l-Bahá comments in a Tablet to a Kurdish Bahá’í, “Now concerning the verse  
in Daniel, the interpretation whereof thou didst ask …. These days must be reck-  
oned as solar and not lunar years. For according to this calculation a century will  
have elapsed from the dawn of the Sun of Truth, then will the teachings of God be

firmly established upon the earth, and the Divine Light shall flood the world from  
the East even unto the West. Then, on this day, will the faithful rejoice!” ‘Abdu’l-  
Bahá further explains in the same Tablet that the 1,335 years must be reckoned  
from 622 A.D., the year of Muḥammad’s flight from Mecca to Medina.

Shoghi Effendi associates Daniel’s reference to the 1,335 days and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s  
statements about the prophecy with the centenary of Bahá’u’lláh’s declaration of  
His mission in 1863 and with the worldwide triumph of the Faith. He stressed that  
the prophecy refers to occurrences within the Bahá’í community, rather than to  
events in the outside world.

While Shoghi Effendi clearly allied the Faith’s triumph with the successful  
completion of the third teaching plan to be undertaken by the Bahá’ís, in his letters  
and in those written on his behalf, four specific dates are mentioned as marking the  
fulfillment of Daniel’s prophecy: 1953, 1957, 1960, and 1963. Regarding the year  
1960 (derived by a lunar reckoning), Shoghi Effendi anticipated, in *God Passes By*,  
p. 151, and in a number of his letters, the successful completion of a third Seven  
Year Plan that was to be inaugurated. Had there been a third Seven Year Plan, it  
would have concluded in 1960, one hundred lunar years after Bahá’u’lláh’s decla-  
ration. When the Ten Year Crusade (1953–63) was announced in 1952, Shoghi  
Effendi linked its completion with the fulfillment of Daniel’s prophecy. There are  
also several references in letters written on Shoghi Effendi’s behalf that give 1957 as  
the date of the prophecy’s fulfillment. In still other letters Shoghi Effendi allies the  
“hundred lunar years” after Bahá’u’lláh’s declaration with the year 1953, although  
the significance of this hundred years is unclear.

Thus it seems the prophecy is not fulfilled by a single date but, rather, by a  
process that extended over a period of time. A letter dated 7 March 1955 written on  
Shoghi Effendi’s behalf says, “In the Ten Year Crusade, we are actually fulfilling the  
prophecy of Daniel, because with the completion of the Ten Year Crusade in 1963  
we will have established the Faith in every part of the globe.” Thus the fulfillment  
of the prophecy coincided with the period of the Ten Year Crusade, a span of time  
that included 1953, 1957, 1960, and 1963.

**DAWN-BREAKERS** The Bábís and early Bahá’ís, many of whom gave their lives  
as martyrs.

**DAWNING PLACE OF REVELATION** A title of **Bahá’u’lláh**, or of any **Mani-**  
**festation of God**.

**DAY OF THE COVENANT** 26 November, the day ‘Abdu’l-Bahá selected for com-  
memorating the inauguration of Bahá’u’lláh’s Covenant. The Bahá’ís wished to cel-  
ebrate ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s birthday, but He did not want this because it coincides with  
the anniversary of the Declaration of the Báb (23 May), when all attention should  
be given to that sacred event. He gave them instead the Day of the Covenant to  
celebrate, choosing a date that is six Gregorian months away from the commemora-  
tion of Bahá’u’lláh’s Ascension. See also **Covenant**.

**DAY OF GOD** An expression used variously, according to context, to refer to the  
appearance of a Manifestation of God, to the duration of His life on earth, or to  
the duration of His Dispensation. It is also used to refer specifically to the advent  
of Bahá’u’lláh.

**DAY OF JUDGMENT** The time of the appearance of the Manifestation of God,  
when the true character of souls is judged according to their response to His Revela-  
tion. Also known as the Day of Resurrection.

**DAYSPRING OF DIVINE GUIDANCE** **Bahá’u’lláh**.

**DISPENSATION** The period of time during which the laws and teachings of a  
Prophet of God have spiritual authority. For example, the Dispensation of Jesus  
Christ lasted until the beginning of the Islamic Dispensation, usually fixed  
at the year 622 A.D., the year Muḥammad emigrated from Mecca to Medina. The  
Islamic Dispensation lasted until the advent of the Báb in 1844. The Dispensation  
of the Báb ended when Bahá’u’lláh experienced the intimation of His mission in  
the Siyáh-Chál, the subterranean dungeon in Tehran in which He was imprisoned  
between August and December 1852. The Dispensation of Bahá’u’lláh will last  
until the advent of the next Manifestation of God, which Bahá’u’lláh asserts will  
occur in no less than one thousand years.

**DIVINE ESSENCE** God.

**DIVINE PEN** A title of **Bahá’u’lláh**.

**DIVINE PLAN** The Plan for the dissemination of the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh  
throughout the world, conceived by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and entrusted to the Bahá’ís of  
North America in fourteen letters called the Tablets of the Divine Plan. The Divine  
Plan was implemented by Shoghi Effendi and is pursued today under the guidance  
of the Universal House of Justice. Teaching Plans undertaken within the framework  
of the Divine Plan include the first Seven Year Plan (1937–44); the second Seven  
Year Plan (1946–53) pursued at first by the Bahá’ís of the United States and Canada  
and extended by supplementary plans adopted with the approval or at the behest  
of Shoghi Effendi by the British Isles, Egypt and the Sudan, Germany, India, Iran,  
and Iraq; and the Ten Year World Crusade (1953–63), all of which were inaugu-  
rated by Shoghi Effendi, and the Nine, Five, Seven, Six, Three, Four Year, and  
Twelve Month Plans launched by the Universal House of Justice. The Divine Plan  
is divided into epochs. The first epoch included the years 1937–46; the second  
epoch spanned the years 1946–63; the third epoch ranged from 1963–86; and the  
fourth epoch was from 1986–2001. See also **Crusade**, **Ten Year World**; **Epochs**;  
**Plans**; **Tablets of the Divine Plan**.

**DIVINE THRESHOLD** See **Sacred Threshold**.

E

**ELECTIONS, BAHÁ’Í** Elections conducted according to Bahá’í principles to se-  
lect individuals to serve as members of Local and National Spiritual Assemblies  
and the Universal House of Justice. Elections for Local Spiritual Assemblies are  
generally held on 21 April, the first day of the Riḍván Festival (21 April–2 May),  
but in certain circumstances can be held on any day during Riḍván. Elections for  
National Spiritual Assemblies are held annually during Riḍván. Elections for the  
Universal House of Justice are held every five years. All adult members in good  
standing in a Bahá’í community may vote for the members of their Local Spiritual  
Assembly; Bahá’ís in an electoral unit elect one or more delegates who, in turn, elect  
the members of the National Spiritual Assembly at the national convention. The  
members of the National Spiritual Assemblies elect the members of the Universal  
House of Justice at an international convention. Shoghi Effendi advises electors  
“to consider without the least trace of passion and prejudice, and irrespective of  
any material consideration, the names of only those who can best combine the  
necessary qualities of unquestioned loyalty, of selfless devotion, of a well-trained  
mind, of recognized ability and mature experience.” There are no nominations.  
Campaigning and electioneering are forbidden. Ballots are cast in a prayerful at-  
mosphere, and the nine persons receiving the most votes are considered chosen by  
God. Members of a minority race or group are given preference when tied for the  
ninth position; otherwise, ballots are cast to break the tie. A unique and significant  
aspect of all Bahá’í elections is the fact that voters elect with the understanding that  
they are free to choose whomever their consciences prompt them to select, and they  
freely accept the authority of the outcome.

**EPISTLE** A formal or elegant letter or treatise; a composition in the form of a letter.  
In Bahá’í usage it refers to certain writings of Bahá’u’lláh—for example, *Epistle to  
the Son of the Wolf*.

**EPOCHS** Major units of time used to mark the unfoldment of the **Divine Plan**  
and the Formative Age. The first epoch of the Formative Age (1921–46) began  
with the passing of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in 1921 and ended with the conclusion of the first  
Seven Year Plan pursued by the Bahá’ís of North America under Shoghi Effendi’s  
direction. The second epoch of the Formative Age (1946–63) began with the  
launching of the second Seven Year Plan and the adoption of similar plans by other  
national communities throughout the Bahá’í world and ended with the conclusion  
of the Ten Year Crusade and the election of the Universal House of Justice. The  
third epoch of the Formative Age (1963–86) included the Nine, Five, and Seven  
Year Plans formulated by the Universal House of Justice. The fourth epoch of the  
Formative Age (1986–2001), included the Six, Three, Four Year, and Twelve Month  
Plans from the Universal House of Justice, as well as the commemoration for the  
centenary of the Ascension of Bahá’u’lláh. See also **Ages**.

F

**FAST, THE** A nineteen-day period (2–21 March, the Bahá’í month of ‘Alá, or  
Loftiness) of spiritual renewal and development during which Bahá’ís abstain from  
food and drink from sunrise to sunset. A symbol of self-restraint, the Fast is a time  
of meditation, prayer, and spiritual recuperation and readjustment.

**FEAST** See **Nineteen Day Feast**.

**FIRESIDE** An informal Bahá’í gathering held for the purpose of discussing the  
Bahá’í Faith and sharing its teachings.

**FOLLOWERS OF THE GREATEST NAME** Bahá’ís; followers of **Bahá’u’lláh**.  
See also **Greatest Name**.

**FORMATIVE AGE** See **Ages**.

**FRIENDS** Bahá’ís.

**FUND** The institution of the Bahá’í Fund, of which there are four main funds,  
operates on the international, continental, national, and local levels.

The Bahá’í International Fund is administered by the Universal House of Justice  
and is used to support the work of the Faith at the Bahá’í World Center and to  
sustain national communities unable to meet their own expenses. The International  
Deputization Fund, a subsidiary of the Bahá’í International Fund, supports the  
work of pioneers and traveling teachers and is administered by the International  
Teaching Center. The Persian Relief Fund, originally established by the National  
Spiritual Assembly of Iran to assist victims of persecution by the Islamic Republic,  
is also a subsidiary of the Bahá’í International Fund and is administered by the  
Universal House of Justice.

The Continental Bahá’í Fund supports the work of the Continental Boards of  
Counselors and the work of their Auxiliary Boards.

Each National Spiritual Assembly and Local Spiritual Assembly administers its  
own National and Local Fund, respectively.

The funds of the Bahá’í Faith are managed according to principles laid down  
by Bahá’u’lláh, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, and Shoghi Effendi. Foremost among the principles  
are: (1) Except for the portion of the Bahá’í Funds devoted exclusively to chari-  
table, philanthropic, or humanitarian purposes, contributions are accepted only  
from those who have identified themselves with the Bahá’í Faith and are regarded  
as its avowed and unreserved supporters. (2) Contributing to the Funds is both a  
spiritual privilege and a responsibility. (3) All contributions to the Bahá’í Funds are  
voluntary. (4) The degree of sacrifice and love of the contributor is more important  
than the amount given. (5) Appeals for donations must be dignified and general  
in character. (6) Confidentiality of contributions is to be strictly preserved. (7)

Receipts are to be issued. Shoghi Effendi referred to the Funds as “the life-blood”  
of the Bahá’í institutions.

G

**GOD’S HOLY MOUNTAIN** See **Mount Carmel**.

**GOD’S MAJOR PLAN** See **Major Plan of God**.

**GOD’S MINOR PLAN** See **Minor Plan of God**.

**GOLDEN AGE** See **Ages**.

**GREATEST HOLY LEAF** See **Bahíyyih Khánum**.

**GREATEST NAME** The name Bahá’u’lláh (“the Glory of God”) and its deriva-  
tives, such as *Alláh-u-Abhá* (“God is Most Glorious”), *Bahá* (“glory,” “splendor,” or  
“light”), and *Yá Bahá’u’l-Abhá* (“O Thou the Glory of the Most Glorious!”). Also  
referred to as the Most Great Name.

**GUARDIANSHIP** The institution, anticipated by Bahá’u’lláh in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas  
and established by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in His Will and Testament, to which Shoghi Effendi  
was appointed. Shoghi Effendi explains that the Guardianship and the Universal  
House of Justice constitute the twin pillars of the World Order of Bahá’u’lláh and  
are the twin successors of Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. The Guardian’s chief func-  
tions are to interpret the writings of Bahá’u’lláh, the Báb, and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and to  
be the permanent head of the Universal House of Justice. See also **Shoghi Effendi**.

H

**HANDS OF THE CAUSE OF GOD** Eminent Bahá’ís appointed by Bahá’u’lláh  
to stimulate the propagation and ensure the protection of the Faith. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá  
in His Will and Testament conferred authority on the Guardian to appoint Hands  
of the Cause and specified their duties. Shoghi Effendi, in a message dated Octo-  
ber 1957 to the Bahá’í world, called the Hands of the Cause of God “the Chief  
Stewards of Bahá’u’lláh’s embryonic World Commonwealth.” After his death on 4  
November 1957 the Hands of the Cause of God assumed responsibility for preserv-  
ing the unity of the Bahá’í Faith and for guiding the Bahá’í world community to the  
victorious completion of the Ten Year World Crusade planned by Shoghi Effendi.  
They also called for the election of the Universal House of Justice in 1963 and  
requested the friends not to elect them, leaving them free to discharge their own  
specific responsibilities. Following the formation of the Universal House of Justice,  
five Hands of the Cause of God were selected by fellow Hands of the Cause to serve  
at the Bahá’í World Center, while the rest continued their continental responsibili-

ties, which included overseeing the work of the Auxiliary Board members. Finding  
itself unable to appoint or legislate in order to appoint additional Hands of the  
Cause of God, the Universal House of Justice, in a cable dated 21 June 1968 and  
a letter dated 24 June 1968, announced the establishment of the institution of the  
Continental Boards of Counselors to extend the functions of the Hands of the  
Cause of God into the future. The Hands of the Cause of God were then freed  
of responsibility for directing the work of Auxiliary Board members and were all  
given worldwide responsibilities. See also **Auxiliary Boards**; **Continental Boards  
of Counselors**; **International Teaching Center**.

**ḤAẒÍRATU’L-QUDS** *The Sacred Fold*: official title designating the headquarters  
of Bahá’í administrative activity in a particular country or region.

**HEROIC AGE** See **Ages**.

**HIDDEN WORDS, THE** Bahá’u’lláh’s most important ethical work. Revealed  
circa 1858. Described by Shoghi Effendi as a “marvelous collection of gem-like  
utterances … with which Bahá’u’lláh was inspired, as He paced, wrapped in His  
meditations, the banks of the Tigris.” Originally designated “The Hidden Book  
of Fáṭimih,” the title of this work is an allusion to the Muslim tradition that the  
Angel Gabriel revealed a Book to Fáṭimih to console her following the death of  
the Prophet Muḥammad, her Father, and that this Book remained hidden in the  
spiritual worlds thereafter.

**HOLY DAY** A day commemorating a significant Bahá’í anniversary or feast. The  
nine Bahá’í holy days on which work should be suspended include:

The Feast of **Naw-Rúz** (New Year), 21 March

The first day of **Riḍván**, 21 April

The ninth day of Riḍván, 29 April

The twelfth day of Riḍván, 2 May

The anniversary of the Declaration of the Báb, 23 May

The anniversary of the Ascension of Bahá’u’lláh, 29 May

The anniversary of the Martyrdom of the Báb, 9 July

The anniversary of the Birth of the Báb, 20 October

The anniversary of the Birth of Bahá’u’lláh, 12 November

The **Day of the Covenant**, 26 November, and the Ascension of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, 28  
November, are commemorated annually, but are not days on which work is to be  
suspended.

**HOLY PLACES** Sites in Iran, Iraq, Turkey, and Israel that are associated with  
significant events in the lives of Bahá’u’lláh, the Báb, and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.

**HOLY SHRINES** See **Shrine**.

**HOLY TEXTS** See **Sacred Scriptures**.

**HOLY THRESHOLD** See **Sacred Threshold**.

**HOSTS** ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explains that “The blessed Person of the Promised One  
[Bahá’u’lláh] is interpreted in the Holy Book as the Lord of Hosts—the heavenly  
armies. By heavenly armies those souls are intended who are entirely freed from  
the human world, transformed into celestial spirits and have become divine angels.  
Such souls are the rays of the Sun of Reality who will illumine all the continents”  
(TDP 8.2).

**HOUSE OF ‘ABDU’LLÁH PÁSHÁ** The house in ‘Akká that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá rented  
in 1896 and that served as His residence until He moved to Haifa in 1910.

**HOUSES OF WORSHIP** See **Mashriqu’l-Adhkár**.

**ḤUQÚQU’LLÁH** *The Right of God*: one of the fundamental Bahá’í ordinanc-  
es of the Bahá’í Faith, it is a great law and a sacred institution laid down by  
Bahá’u’lláh in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas. It is one of the key instruments for constructing  
the foundation and supporting the structure of the World Order of Bahá’u’lláh.  
Its far-reaching ramifications extend from enabling individuals to express their  
devotion to God in a private act of conscience that attracts divine blessings and  
bounties for the individual, promotes the common good, and directly connects  
individuals with the Central Institution of the Faith, to buttressing the authority  
and extending the activity of the Head of the Faith. The law prescribes that each  
Bahá’í shall pay a certain portion of his accumulated savings after the deduction  
of all expenses and of certain exempt properties such as one’s residence. These  
payments provide a fund at the disposition of the Head of the Faith for carrying  
out beneficent activities. Ḥuqúqu’lláh is administered by the Universal House of  
Justice, and payments are made to trustees appointed by the Universal House of  
Justice in every country or region. In providing a regular and systematic source  
of revenue for the Central Institution of the Cause, Bahá’u’lláh has assured the  
means for the independence and decisive functioning of the World Center of  
His Faith. The fundamentals of the law of Ḥuqúqu’lláh are promulgated in the  
Kitáb-i-Aqdas. Further elaborations of its features are found in other writings  
of Bahá’u’lláh and in those of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi, and the Universal  
House of Justice. The law was codified in 1987 and made universally applicable as  
of Riḍván 1992 to all who profess belief in Bahá’u’lláh. For further information,  
see *Ḥuqúqu’lláh: Extracts from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Shoghi  
Effendi and The Universal House of Justice* (1986).

I

**INSTITUTE** See **Training institute**.

**INTERNATIONAL BAHÁ’Í ARCHIVES** An institution at the Bahá’í World  
Center that preserves the writings and sacred relics of the Central Figures of the  
Faith and Shoghi Effendi as well as other historical documents and items. The  
International Archives Building, completed in 1957, was the first of five buildings  
on the Arc on Mount Carmel to be constructed.

**INTERNATIONAL BAHÁ’Í CONVENTION** An event held every five years in  
Haifa, Israel, at which members of National Spiritual Assemblies from around the  
world gather to elect the members of the Universal House of Justice.

**INTERNATIONAL BAHÁ’Í LIBRARY** The central depository of all literature  
published on the Faith, and an essential source of information for the institutions  
of the World Center on all subjects relating to the Cause of God and the conditions  
of mankind.

**INTERNATIONAL FUND** See **Fund**.

**INTERNATIONAL TEACHING CENTER** An institution established by the  
Universal House of Justice in 1973, the members of which are the Hands of the  
Cause of God and Counselors appointed by the Universal House of Justice to serve  
at the Bahá’í World Center. Among the institution’s many responsibilities are mak-  
ing reports and recommendations to the Universal House of Justice, coordinat-  
ing and directing the work of the Continental Boards of Counselors, being fully  
informed of the Faith’s condition throughout the world, watching over the security  
and ensuring the protection of the Faith, and being alert to possibilities for extend-  
ing the teaching work and for developing social and economic life both inside and  
outside the Bahá’í community.

K

**KING OF GLORY** A title of **Bahá’u’lláh**.

**KITÁB-I-‘AHD** See **Book of the Covenant**.

**KITÁB-I-AQDAS, THE** *The Most Holy Book* (*Kitáb* means “book”; *Aqdas* means  
“Most Holy”): the chief repository of Bahá’u’lláh’s laws and the Mother Book of His  
revelation, revealed in ‘Akká in 1873 and termed by Shoghi Effendi “the Charter of  
the future world civilization.” For a summary of its contents, see GPB, pp. 214–15.

**KNIGHTS OF BAHÁ’U’LLÁH** The title given by Shoghi Effendi to Bahá’ís who  
settled in the goal countries enumerated at the outset of the Ten Year World Cru-  
sade as having no Bahá’ís living in them. All those who settled in such territories

during the Holy Year October 1952—October 1953 and, thereafter, the first to settle  
in the remaining territories were designated Knights of Bahá’u’lláh. The names of  
the Knights of Bahá’u’lláh are inscribed on a scroll that was laid beneath the floor  
inside the entrance door of the Shrine of Bahá’u’lláh in May 1992 during the Holy  
Year commemorating the centenary of Bahá’u’lláh’s ascension.

L

**LESSER PEACE** The first of two major stages in which Bahá’ís believe peace will  
be established. The Lesser Peace will come about through a binding treaty among  
the nations for the political unification of the world. It will involve fixing every  
nation’s boundaries, strictly limiting the size of their armaments, laying down  
the principles underlying the relations among governments, and ascertaining all  
international agreements and obligations. Its inception will synchronize with two  
processes operating within the Bahá’í Faith—the maturation of local and national  
Bahá’í institutions and the completion of specified buildings around the Arc on  
Mount Carmel—and will portend the coming of the **Most Great Peace**.

**LETTERS OF THE LIVING** A translation of *Ḥurúf-i-Ḥáyy*. The first eighteen  
people who independently recognized and believed in the Báb. Together with Him,  
they form the first *Váḥid* (“Unit”) of the Bábí Dispensation. The word *Ḥáyy*, which  
is the Name of God “The Living,” has the numerical value of eighteen in the *abjad*  
system of notation in which each letter of the Arabic alphabet is assigned a specific  
numerical value. The word “Váḥid” has the numerical value of nineteen.

**LIFEBLOOD OF THE CAUSE**  The Bahá’í **Fund**.

**LORD OF HOSTS** A title of **Bahá’u’lláh**. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explains that “what is  
meant in the prophecies by the ‘Lord of Hosts’ and the ‘Promised Christ’ is the  
Blessed Perfection [Bahá’u’lláh] and His holiness the Exalted One [the Báb].” See  
also **Hosts**.

**LORD OF THE AGE** A designation of the Manifestation of God in each Dispen-  
sation. In Islam it was a title given to the promised Qá’im and, therefore, is applied  
in Bahá’í terminology particularly to the Báb.

M

**MAJOR PLAN OF GOD** God’s plan for humanity that is tumultuous and mys-  
terious in its progress. Its purpose in this cycle is to unify the human race and to  
establish the Kingdom of God on earth. See also **Minor Plan of God**.

**MANIFESTATION OF GOD** Designation of a Prophet “endowed with constan-  
cy” Who is the Founder of a religious Dispensation, inasmuch as in His words, His

person, and His actions He manifests the nature and purpose of God in accordance  
with the capacity and needs of the people to whom He comes.

**MASHRIQU’L-ADHKÁR** *The Dawning place of the Praise of God*: a title desig-  
nating a Bahá’í House of Worship or Temple. Houses of Worship have been con-  
structed in Wilmette, near Chicago, Illinois; Kampala, Uganda; Ingleside, near  
Sydney, Australia; Langenhain, near Frankfurt am Main, Germany; Panama City,  
Panama; Apia, Western Samoa; and New Delhi, India. The first Bahá’í House of  
Worship, built in 1902 in ‘Ishqábád, Turkmenistan, was damaged by an earthquake  
in 1948 and, following heavy rains, had to be razed in 1963. For a full description  
of the institution of the Mashriqu’l-Adhkár, see BW 18:568–88.

**MASTER** A title of **‘Abdu’l-Bahá** referring to the virtues He manifested and to His  
role as an enduring model for humanity to emulate.

**MAZRA‘IH** A country mansion near the village of Mazra‘a, several miles north  
of the prison-city of ‘Akká and about a half-mile from the Mediterranean Sea.  
Bahá’u’lláh lived at Mazra‘ih for about two years after leaving ‘Akká in 1877. The  
mansion looks eastward to the hills of Galilee and has a pool and gardens.

**MECCA** The holy city of Islam, the birthplace of Muḥammad (570 A.D.). In  
Mecca, the principal place of pilgrimage of the Muslim world, stands the Great  
Mosque surrounding the Ka‘bih (Kaaba), the ancient cubical temple believed to  
have been built by Abraham and Ishmael, which is the Muslim **Qiblih**.

**MIHDÍ, MÍRZÁ** *The Purest Branch*: a son of Bahá’u’lláh and brother of ‘Abdu’l-  
Bahá. He died at the age of twenty-two in 1870 when he fell through a skylight while  
rapt in prayer on the roof of the prison-barracks in ‘Akká. He asked Bahá’u’lláh to  
accept his life as a ransom so that pilgrims prevented from attaining Bahá’u’lláh’s  
presence would be enabled to do so. Bahá’u’lláh, in a prayer, made this astounding  
proclamation: “Glorified art Thou, O Lord my God! Thou seest Me in the hands  
of Mine enemies, and My son blood-stained before Thy face, O Thou in Whose  
hands is the kingdom of all names. I have, O My Lord, offered up that which Thou  
hast given Me, that Thy servants may be quickened and all that dwell on earth be  
united.”

**MINOR PLAN OF GOD** The part of God’s Plan that is revealed by Bahá’u’lláh to  
His followers and is laid out for them in detailed instructions and successive plans  
by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi, and the Universal House of Justice. In contrast to  
the **Major Plan of God**, it proceeds in a methodical, ordered way, disseminating  
His teachings and raising up the structure of a united world society.

**MOST EXALTED LEAF** See **Ásíyih Khánum** and **Bahíyyih Khánum**.

**MOST GREAT FESTIVAL** See **Riḍván**.

**MOST GREAT JUBILEE** The centenary of the declaration of Bahá’u’lláh’s pro-  
phetic mission in the Garden of Riḍván in Baghdad, 22 April–3 May 1863. It was  
commemorated by the first Bahá’í World Congress, held in Royal Albert Hall, Lon-  
don, during the Riḍván Festival (28 April–2 May) 1963. The Most Great Jubilee  
coincided with the victorious completion of the Ten Year World Crusade Shoghi  
Effendi launched in April 1953 (fulfilling the prophecy of Daniel 12:12 regarding  
the spread of the Bahá’í Faith throughout the world) and the establishment of  
the Universal House of Justice elected a few days earlier in Haifa, Israel. See also  
**Daniel’s Prophecy**.

**MOST GREAT NAME** See **Greatest Name**.

**MOST GREAT OCEAN** See **Ancient Beauty**.

**MOST GREAT PEACE** The second of two major stages in which Bahá’ís believe  
peace will be established. The Most Great Peace will be the practical consequence  
of the spiritualization of the world and the fusion of all its races, creeds, classes,  
and nations. It will rest on the foundation of, and be preserved by, the ordinances  
of God. See also **Lesser Peace**.

**MOST GREAT PRISON** The prison-city of ‘Akká in which Bahá’u’lláh, His fam-  
ily, and companions were confined from 31 August 1868 until June 1877.

**MOST HOLY BOOK** See **Kitáb-i-Aqdas, The**.

**MOST HOLY SHRINE** The Shrine of Bahá’u’lláh in **Bahjí**.

**MOTHER TEMPLE** Refers to the first Bahá’í House of Worship to be built in  
a hemisphere or continent. For example, the Bahá’í House of Worship outside of  
Frankfurt am Main, Germany, is known as the Mother Temple of Europe; the  
House of Worship in Wilmette, Illinois, the Mother Temple of the West.

**MOUNT CARMEL** A mountain in Israel on which the Shrine of the Báb and the  
Bahá’í World Center are located. The home of the prophet Elijah, it is referred to by  
Bahá’u’lláh as “the Hill of God and His Vineyard” and was extolled by Isaiah as the  
“mountain of the Lord” to which “all nations shall flow.” On it Bahá’u’lláh pitched  
His tent and revealed the **Tablet of Carmel**, the charter of the world spiritual and  
administrative centers of the Bahá’í Faith. See also **Arc**; **Bahá’í World Center**.

**MYSTERY OF GOD** A translation of *Sirru’lláh*, a title Bahá’u’lláh gave to **‘Abdu’l-**  
**Bahá** referring to His unique spiritual station in which the incompatible character-

istics of human nature and superhuman knowledge and perfection are blended and  
completely harmonized.

N

**NATIONAL CONVENTION** The institution that elects the members of the Na-  
tional Spiritual Assembly during the annual Riḍván Festival (April 21–May 2). At  
unit or “district” conventions, adult Bahá’ís elect delegates who, in turn, attend  
the National Convention. There the delegates vote to elect the members of the  
National Spiritual Assembly, consult about the affairs of the Faith, and offer recom-  
mendations to the National Spiritual Assembly. See also **Elections**, **Bahá’í**.

**NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLIES** See **Spiritual Assemblies**.

**NAW-RÚZ** *New Day*: Bahá’í New Year’s Day, the date of the vernal equinox. A  
Bahá’í holy day on which work is suspended, it is celebrated in the West on 21  
March, until such time as the Universal House of Justice fixes the standard for the  
date throughout the world in accordance with astronomical data.

**NIGHTINGALE OF PARADISE** See **Ancient Beauty**.

**NINE YEAR PLAN** The first teaching plan launched by the Universal House of  
Justice. It encompassed the years 1964–73. See also **Plans**.

**NINETEEN DAY FEAST** A Bahá’í institution inaugurated by the Báb and con-  
firmed by Bahá’u’lláh in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas. It is held on the first day of every Bahá’í  
month, each consisting of nineteen days and bearing the name of one of the at-  
tributes of God. The Feast is the heart of Bahá’í community life at the local level  
and consists of devotional, consultative, and social elements.

O

**ORDER OF BAHÁ’U’LLÁH** See **World Order of Bahá’u’lláh**.

P

**PEERLESS BELOVED** See **Ancient Beauty**.

**PEN OF GLORY, PEN OF THE MOST HIGH** See **Ancient Beauty**.

**PEOPLE OF BAHÁ** Generally, the members of the Bahá’í community. Shoghi  
Effendi explains that in the Tablet of Carmel “the people of Bahá” refers to the  
members of the Universal House of Justice.

**PILGRIM HOUSE** A house for visiting pilgrims that Mírzá Ja‘far Raḥmání built,  
with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s permission, near the Shrine of the Báb. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá composed  
a dedicatory inscription that appears above its entrance: “This is a spiritual Hostel  
for Pilgrims, and its founder is Mírzá Ja‘far Raḥmání 1327 A.H. [1909].” It was  
completed in 1909 and was known as the Eastern or Oriental Pilgrim House. In  
1969 the increasing number of pilgrims led the Universal House of Justice to decide  
that pilgrims should be accommodated in hotels, thereby enabling it to convert the  
pilgrim house into a reception center.

A Western Pilgrim House was built across the street from the House of ‘Abdu’l-  
Bahá in Haifa, shortly after His passing, with funds American Bahá’ís had contrib-  
uted and in accordance with a design ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had selected and modified. In  
1963 the Universal House of Justice established its offices in the Western Pilgrim  
House. In 1983, after the completion of the Seat of the Universal House of Justice,  
the Western Pilgrim House became the seat of the International Teaching Center.

Another pilgrim house is located at Bahjí, near the Shrine of Bahá’u’lláh.

**PILGRIMAGE** A journey made with the intention of visiting a shrine or holy  
place. For Bahá’ís it is both a privilege and an obligation, although it is only obliga-  
tory for men who are able to make the journey. In the Kitáb-i-Aqdas Bahá’u’lláh  
specifically ordains pilgrimage to the House of Bahá’u’lláh in Baghdad and to the  
House of the Báb in Shíráz. On the day of Bahá’u’lláh’s Ascension, the room where  
His Holy Dust was laid became a third center of pilgrimage—the most holy spot  
and the **Qiblih** of the Bahá’í world—for at least the next thousand years. Under  
current conditions, Bahá’ís assume that the obligation of pilgrimage is satisfied by  
a visit to the Shrine of Bahá’u’lláh and the Shrine of the Báb in the Holy Land.

The first group of Western pilgrims arrived in ‘Akká on 10 December 1898 and  
included Edward and Lua Getsinger; Phoebe Hearst; Mrs. Hearst’s butler, Robert  
Turner, who was the first African-American in the West to become a Bahá’í; and  
Mrs. Thornburgh.

**PILLARS OF THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE** National Spiritual As-  
semblies. See also **Spiritual Assemblies**.

**PIONEERS** Bahá’ís who leave their hometown or country to reside elsewhere for  
the purpose of teaching the Bahá’í Faith.

**PLANS** Refers to the courses of action devised by Shoghi Effendi and, later, by the  
Universal House of Justice for expanding and consolidating the Bahá’í Faith within  
the framework of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s **Divine Plan**. Teaching Plans launched by Shoghi  
Effendi include the first Seven Year Plan (1937–44) and the second Seven Year Plan  
(1946–53) pursued by the Bahá’ís of the United States; a Six Year Plan pursued by  
the Bahá’ís of the British Isles (1944–50); plans of varying durations separately pur-  
sued between 1947–53 by the National Spiritual Assemblies of Canada, of Central

America, of South America, of Australia and New Zealand, of India, Pakistan, and  
Burma, of Germany and Austria, of Iran, of Iraq, and of Egypt and the Sudan; the  
Two Year Plan for the development of the Faith in Africa; and the Ten Year World  
Crusade (1953–63) pursued by the worldwide Bahá’í community. The Universal  
House of Justice has launched the Nine Year Plan (1964–73), the Five Year Plan  
(1974–79), the Seven Year Plan (1979–86), the Six Year Plan (1986–92), the Three  
Year Plan (1993–1996), the Four Year Plan (1996–2000), the Twelve Month Plan  
(2000–2001), and two Five Year Plans (2001–2006 and 2006–2011). See also **Ma-  
jor Plan of God** and **Minor Plan of God**.

**PROMISED ONE** **Bahá’u’lláh**.

**PUREST BRANCH, THE** See **Mihdí, Mírzá**.

Q

**QIBLIH** *“That which one faces; prayer-direction; point of adoration”*: the focus to  
which the faithful turn in prayer. The Qiblih for Muslims is the Ka’bih in Mecca;  
for Bahá’ís it is the Most Holy Tomb of Bahá’u’lláh at **Bahjí**, “the Heart and Qiblih  
of the Bahá’í world.”

R

**REGIONAL COUNCILS** Established by the Universal House of Justice in 1997,  
this new element of the Bahá’í **Administrative Order**, serves as a link between the  
local and national levels. These institutions are formed only in certain countries  
where the growing complexity of the issues which are facing National Spiritual  
Assemblies requires this development. A Regional Council is established either  
through election by the members of the **Local Spiritual Assemblies** in a region or  
through appointment by the **National Spiritual Assembly**.

**REMOTE PRISON** The city of Adrianople (now Edirne, Turkey), to which  
Bahá’u’lláh was banished from 12 December 1863 through 12 August 1868. Adri-  
anople is in western Turkey, on its border with Greece and Bulgaria.

**REVELATION** The conveying of truth from God to humanity. The word is used  
to refer to the process of divine communication from God to His Manifestation  
and from the Manifestation to His people; to the words and acts of such communi-  
cation themselves; and to the entire body of teachings given by a Prophet of God.

**RIḌVÁN** The Islamic name of the gardener and custodian of Paradise. In Bahá’í  
terminology the word denotes both “garden” and “paradise”; however, it has also  
been used to denote God’s good-pleasure and His divine acceptance. The Riḍván  
Festival, the holiest and most significant of all Bahá’í festivals, commemorates

Bahá’u’lláh’s declaration of His mission to His companions in the Garden of Riḍván  
in Baghdad in 1863. It is a twelve-day period celebrated annually, 21 April–2 May.  
It is also called the Most Great Festival. During each Riḍván Festival Local and  
National Spiritual Assemblies are elected, and, once every five years, the Universal  
House of Justice is elected.

**RUHI INSTITUTE** A system whose materials seek to integrate focused study of  
the Bahá’í writings with specific acts of service for the community. Organized as a  
series of levels of study, which aim to develop an understanding of the essential  
spiritual verities taught by Bahá’u’lláh, the courses are self-perpetuating in nature,  
developing human resources who in turn are able to arise to serve the community  
and teach the courses to others.

**RUḤÍYYIH KHÁNUM, AMATU’L-BAHÁ** See **Amatu’l-Bahá Rúḥíyyih  
Khánum**.

S

**SACRED SCRIPTURES, SACRED TEXTS** The Holy Books of the world’s reli-  
gions. Also refers to the writings of Bahá’u’lláh, the Báb, and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.

**SACRED THRESHOLD** A term used metaphorically and respectfully to denote  
approach to the Presence of God and, hence, to the precincts of a holy place such  
as a shrine. It is also sometimes used literally to denote the actual outer or inner  
threshold of a holy shrine.

**SEAL OF THE PROPHETS** Muḥammad.

**SHOGHI EFFENDI** The title by which Shoghi Rabbání (1 March 1897–4 No-  
vember 1957), great-grandson of Bahá’u’lláh, is generally known to Bahá’ís. (*Shoghi*  
is an Arabic name meaning “the one who longs”; *Effendi* is a Turkish honorific  
signifying “sir” or “master.”) He was appointed Guardian of the Bahá’í Faith by  
‘Abdu’l-Bahá in His Will and assumed the office upon ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s passing in  
1921.

**SHRINE** The original meaning of the word is a casket or case for books, but it later  
acquired the special meaning of a casket containing sacred relics, and thence a tomb  
of a saint, a chapel with special associations, or a place hallowed by some memory.  
It is used to denote the latter in Bahá’í terminology. The term “Holy Shrines,” for  
example, refers to the burial places of Bahá’u’lláh, the Báb, and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. The  
House associated with the visit of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to Montreal was designated by  
Shoghi Effendi as a Bahá’í shrine. Also, when referring to the All-American Con-  
vention held in 1944 to commemorate the one hundredth anniversary of the incep-  
tion of the Bahá’í Faith, the Guardian wrote of the representatives of the American

Bahá’í community’s being “Gathered within the walls of its national Shrine—the  
most sacred Temple ever to be reared to the glory of Bahá’u’lláh” (GPB p. 400).

**SÍYÁH-CHÁL** *Black Pit*: the subterranean dungeon in Tehran in which Bahá’u’lláh  
was imprisoned August–December 1852. Here, chained in darkness three flights of  
stairs underground, in the company of his fellow-Bábís and some 150 thieves and  
assassins, He received the first intimations of His world mission.

**SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLIES** Administrative institutions of Bahá’u’lláh’s World Or-  
der that operate at the local and national levels and are elected according to Bahá’í  
principles. They are responsible for coordinating and directing the affairs of the  
Bahá’í community in their areas of jurisdiction. The institution of the Local Spiri-  
tual Assembly is ordained by Bahá’u’lláh in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas (referred to there as  
the “House of Justice”); the institution of the National Spiritual Assembly is estab-  
lished by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in His Will and Testament. The term “Spiritual Assembly”  
was introduced by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá so that, while the Faith is still generally unknown,  
people will not make the false deduction from the term “House of Justice” that it  
is a political institution. Regional Spiritual Assemblies have been elected in many  
areas and are gradually reduced in size and eventually replaced by National Spiritual  
Assemblies as the Faith expands and consolidates itself. See also **Elections**, **Bahá’í**.

**SUPREME HOUSE OF JUSTICE** See **Universal House of Justice**.

**SUPREME PEN** A title of **Bahá’u’lláh**.

**SÚRIY-I-MULÚK** *Tablet to the Kings*: revealed by Bahá’u’lláh in Adrianople, re-  
ferred to by Shoghi Effendi as “the most momentous Tablet revealed by Bahá’u’lláh.”  
In it Bahá’u’lláh addresses collectively the monarchs of East and West, the Sulṭán  
of Turkey, the kings of Christendom, the French and Persian ambassadors to the  
Ottoman Empire, the Muslim clergy in Constantinople, the people of Persia, and  
the philosophers of the world. In the Súriy-i-Mulúk Bahá’u’lláh unequivocally and  
forcefully proclaims His station. See *Proclamation of Bahá’u’lláh* (pp. 7–12, 47–54,  
102–03) for passages of the Súriy-i-Mulúk that have been translated into English.

T

**TABLET OF CARMEL** The charter of the world spiritual and administrative cen-  
ters of the Bahá’í Faith, revealed by Bahá’u’lláh in 1890 during one of His visits to  
Mount Carmel. See GWB, no. 11, or TB, pp. 3–5.

**TABLETS** Refers to letters revealed by Bahá’u’lláh, the Báb, and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.

**TABLETS OF THE DIVINE PLAN** Fourteen Tablets revealed by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá  
in 1916 and 1917 and referred to as the charter for propagating the Bahá’í Faith.

Addressed to the Bahá’ís of North America, the Tablets convey His mandate for  
the transmission of the Bahá’í Faith throughout the world. See also Divine Plan.

**TEN YEAR WORLD CRUSADE** See **Crusade**, **Ten Year World**.

**TONGUE OF GRANDEUR** See **Ancient Beauty**.

**TRAINING INSTITUTE**. A program designed to enrich the spiritual life of the  
participants and enable them to perform specific acts of service such as engaging in  
teaching activities, giving deepening courses, teaching children’s classes, and acti-  
vating Bahá’í community life.

**TRANSITION, AGE OF** or **PERIOD OF** See **Ages**.

**TWIN HOLY CITIES** Haifa and ‘Akká, Israel.

**TWIN HOLY SHRINES** The Shrines of Bahá’u’lláh and the Báb. See also **Shrines**.

U

**UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE** The supreme governing and legislative body  
of the Bahá’í Faith. The Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice are the  
twin, crowning institutions of the Bahá’í Administrative Order. Elected every five  
years at an international Bahá’í convention, the Universal House of Justice gives  
spiritual guidance to and directs the administrative activities of the worldwide  
Bahá’í community. It is the institution Bahá’u’lláh ordained as the agency invested  
with authority to legislate on matters not covered in His writings. In His Will and  
Testament ‘Abdu’l-Bahá elaborates on its functions and affirms that it is infallibly  
guided.

W

**WILL AND TESTAMENT OF ‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ** A document that Shoghi  
Effendi says is “unique in the annals of the world’s religious systems,” the Will and  
Testament is the charter of the Administrative Order of the Bahá’í Faith. Written,  
signed, and sealed by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, the Will and Testament consists of three sec-  
tions written at three different times between 1901 and the year of His passing. The  
Will and Testament affirms “the two-fold character of the Mission of the Báb,”  
which was to bring an independent revelation from God and to herald the coming  
of another, greater revelation through Bahá’u’lláh. It also “discloses the full station  
of” Bahá’u’lláh as the “Supreme Manifestation of God,” declares the fundamental  
beliefs of the Bahá’í Faith, establishes the institution of the Guardianship, and  
appoints Shoghi Effendi as Guardian. It provides for the election of the Universal  
House of Justice and defines its scope. It also creates the institution of the National

Spiritual Assembly, provides for the appointment of the Hands of the Cause of  
God and prescribes their obligations, and exposes the conduct of the Covenant-  
breakers.

**WORLD CENTER** See **Bahá’í World Center**.

**WORLD CONGRESS** See **Most Great Jubilee**.

**WORLD CRUSADE** See **Crusade**, **Ten Year World**.

**WORLD ORDER OF BAHÁ’U’LLÁH** Bahá’u’lláh’s “scheme for world-wide soli-  
darity” that is “destined to embrace in the fullness of time the whole of mankind.”  
The current Bahá’í Administrative Order is its nucleus and pattern, providing the  
“rudiments of the future all-enfolding Bahá’í Commonwealth.”

Y

**YÁ ‘ALÍYYU’L-A’LÁ** *O Thou the Exalted, the Most Exalted!* A form of the Báb’s  
name that is used as an invocation.

**YÁ BAHÁ’U’L-ABHÁ** *O Thou the Glory of the Most Glorious!* A form of  
**Bahá’u’lláh**’s name (the **Greatest Name**) that is used as an invocation.

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2. 7-1 TB, p. 148. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. 7-2 For the compilation, see CC 2:355–406 or http://reference.bahai.org/en/t/c/  
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4. 7-3 CC 2:371. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. 10-1 TB, p. 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. 12-1 SAQ, p. 173. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. 13-1 A reference to the compilation on Ḥuqúqu’lláh; see CC 1:489–527. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. 14-1 The compilation is too lengthy to include here; see CC 2:327–53. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. 17-1 KA, ¶182. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. 17-2 KI, ¶283; GWB, no. 89.1. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. 18-1 MBW, p. 74. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. 18-2 See WOB, pp. 161-206. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. 21-1 See CC 1:489–527. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. 21-2 The numbers in parentheses refer to the paragraphs of the compilation on  
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18. 25-1 LG, no. 288. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
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85. 67-2 BA, p. 79. [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. 68-1 Revised translation in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas: “Recite ye the verses of God every  
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87. 68-2 KA, ¶182, 149; GWB, no. 136.2. [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. 68-3 KA, ¶48. [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. 69-1 SWAB, no. 51. [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. 69-2 CC 1:957. [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. 69-3 CC 1:923. [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
92. 69-4 The translation used here differs from the final published version in the  
    Kitáb-i-Aqdas, which appears in ¶57 and reads, “Verily, it is enjoined upon you  
    to offer a feast, once in every month, though only water be served; for God hath  
    purposed to bind hearts together, albeit through both earthly and heavenly means.” [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
93. 69-5 CC 1:920. [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
94. 70-1 The compilation is too lengthy to include here; see CC 1, pp. 417–58. [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
95. 76-1 The compilation is too lengthy to include here; see CC 1, pp. 65–92. [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
96. 76-2 SWAB, no. 220.1. [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
97. 81-1 The compilation is too lengthy to include here; see CC 3, pp. 139–53. [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
98. 82-1 GWB, no. 117. [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
99. 85-1 ESW, p. 26; CC 2:1823; CF, p. 9; CC 1:511. [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
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111. 102-2 HW, Arabic no. 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-111)
112. 102-3 See no. 60, pp. 102–20. [↑](#footnote-ref-112)
113. 107-1 See no. 109, pp. 203–5. [↑](#footnote-ref-113)
114. 107-2 See no. 91, p. 168. [↑](#footnote-ref-114)
115. 107-3 The statement was published by the National Spiritual Assembly of the  
     Bahá’ís of the United States under the title *Bahá’u’lláh* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í  
     Publishing Trust, 1991). [↑](#footnote-ref-115)
116. 108-1 WOB, pp. 171, 155. [↑](#footnote-ref-116)
117. 108-2 WOB, p. 40. [↑](#footnote-ref-117)
118. 108-3 PUP, pp. 49, 143; CF, p. 32. [↑](#footnote-ref-118)
119. 109-1 TDP, no. 8.8. [↑](#footnote-ref-119)
120. 109-2 John 10:16 (KJV). [↑](#footnote-ref-120)
121. 118-1 LDG, p. 120. [↑](#footnote-ref-121)
122. 119-1 See no. 118, pp. 240–43. [↑](#footnote-ref-122)
123. 122-1 LDG, pp. 297–8. [↑](#footnote-ref-123)
124. 122-2 LDG, p. 297; CC 2:1519; LG, no. 178; MC, pp. 39, 51. [↑](#footnote-ref-124)
125. 122-3 ADJ, ¶39. [↑](#footnote-ref-125)
126. 122-4 BA, p. 64. [↑](#footnote-ref-126)
127. 122-5 CC 2:1401. [↑](#footnote-ref-127)
128. 122-6 MC, p. 51. [↑](#footnote-ref-128)
129. 122-7 LDG, p. 297. [↑](#footnote-ref-129)
130. 124-1 LG, no. 1223. [↑](#footnote-ref-130)
131. 129-1 SWAB, no. 5.1; SH, ¶152; WOB, p. 102; KA, ¶181. [↑](#footnote-ref-131)
132. 129-2 ADJ, ¶103. [↑](#footnote-ref-132)
133. 129-3 TDH, no. 158.14. [↑](#footnote-ref-133)
134. 129-4 GPB, p. 288. [↑](#footnote-ref-134)
135. 129-5 TB, p. 261. [↑](#footnote-ref-135)
136. 129-6 HW, Arabic, no. 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-136)
137. 129-7 GWB, no. 128.10. [↑](#footnote-ref-137)
138. 129-8 TB, p. 169; ESW, p. 11; GWB, no. 47; TB, p. 169; HW, Arabic, no. 5;  
     GWB, no. 45. [↑](#footnote-ref-138)
139. 129-9 ESW, p. 46. [↑](#footnote-ref-139)
140. 129-10 KA, ¶38. [↑](#footnote-ref-140)
141. 130-1 The compilation enclosed with this communication is unpublished. [↑](#footnote-ref-141)
142. 131-1 The following text was read on the occasion of the ceremony at Bahjí on the  
     morning of 28 May 1992 for the placement of the Roll of Honor of the Knights of  
     Bahá’u’lláh at the entrance door of the Most Holy Shrine. [↑](#footnote-ref-142)
143. 131-2 SWB, 7:1.2. [↑](#footnote-ref-143)
144. 131-3 PDC, p. 100; ESW, pp. 45, 77. [↑](#footnote-ref-144)
145. 131-4 ESW, pp. 76–77. [↑](#footnote-ref-145)
146. 131-5 GPB, p. 220; ESW, p. 43. [↑](#footnote-ref-146)
147. 131-6 TB, p. 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-147)
148. 131-7 ADJ, ¶36. [↑](#footnote-ref-148)
149. 131-8 PDC, p. 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-149)
150. 131-9 ADJ, ¶109; GWB, no. 96.2; ESW, p. 46. [↑](#footnote-ref-150)
151. 131-10 WOB, p. 106. [↑](#footnote-ref-151)
152. 131-11 MBW, p. 155. [↑](#footnote-ref-152)
153. 131-12 TB, p. 169. [↑](#footnote-ref-153)
154. 131-13 ESW, p. 153. [↑](#footnote-ref-154)
155. 140-1 GWB, nos 82.1, 82.6. [↑](#footnote-ref-155)
156. 140-2 GWB, no. 22.4. [↑](#footnote-ref-156)
157. 140-3 GWB, no. 22.10. [↑](#footnote-ref-157)
158. 140-4 SH, ¶44. [↑](#footnote-ref-158)
159. 140-5 TDH, no. 158.19. [↑](#footnote-ref-159)
160. 140-6 LG, no. 1552. [↑](#footnote-ref-160)
161. 140-7 See no. 90, p. 160–67. [↑](#footnote-ref-161)
162. 140-8 WOB, p. 125. [↑](#footnote-ref-162)
163. 140-9 GWB, no. 13.6. [↑](#footnote-ref-163)
164. 141-1 GWB, no. 128.10, 161.2. [↑](#footnote-ref-164)
165. 141-2 See MUHJ, no. 37. [↑](#footnote-ref-165)
166. This Message was delivered via satellite during final day of the second Bahá’í  
     World Congress, held in New York City, 23–26 November 1992. [↑](#footnote-ref-166)
167. 145-1 GWB, no. 109.2. [↑](#footnote-ref-167)
168. 145-2 ADJ, ¶101. [↑](#footnote-ref-168)
169. 145-3 TB, p. 125. [↑](#footnote-ref-169)
170. 145-4 WOB, p. 187. [↑](#footnote-ref-170)
171. 145-5 WOB, p. 43. [↑](#footnote-ref-171)
172. 145-6 ADJ, ¶108. [↑](#footnote-ref-172)
173. 145-7 GWB, nos 4.2, 70.1. [↑](#footnote-ref-173)
174. 145-8 WOB, p. 41. [↑](#footnote-ref-174)
175. 145-9 WOB, p. 41. [↑](#footnote-ref-175)
176. 145-10 GPB, p. 288. [↑](#footnote-ref-176)
177. 149-1 PUP, pp. 232–33. [↑](#footnote-ref-177)
178. 149-2 SWAB, no. 129.11. [↑](#footnote-ref-178)
179. 149-3 PUP, p. 105. [↑](#footnote-ref-179)
180. 149-4 LG, no. 2079. [↑](#footnote-ref-180)
181. 149-5 CC 2:2145. [↑](#footnote-ref-181)
182. 149-6 GWB, nos. 136.6, 60.3. [↑](#footnote-ref-182)
183. 149-7 LG, no. 1156. [↑](#footnote-ref-183)
184. 149-8 LG, no. 510. [↑](#footnote-ref-184)
185. 149-9 WOB, p. 187. [↑](#footnote-ref-185)
186. 150-1 PDIC, ¶51. [↑](#footnote-ref-186)
187. 150-2 GPB, p. 213. [↑](#footnote-ref-187)
188. 150-3 MBW, p. 78; GPB, p. 213. [↑](#footnote-ref-188)
189. 150-4 TB, pp. 267, 200. [↑](#footnote-ref-189)
190. 151-1 SAQ, p. 64. [↑](#footnote-ref-190)
191. 151-2 GWB, no. 99. [↑](#footnote-ref-191)
192. 151-3 CF, p. 130. [↑](#footnote-ref-192)
193. 153-1 See MUHJ, no. 147. [↑](#footnote-ref-193)
194. 162-1 MUHJ, no. 18.4. [↑](#footnote-ref-194)
195. 162-2 ADJ, ¶78 (2006). [↑](#footnote-ref-195)
196. 163-1 HW, Persian, no. 82. [↑](#footnote-ref-196)
197. 163-2 TB, p. 26. [↑](#footnote-ref-197)
198. 164-1 See no. 154, p. 334. [↑](#footnote-ref-198)
199. 165-1 KA, ¶43. [↑](#footnote-ref-199)
200. 169-1 TB, p. 96. [↑](#footnote-ref-200)
201. 169-2 CC 1:506. [↑](#footnote-ref-201)
202. 169-3 KI, ¶77. [↑](#footnote-ref-202)
203. 170-1 UD, p. 423. [↑](#footnote-ref-203)
204. 172-1 The compilation is too lengthy to include here; see CC 3, pp. 154–203. [↑](#footnote-ref-204)
205. 176-1 GWB, no. 120.3. [↑](#footnote-ref-205)
206. 176-2 WOB, p. 147; KA, ¶181. [↑](#footnote-ref-206)
207. 176-3 GPB, p. 213; MBW, p. 84. [↑](#footnote-ref-207)
208. 176-4 MBW, p. 63. [↑](#footnote-ref-208)
209. 176-5 TDH, no. 64.6. [↑](#footnote-ref-209)
210. 176-6 MBW, p. 64. [↑](#footnote-ref-210)
211. 176-7 GPB, pp. 315–6. [↑](#footnote-ref-211)
212. 176-8 Isaiah 2:2 (KJV). [↑](#footnote-ref-212)
213. 176-9 ESW, p. 145. [↑](#footnote-ref-213)
214. 177-1 WT, pp. 11, 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-214)
215. 181-1 PEBT, p. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-215)
216. 181-2 See no. 173, p. 367; and CC 3, pp. 154–203. [↑](#footnote-ref-216)
217. 182-1 GWB, no. 70.1. [↑](#footnote-ref-217)
218. 183-1 ADJ, ¶78. [↑](#footnote-ref-218)
219. 183-2 ADJ, ¶27, 28. [↑](#footnote-ref-219)
220. 183-3 ADJ, ¶71. [↑](#footnote-ref-220)
221. 183-4 ADJ, ¶101. [↑](#footnote-ref-221)
222. 183-5 ADJ, ¶102. [↑](#footnote-ref-222)
223. 183-6 ADJ, ¶15. [↑](#footnote-ref-223)
224. 183-7 The latter two letters can be found in CF, pp. 4-37 and 122–32, respectively. [↑](#footnote-ref-224)
225. 183-8 WT, p. 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-225)
226. 183-9 MUHJ, no. 111.14. [↑](#footnote-ref-226)
227. 183-10 DG, p. 50. [↑](#footnote-ref-227)
228. 183-11 TB, p. 138. [↑](#footnote-ref-228)
229. 183-12 See MUHJ, no. 72. [↑](#footnote-ref-229)
230. 183-13 BA, pp. 45, 46. [↑](#footnote-ref-230)
231. 183-14 WOB, p. 43. [↑](#footnote-ref-231)
232. 183-15 LG, no. 277. [↑](#footnote-ref-232)
233. 183-16 LG, no. 1344. [↑](#footnote-ref-233)
234. 183-17 LGA, p. 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-234)
235. 183-18 BA, pp. 63–64. [↑](#footnote-ref-235)
236. 183-19 BA, p. 79. [↑](#footnote-ref-236)
237. 183-20 LG, no. 119. [↑](#footnote-ref-237)
238. 185-1 UD, p. 207. [↑](#footnote-ref-238)
239. 187-1 HW, Persian, no. 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-239)
240. 187-2 GWB, no. 159.3. [↑](#footnote-ref-240)
241. 187-3 GWB, no. 120.1. [↑](#footnote-ref-241)
242. 192-1 KA, p. i. [↑](#footnote-ref-242)
243. 192-2 KA, p. 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-243)
244. 192-3 TB, p. 68. [↑](#footnote-ref-244)
245. 194-1 The statement is available online at http://www.bic-un.bahai.org/95-0303.  
     htm. [↑](#footnote-ref-245)
246. 195-1 The compilation is too long to include here; see CC 3, pp. 226–64; the

     compilation is also available online at http://reference.bahai.org/en/t/c/SCH/. [↑](#footnote-ref-246)
247. 196-1 BA, p. 64. [↑](#footnote-ref-247)
248. 198-1 MBW, p. 71. [↑](#footnote-ref-248)
249. 200-1 MBW, p. 74. [↑](#footnote-ref-249)
250. 200-2 GWB, nos 129.3, 128.10. [↑](#footnote-ref-250)
251. 200-3 PUP, p. 174. [↑](#footnote-ref-251)
252. 201-1 Reference to a letter of 15 June 1935 from Shoghi Effendi, published in the  
     United States *Bahá’í News*, no. 95, October 1935, p. 2, and in *Messages to America:  
     Selected Letters and Cablegrams Addressed to the Bahá’ís of North America, 1932–1946*  
     (Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Committee, 1947), pp. 4–5. The referenced text can  
     also be found in TDH, no. 16. [↑](#footnote-ref-252)
253. 201-2 WOB, p. 66. [↑](#footnote-ref-253)
254. 201-3 BA, p. 147. [↑](#footnote-ref-254)
255. 201-4 BA, p. 62. [↑](#footnote-ref-255)
256. 201-5 WT, pp. 14–15. [↑](#footnote-ref-256)
257. 201-6 LG, no. 1604. [↑](#footnote-ref-257)
258. 201-7 WOB, p. 203. [↑](#footnote-ref-258)
259. 201-8 BA, p. 47. [↑](#footnote-ref-259)
260. 201-9 WOB, pp. 6–7. [↑](#footnote-ref-260)
261. 201-10 WOB, pp. 64–65. [↑](#footnote-ref-261)
262. 201-11 CF, p. 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-262)
263. 201-12 WOB, p. 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-263)
264. 201-13 MBW, p. 155. [↑](#footnote-ref-264)
265. 201-14 ADJ, ¶52. [↑](#footnote-ref-265)
266. 201-15 WO B, p. 152. [↑](#footnote-ref-266)
267. 203-1 WOB, p. 203. [↑](#footnote-ref-267)
268. 203-2 GWB, no. 84.4. [↑](#footnote-ref-268)
269. 205-1 CC 1:148. [↑](#footnote-ref-269)
270. 205-2 LG, no. 1223. [↑](#footnote-ref-270)
271. 205-3 SWAB, no. 102.1; SAQ, p. 215. [↑](#footnote-ref-271)
272. 205-4 LG, no. 698. [↑](#footnote-ref-272)
273. 205-5 LG, no. 1223. [↑](#footnote-ref-273)
274. 206-1 See CC 2, pp. 327–54. [↑](#footnote-ref-274)
275. 206-2 Note that in the published version “people” has been incorrectly given for  
     priest. [↑](#footnote-ref-275)
276. 206-3 CC 2:2050. [↑](#footnote-ref-276)
277. 210-1 PUP, p. 194. [↑](#footnote-ref-277)
278. 213-1 BA, p. 66. [↑](#footnote-ref-278)
279. 213-2 BA, pp. 3, 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-279)
280. 213-3 ADJ, ¶76. [↑](#footnote-ref-280)
281. 215-1 ESW, p. 26. [↑](#footnote-ref-281)
282. 215-2 SH, ¶63. [↑](#footnote-ref-282)
283. 215-3 BA, p. 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-283)
284. 216-1 The text of the statement is available online at http://wvwv.ibiblio.org/Bahai/  
     Texts/English/Turning-Point-For-All-Nations.html. [↑](#footnote-ref-284)
285. 216-2 ADJ, ¶76. [↑](#footnote-ref-285)
286. 216-3 GWB, no. 129.3. [↑](#footnote-ref-286)
287. 216-4 CF, p. 131. [↑](#footnote-ref-287)
288. 216-5 ALNZ, p. 34. [↑](#footnote-ref-288)
289. 216-6 GWB, no. 96.3 [↑](#footnote-ref-289)
290. 216-7 CC 1:26. [↑](#footnote-ref-290)
291. 216-8 PUP, p. 90. [↑](#footnote-ref-291)
292. 216-9 WOB, p. 170. [↑](#footnote-ref-292)
293. 216-10 ADJ, ¶73. [↑](#footnote-ref-293)
294. 216-11 PUP, ¶303. [↑](#footnote-ref-294)
295. 217-1 ADJ, ¶90. [↑](#footnote-ref-295)
296. 217-2 CC 2:1336. [↑](#footnote-ref-296)
297. 218-1 MIS, p. 203. [↑](#footnote-ref-297)
298. 220-1 See TDP, no. 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-298)
299. 220-2 BA, p. 66. [↑](#footnote-ref-299)
300. 220-3 HE, p. 36. [↑](#footnote-ref-300)
301. 220-4 MC, p. 60. [↑](#footnote-ref-301)
302. 220-5 TDP, no. 5.2. [↑](#footnote-ref-302)
303. 220-6 CF, pp. 141–42. [↑](#footnote-ref-303)
304. 220-7 TDP, no. 9.3. [↑](#footnote-ref-304)
305. 220-8 TDP, no. 7.4. [↑](#footnote-ref-305)
306. 221-1 UD, p. 319. [↑](#footnote-ref-306)
307. 221-2 See CC 3, pp. 154–203. [↑](#footnote-ref-307)
308. 222-1 ABL, p. 68. [↑](#footnote-ref-308)
309. 222-2 TB, p. 89. [↑](#footnote-ref-309)
310. 223-1 GWB, no. 163.2. [↑](#footnote-ref-310)
311. 223-2 KA, ¶53. [↑](#footnote-ref-311)
312. 224.1 WOB, p. 78. [↑](#footnote-ref-312)
313. 224-2 JTA, p. 89. [↑](#footnote-ref-313)
314. 224-3 LGANZ, p. 138. [↑](#footnote-ref-314)
315. 224-4 MBW, p. 111. [↑](#footnote-ref-315)
316. 225-1 SWAB, no. 212. [↑](#footnote-ref-316)
317. 225-2 See no. 48, pp. 81–85. [↑](#footnote-ref-317)
318. 225-3 MUHJ, no. 453.8. [↑](#footnote-ref-318)
319. 227-1 PDC, p. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-319)
320. 227-2 GWB, no. 4.1. [↑](#footnote-ref-320)
321. 227-3 GWB, no. 70.1. [↑](#footnote-ref-321)
322. 227-4 WOB, p. 163. [↑](#footnote-ref-322)
323. 228-1 MUHJ, no. 23.11, quoted from Makátíb-i-‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Vol. III, pp. 500–  
     501. [↑](#footnote-ref-323)
324. 228-2 WOB, p. 150. [↑](#footnote-ref-324)
325. 228-3 CUHJ, p. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-325)
326. 228-4 See no. 52, pp. 87–91. [↑](#footnote-ref-326)
327. 229-1 MUHJ, no. 147. [↑](#footnote-ref-327)
328. 229-2 Note that in paragraphs 9 and 10, any action taken by an executor should be  
     within the bounds of civil law. [↑](#footnote-ref-328)
329. 231-1 GWB, no. 96.3. [↑](#footnote-ref-329)
330. 243-1 See no. 159, pp. 339–40. [↑](#footnote-ref-330)
331. 243-2 See no. 161, pp. 341–47. [↑](#footnote-ref-331)
332. 247-1 KA, ¶119. [↑](#footnote-ref-332)
333. 247-2 KA, Notes, no. 144. [↑](#footnote-ref-333)
334. 247-3 ADJ, ¶49. [↑](#footnote-ref-334)
335. 247-4 LG, no. 1171. [↑](#footnote-ref-335)
336. 247-5 CC 2:1790. [↑](#footnote-ref-336)
337. 247-6 HW, Persian, no. 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-337)
338. 247-7 HW, Arabic, no. 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-338)
339. 248-1 SWAB, no. 7.2. [↑](#footnote-ref-339)
340. 248-2 GWB, no. 151.1. [↑](#footnote-ref-340)
341. 248-3 GWB, no. 96.3. [↑](#footnote-ref-341)
342. 248-4 SWAB, no. 97.2. [↑](#footnote-ref-342)
343. 248-5 SWAB, no. 119.1–2. [↑](#footnote-ref-343)
344. 248-6 SWAB, no. 102.3. [↑](#footnote-ref-344)
345. 248-7 LG, no. 763. [↑](#footnote-ref-345)
346. 248-8 GWB, no. 151.4. [↑](#footnote-ref-346)
347. 250-1 Letter of 18 October 1927 to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís  
     of the United States and Canada. [↑](#footnote-ref-347)
348. 251-1 MUHJ, nos 23, 35, and 75. [↑](#footnote-ref-348)
349. 251-2 WT, p. 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-349)
350. 251-3 WT, pp. 25–26. [↑](#footnote-ref-350)
351. 251-4 WOB, p. 153. [↑](#footnote-ref-351)
352. 251-5 MUHJ, no. 111.12. [↑](#footnote-ref-352)
353. 255-1 MUHJ, no. 23.3. [↑](#footnote-ref-353)
354. 255-2 MUHJ, no. 5.1. [↑](#footnote-ref-354)
355. 255-3 MUHJ, no. 23.11. [↑](#footnote-ref-355)
356. 255-4 MUHJ, no. 23.20. [↑](#footnote-ref-356)
357. 255-5 DG, p. 61. [↑](#footnote-ref-357)
358. 257-1 LG, no. 283. [↑](#footnote-ref-358)
359. 259-1 MUHJ, no. 94. [↑](#footnote-ref-359)
360. 263-1 CF, p. 140. [↑](#footnote-ref-360)
361. 263-2 PDC, ¶5. [↑](#footnote-ref-361)
362. 263-3 ADJ, ¶77. [↑](#footnote-ref-362)
363. 266-1 The document entitled “Training Institutes” is published in *Turning Point:  
     Selected Messages of the Universal House of Justice and Supplementary Material, 1996–  
     2006* (West Palm Beach: Palabra Publications, 2006). [↑](#footnote-ref-363)
364. 270-1 See no. 216, pp. 480–95. [↑](#footnote-ref-364)
365. 270-2 See no. 231, pp. 546–47. [↑](#footnote-ref-365)
366. 273-1 MUHJ, no. 426.3a. [↑](#footnote-ref-366)
367. 275-1 MUHJ, no. 131. [↑](#footnote-ref-367)
368. 281-1 TB, p. 173. [↑](#footnote-ref-368)
369. 281-2 KA, p. 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-369)
370. 293-1 See no. 290, p. 655. [↑](#footnote-ref-370)
371. 296-1 MC, p. 66. [↑](#footnote-ref-371)
372. 303-1 See no. 204, pp. 445–46. [↑](#footnote-ref-372)
373. 305-1 See no. 304, pp. 678–79. [↑](#footnote-ref-373)
374. 305-2 See no. 302, pp. 674–76. [↑](#footnote-ref-374)
375. 307-1 MUHJ, no. 162. [↑](#footnote-ref-375)
376. 310-1 GWB, no. 96.3. [↑](#footnote-ref-376)
377. 311-1 HW, Arabic, no. 46. [↑](#footnote-ref-377)
378. 315-1 KA, ¶18. [↑](#footnote-ref-378)
379. 326-1 See no. 250, pp. 582–93. [↑](#footnote-ref-379)
380. 328-1 The document entitled “Training Institutes and Systematic Growth” is  
     published in *Turning Point: Selected Messages of the Universal House of Justice and  
     Supplementary Material, 1996–2006* (West Palm Beach: Palabra Publications,  
     2006). [↑](#footnote-ref-380)
381. 330-1 DND, p. 79. [↑](#footnote-ref-381)
382. 330-2 LG, no. 173. [↑](#footnote-ref-382)
383. 330-3 DG, no. 128. [↑](#footnote-ref-383)
384. 330-4 DG, no. 16. [↑](#footnote-ref-384)
385. 330-5 See no. 250, pp. 582–93. [↑](#footnote-ref-385)
386. 336-1 See no. 315, pp. 697–99. [↑](#footnote-ref-386)
387. 337-1 WOB, pp. 152–53. [↑](#footnote-ref-387)
388. 337-2 WOB, p. 154. [↑](#footnote-ref-388)
389. 337-3 BA, p. 64. [↑](#footnote-ref-389)
390. 337-4 BA, pp. 63–64. [↑](#footnote-ref-390)
391. 337-5 MUHJ, no. 111.14. [↑](#footnote-ref-391)
392. 338-1 LG, no. 454. [↑](#footnote-ref-392)
393. 339-1 PUP, p. 424. [↑](#footnote-ref-393)
394. 345-1 The referenced compilation on Ḥuqúqu’lláh was released on 4 July 1985,  
     and a new compilation entitled “Ḥuqúqu’lláh: The Right of God” was issued by  
     the Universal House of Justice in April 2007. [↑](#footnote-ref-394)
395. 345-2 The numbers in parentheses refer to the paragraphs of the compilation on  
     Ḥuqúqu’lláh issued by the Universal House of Justice. [↑](#footnote-ref-395)
396. 345-3 Reference to the extract number in parentheses has been removed from the  
     first sentence in the 2007 revision to the Codification. [↑](#footnote-ref-396)
397. 345-4 See III.C.1. [↑](#footnote-ref-397)
398. 348-1 SWAB, no. 204.2. [↑](#footnote-ref-398)
399. 351-1 GWB, no. 11.4. [↑](#footnote-ref-399)
400. 352-1 See no. 153, pp. 333–34. [↑](#footnote-ref-400)
401. 352-2 MUHJ, no. 147. [↑](#footnote-ref-401)
402. 352-3 See no. 315, pp. 697–99. [↑](#footnote-ref-402)
403. 355-1 KA, ¶1. [↑](#footnote-ref-403)
404. 355-2 WT, p. 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-404)
405. 355-3 BA, p. 90. [↑](#footnote-ref-405)
406. 355-4 GWB, no. 70.1. [↑](#footnote-ref-406)
407. 356-1 PDC, ¶58. [↑](#footnote-ref-407)
408. 356-2 PDC, ¶60–62. [↑](#footnote-ref-408)
409. 356-3 ESW, pp. 30–31. [↑](#footnote-ref-409)
410. 356-4 GWB, no. 117.1. [↑](#footnote-ref-410)
411. 356-5 WOB, pp. 37–38. [↑](#footnote-ref-411)
412. 356-6 PUP, p. 174. [↑](#footnote-ref-412)
413. 356-7 ABC, p. 35. [↑](#footnote-ref-413)
414. 356-8 LG, no. 1425. [↑](#footnote-ref-414)
415. 356-9 MUHJ, no. 422. [↑](#footnote-ref-415)
416. 356-10 WOB, p. 44. [↑](#footnote-ref-416)
417. 356-11 SWAB, no. 227.31. [↑](#footnote-ref-417)
418. 356-12 WOB, p. 191. [↑](#footnote-ref-418)
419. 356-13 WOB, pp. 191–92. [↑](#footnote-ref-419)
420. 356-14 WOB, p. 193. [↑](#footnote-ref-420)
421. 356-15 CF, p. 33. [↑](#footnote-ref-421)
422. 356-16 WOB, p. 44. [↑](#footnote-ref-422)
423. 356-17 PDC, p. 200. [↑](#footnote-ref-423)
424. 356-18 MUHJ, no. 438.1–7. [↑](#footnote-ref-424)
425. 356-19 MUHJ, no. 438.1–7. [↑](#footnote-ref-425)
426. 356-20 MUHJ, no. 438.25–28. [↑](#footnote-ref-426)
427. 356-21 MUHJ, no. 438.54–55. [↑](#footnote-ref-427)
428. 356-22 See no. 216, pp. 480–95, Riḍván message BE 153. [↑](#footnote-ref-428)
429. 356-23 See no. 263, pp. 612–17, Riḍván message BE 155. [↑](#footnote-ref-429)
430. 356-24 See no. 331, pp. 716–29, 2000 Riḍván message. [↑](#footnote-ref-430)