

That Promising Continent

*Selections from the Writings of
'Abdu'l-Bahá, the Writings
and Letters of Shoghi Effendi
and the Letters Written on
his Behalf on Africa*

The National Spiritual Assembly
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Foreword

Africa is truly a continent of great promise, and the Bahá'ís of Africa have a vital part to play in fulfilling that promise. 'You come with an extraordinary history of achievement,' wrote the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of Africa in April 1996, 'which indicates that you are well equipped spiritually and administratively, and in the inherent potential of your people . . . 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.'

In that same letter, the Universal House of Justice wrote further: 'The spiritual endowments of Africa derive naturally from the creative forces universally released by the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh but these have been marvellously 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 Centre 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 favoured 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".'

The Universal House of Justice went on to express its confidence that 'Africa is poised to register a victory for the Cause that will reaffirm its position among the front ranks of our world community,' and expressed a longing to see the '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.' The Universal House of Justice then added '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

* Bahá'u'lláh † 'Abdu'l-Bahá

the growth and development of vibrant communities in which adults, youth and children are more and more integrated and active. To fulfil these expectations is to demonstrate to a sceptical 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.'

Some years ago, the Universal House of Justice had prepared a compilation of extracts concerning Africa from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, writings and letters of Shoghi Effendi, and extracts from letters written on his behalf entitled '... That Vast but Promising Continent ...'. The International Teaching Centre, the agency that co-ordinates the expansion and consolidation of the Bahá'í Faith under the direction of the Universal House of Justice, commended it to the Continental Board of Counsellors in Africa who now feel the study of this compilation will stimulate among the Bahá'ís of Africa a greater awareness of their high spiritual destiny, a better appreciation of the victories they have already achieved, a clearer understanding of their strengths and the opportunities they face, and more resolute action on the part of institutions, communities and individual believers.

We have, with the permission of the Universal House of Justice, rearranged this compilation and now publish it in the hope that it will inspire the Friends throughout the continent and assist them to achieve 'victory upon victory.'

The National Spiritual Assembly
of the Bahá'ís of South Africa

That Promising Contract

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That Promising Continent

There is no Distinction of Colour

Indeed, the world of humanity is like one kindred and one family. Because of the climatic differences of the zones, through the passing of ages, colours have become different. In the torrid zone, on account of the intensity of the effect of the sun throughout the ages the black race appeared. In the frigid zone, on account of the severity of the cold and the ineffectiveness of the heat of the sun throughout the ages the white race appeared. In the temperate zone, the yellow, brown and red races came into existence. But in reality mankind is one race. Because it is of one race unquestionably there must be unity and harmony and no separation or discord.

(From a Tablet of 'Abdu'l-Bahá to an individual believer, published in Star of the West vol 13 no 11 (February 1923) p 307)

In the estimation of God, there is no distinction of colour; all are one in the colour and beauty of servitude to Him. Colour is not important; the heart is all-important. It mattereth not what the exterior may be if the heart is pure and white within. God doth not behold differences of hue and complexion. He looketh at the hearts. He whose morals and virtues are praiseworthy is preferred in the presence of God; he who is devoted to the Kingdom is most beloved. In the realm of genesis and creation the question of colour is of least importance.

('Abdu'l-Bahá, quoted in Shoghi Effendi, The Advent of Divine Justice (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust 1984) pp 37-8)

Bahá'u'lláh once compared the coloured people to the black pupil of the eye surrounded by the white. In this black pupil is seen the reflection of that which is before it, and through it the light of the spirit shineth forth.

('Abdu'l-Bahá, quoted in The Advent of Divine Justice p 37)

O handmaid of God! Render thanks to the Lord that among that race thou art the first believer, that thou hast engaged in spreading sweet-scented breezes, and hast arisen to guide others. It is my hope that through the bounties and favours of the Abhá Beauty* thy countenance may be illumined, thy disposition pleasing, and thy fragrance diffused, that thine eyes may be seeing, thine ears attentive, thy tongue eloquent, thy heart filled with supreme gladtidings, and thy soul refreshed by divine fragrances, so that thou mayest arise among that race and occupy thyself with the edification of the people, and become filled with light. Although the pupil of the eye is black, it is the source of light. Thou shalt likewise be. The disposition should be bright, not the appearance. Therefore, with supreme confidence and certitude, say: 'O God! Make me a radiant light, a shining lamp, and a brilliant star, so that I may illumine the hearts with an effulgent ray from Thy Kingdom of Abhá. . . .'

(From a newly translated Tablet of 'Abdu'l-Bahá to an individual believer)

Indeed, the hearts of the Africans are like unto a scroll which is free from any trace. It is possible for thee to write thereon any phrase, provided thou showest forth patience, and hast a heart as firm as a mighty mountain.

(From a newly translated Tablet of 'Abdu'l-Bahá to an individual believer)

* Bahá'u'lláh

Taking the Faith to Africa from Abroad

The moment this divine Message is carried forward by the American believers from the shores of America and is propagated through the continents of Europe, of Asia, of Africa and of Australasia, and as far as the islands of the Pacific, this community will find itself securely established upon the throne of an everlasting dominion.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá Tablets of the Divine Plan (Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Trust 1977) p 38)

In time, we all hope, South Africa will become as great a centre of divine guidance as America is now. Ensuring its firm hold there, the Cause will undoubtedly begin to spread in the other regions of that vast continent.

(From letter of 12 September 1926 on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer)

Southern Africa, where some start has been already made is a promising field for teaching.

(From letter of 23 September 1936 on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer)

The Guardian feels very strongly that the Negro Bahá’ís have great responsibilities, both towards their own race and towards their fellow-believers. They must not only arise to teach the Cause to the members of their own race, but must do all in their power to ensure that within their Bahá’í Community itself the Negro and white believers understand and love each other and are truly as one soul in different bodies. Our allegiance as believers is to Bahá’u’lláh; we must fix our attention and devotion on Him, and His Will, and, heedless of the shortcomings of our fellow-Bahá’ís, act as He would have us toward them.

(From letter of 23 November 1941 on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer)

HOUR PROPITIOUS GALVANIZED FIRMLY KNIT BODY BELIEVERS
BRACE ITSELF EMBARK AFTER ONE YEAR RESPITE YET ANOTHER HIS-
TORIC UNDERTAKING MARKING FORMAL INAUGURATION TWO YEAR
PLAN CONSTITUTING PRELUDE INITIATION SYSTEMATIC CAMPAIGN
DESIGNED CARRY TORCH FAITH TERRITORIES DARK CONTINENT
WHOSE NORTHERN SOUTHERN FRINGES WERE SUCCESSIVELY ILLU-
MINATED COURSE MINISTRIES BAHÁ'U'LLÁH 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ. HOUR
STRUCK UNDERTAKE PRELIMINARY STEPS IMPLANT BANNER FAITH
AMIDST AFRICAN TRIBES MENTIONED TABLET CENTRE COVENANT
SIGNALIZING ASSOCIATION VICTORIOUS BRITISH BAHÁ'Í COMMUNITY
WITH SISTER COMMUNITIES UNITED STATES EGYPT DESIGNED LAY
STRUCTURAL BASIS BAHÁ'Í ADMINISTRATIVE ORDER SCALE COMPA-
RABLE FOUNDATION ALREADY ESTABLISHED NORTH SOUTH AMERI-
CAN EUROPEAN AUSTRALIAN CONTINENTS. . . .

*(Cable dated 26 April 1950 to the British National Convention,
published in Unfolding Destiny: The Messages from the
Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith to the Bahá'í Community of the
British Isles (London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust 1981) p 245)*

FEEL MOVED APPEAL TO GALLANT GREAT-HEARTED AMERICAN
BAHÁ'Í COMMUNITY ARISE EVE LAUNCHING FAR-REACHING HIS-
TORIC CAMPAIGN BY SISTER COMMUNITY BRITISH ISLES LEND VAL-
UED ASSISTANCE MERITORIOUS ENTERPRISE UNDERTAKEN PRIMA-
RILY ILLUMINATION TRIBES EAST WEST AFRICA ENVISAGED TABLETS
CENTRE COVENANT REVEALED DARKEST HOUR HIS MINISTRY. AP-
PEAL PARTICULARLY ITS DEARLY BELOVED MEMBERS BELONGING
NEGRO RACE PARTICIPATE CONTEMPLATED PROJECT MARKING SIG-
NIFICANT MILESTONE WORLD UNFOLDMENT FAITH SUPPLEMENTING
WORK INITIATED FIFTY YEARS AGO NORTH AMERICAN CONTINENT
FORGING FRESH LINKS BINDING AMERICAN BRITISH EGYPTIAN COM-
MUNITIES PROVIDING PRELUDE FULL SCALE OPERATIONS DESTINED
BE LAUNCHED LATER PERIOD UNFOLDMENT DIVINE PLAN AIMING
CONVERSION BACKWARD OPPRESSED MASSES SWIFTLY AWAKENING
CONTINENT.

*(Cable of the Guardian dated 4 August 1950 published in Citadel
of Faith: Messages to America 1947-1957 (Wilmette: Bahá'í
Publishing Trust 1980) pp 87-8)*

In one of your letters you mentioned some Africans who have visited the London Centre and their attitude: great patience must be used in dealing with the childlike members of some of these primitive races. They are innocent in heart and have certainly had a very bad example, in many Christians, of a purely mercenary approach to religion; but if their hearts and minds once become illumined with the Faith they could make very fine believers.

(From letter of 29 April 1948 on behalf of the Guardian to the National Spiritual Assembly of the British Isles)

There are no specific tribes listed in the Master's Tablets; the pioneering should be directed at present towards the most feasible possibilities.

(From letter of 28 June 1950 on behalf of the Guardian to the National Spiritual Assembly of the British Isles published in Unfolding Destiny p 253)

FERVENTLY PRAYING PARTICIPATION BRITISH AMERICAN PERSIAN EGYPTIAN NATIONAL ASSEMBLIES UNIQUE EPOCH-MAKING ENTERPRISE AFRICAN CONTINENT MAY PROVE PRELUDE CONVOCATION FIRST AFRICAN TEACHING CONFERENCE LEADING EVENTUALLY INITIATION UNDERTAKINGS INVOLVING COLLABORATION ALL NATIONAL ASSEMBLIES BAHÁ'Í WORLD THEREBY PAVING WAY ULTIMATE ORGANIC UNION THESE ASSEMBLIES THROUGH FORMATION INTERNATIONAL HOUSE JUSTICE DESTINED LAUNCH ENTERPRISES EMBRACING WHOLE BAHÁ'Í WORLD.

(From a cable of the Guardian dated 17 January 1951 to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, published in Citadel of Faith p 90 and Unfolding Destiny pp 256-7)

Indeed the birth of this African enterprise, in the opening decade of the second Bahá'í century, coinciding as it does with the formation of the International Bahá'í Council,* should be acclaimed as an event of peculiar significance in the evolution of our beloved

* The International Bahá'í Council was instituted by Shoghi Effendi in 1951 as a forerunner of the Universal House of Justice.

Faith. Both events will, no doubt, be hailed by posterity as simultaneous and compelling evidences of the irresistible unfoldment of a divinely appointed Administrative Order and of the development, on an international scale, of its subsidiary agencies, heralding the establishment of the Supreme Legislative Body designed to crown the Administrative Edifice now being laboriously erected by the privileged builders of a Divine Order, whose features have been delineated by the Centre of the Covenant in His Will and Testament, whose fundamental laws have been revealed by the Founder of our Faith in His Kitáb-i-Aqdas, and Whose advent has been foreshadowed by the Herald of the Bahá'í Dispensation in the Bayán, His most weighty Book.

(From a postscript in the handwriting of the Guardian to a letter dated 25 February 1951 to the National Spiritual Assembly of the British Isles published in Unfolding Destiny p 261)

AUSPICIOUS RAYS GOD'S DAWNING REVELATION WHICH FIRST STRUCK CORNER VAST DARK SPIRITUALLY DECADENT CONTINENT COURSE BAHÁ'U'LLÁH'S MINISTRY WHICH WARMED ILLUMINATED ITS NORTHERN SOUTHERN FRINGES CONCLUDING YEARS HEROIC AGÉ FAITH MUST NOW PENETRATE ITS HEART BRIGHTEN ITS JUNGLE FASTNESSES ENVELOP IT WITH SPLENDOUR THEIR RADIANCE COURSE PRESENT SUCCEEDING EPOCHS FORMATIVE AGE BAHÁ'Í DISPENSATION. CONFIDENT BRITISH BAHÁ'Í COMMUNITY WILL ARISE BEFITTINGLY MEET CHALLENGE NOW CONFRONTING IT ACHIEVE THREE-FOLD PURPOSE PLAN. PRAYING ENERGETIC COLLABORATION PROSECUTORS 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ'S DIVINE PLAN WITH COMMUNITY BELIEVERS BELONGING NATION WHOSE DESTINY BEEN LINKED FORTUNES WORLD'S BACKWARD RACES REINFORCED ASSISTANCE SISTER COMMUNITY CRADLE FAITH NATIONAL ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES LEADING COMMUNITY AFRICAN CONTINENT MAY ENSURE SUCCESS CRUSADE CONSTITUTING SPIRITUAL LANDMARK PROCESS AWAKENING AFRICAN PEOPLES MARKING OPENING GLORIOUS CHAPTER EVOLUTION WORLD FAITH BAHÁ'U'LLÁH. . . .

(From a cable of the Guardian dated 25 April 1951 to the British National Convention published in Unfolding Destiny p 264)

The decision you have taken to go to Africa and teach the Cause is momentous and is worthy of the great race you belong to. The Guardian has been eagerly awaiting a Negro pioneer, and feels that Bahá'u'lláh will surely bless your enterprise and assist you in this work you are planning for His Faith.

You are fortunate to have a wife by your side kindled with the same enthusiasm and determination, and your joint labours will be a tremendous asset to the new campaign in Africa.

The Guardian has recently called upon India and Persia to open up further territories, and he feels that this pioneer effort – the first in Bahá'í history linking five National Spiritual Assemblies in an international undertaking – is truly historic and of the greatest importance.

He will ardently pray that the way may speedily open for you to go to your goal country in Africa, and he urges you to persevere in your efforts. We all have weak points, but when we arise to serve Bahá'u'lláh He helps us overcome them in a truly miraculous way!

(From letter of 4 June 1951 on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer published in Bahá'í News no 247 (September 1951) p 1)

How significant that the first group to be formed in the heart of Africa is composed of believers from the East and the West, united, working side by side to bring the Message of the Blessed Beauty to one of the great waiting races of the world, hitherto oppressed and disregarded, but now being offered the waters of life and a wonderful future! . . .

While being wise and tactful you should, however, never lose sight of the fact that it is to the African peoples, primarily, that your mission is addressed. To bring them into our world-wide brotherhood is your duty and privilege.

(From letter of 27 July 1951 on behalf of the Guardian to the Bahá'ís in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania)

He hopes that wherever it is possible the believers will make every

effort to contact African students and visitors, and to show them kindness and hospitality. This may not only lead to the conversion of some while in America, but will also make friends for the Faith in Africa.

(From letter of 28 September 1951 on behalf of the Guardian to believers gathered at the Louhelen summer school published in Bahá'í News no 253 (March 1952) p 1)

... he feels that the Africa Campaign has been launched in a way far exceeding his hopes, is being visibly blessed from on High, and, with the same amount of perseverance shown so far, is assured of great and speedy victories.

(From letter of 16 October 1951 on behalf of the Guardian to the National Spiritual Assembly of the British Isles published in Unfolding Destiny p 269)

He was very pleased to have the first pioneer from America go forth under this organized African campaign; he was doubly happy that it should have been an American Negro who went. This is highly appropriate and surely has delighted the heart of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Who watched over that race with particular love, tenderness and understanding.

(From letter of 23 November 1951 on behalf of the Guardian to a National Spiritual Assembly)

He trusts that the way will open for you . . . to go to Casablanca. Africa is stirring with life, and your presence in that continent would add to the strength of the centres gradually being built up.

(From letter of 30 April 1952 on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer)

The potent seeds a loving and vigilant Master sowed with His own hands, in the course of a twice repeated visit to the homeland of this Community, are now, after having lain dormant for almost a quarter of a century, at long last, sprouting throughout the length and breadth of the British Isles, and are even revealing the

potency of their regenerative power, through the instrumentality of those valiant pioneers, who, faithful to His Call and dedicated to His service, are leaving the shores of those islands to settle in the territories of a far-away and backward continent. Amidst their arduous labours, in their contact with the heterogeneous tribes and races dwelling in that continent, in their dealings with the civil authorities of divers countries and states within whose jurisdiction they will labour, in their struggle with an inhospitable climate, in the hazards to which they will be inevitably exposed, in the adventures they may experience, in the reverses they may temporarily suffer, in the opposition they will meet with, in the tests and trials they will undergo, His unfailing guidance will be vouchsafed to them in direct proportion to the degree of their consecration to their task, and the perseverance, the courage and fidelity they will display as they discharge their duties.

(From a postscript in the Guardian's handwriting to a letter dated 12 June 1952 to the National Spiritual Assembly of the British Isles published in Unfolding Destiny pp 286-7)

The Guardian feels you should acquaint the African students with the rapid progress of the Faith in Africa, which is truly amazing to all the friends, as this will help to fan the flame of their interest in the Teachings.

(From letter of 2 December 1952 on behalf of the Guardian to a Local Spiritual Assembly)

He hopes that, during this coming year, you . . . will devote yourselves as much as you can to consolidating the new Assemblies, and assisting the new believers to gradually understand better the Administration, and its application in Bahá'í Community life. Tact, love and patience will no doubt be needed, and one cannot expect these new believers to do everything in the same way that old and tried Communities do. Indeed, individuality of expression, within the framework of the Administrative Order, is preferable to too great a uniformity.

(From letter of 26 April 1953 on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer)

The Guardian wishes me to assure you that he is deeply appreciative of the services you and your good husband are rendering in Africa. At the present time there is no place or any service which one can render the Faith, that is more meritorious than pioneering in this vast continent, which is now slowly awakening.

(From letter of 28 April 1953 on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer)

The Guardian very greatly values your devoted services in Morocco. This country has a very great future, and it is therefore of the greatest importance that Bahá'í Communities and Local Assemblies be established.

(From letter of 2 May 1953 on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer)

Shoghi Effendi suggests you consider settling with your dear daughter in Johannesburg. South and West Africa is of extreme importance, particularly Johannesburg, in South Africa. If you should be unable to get into Johannesburg, then he would suggest the following countries, in the order named: Togoland, the Cameroons, one of the Congo territories, preferably Belgian Congo.

(From letter of 3 May 1953 on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer)

Within Africa

From the wondrous contents of that letter I was able to inhale the breeze of steadfastness and the fragrance of faithfulness, wafted from the rose-gardens of your hearts which are brimming over with the love of God. My spirit was uplifted, my heart rejoiced and my sorrows were dispelled when I learned of your noble intentions, your high endeavours and your spiritual tidings. . . .

O beloved and righteous ones! Let your steps be firm in this undeviating path, and in your efforts to acquire spiritual perfec-

tions, to study the truths and teachings of the Cause, and to promulgate them with devotion, with dignity and with consummate perfection. Detach yourselves from everything save Him, place your trust in Him, and, turning your hearts towards the source of heavenly bounties, unite the hearts. You should strictly avoid all political strife and the conflict of warring factions, and instead consolidate the foundations of your Spiritual Assemblies, reinforce the ties of understanding and collaboration among yourselves, endeavour to dispel the prejudices of your countrymen and seek to strengthen the exchange of ideas and the bonds of fellowship between the communities of East and West. Do not despair of the Spirit of God and His Power that pervadeth all things. Arise with utmost joy, detachment and confidence. He will, indeed, confirm your efforts with His all-powerful might, will guide you to the right path, and will render you victorious with the cohorts of His Concurrence on high. Study and ponder the sacred Writings, rejoice in the promises of your Lord, and exert your highest endeavours to sanctify your spirits, illumine your minds, and purify your conduct, for this is the way which will lead to the raising of the standard of the Cause of God, and will enable its light to shine with the utmost radiance and splendour.

(From a letter dated 8 May 1925 written by the Guardian to the Bahá'is of Tunis)

The Guardian said that the travel of Mr . . . to Ethiopia was highly acceptable. . . . He will soon arrange to have Dr Esslemont's book translated into the local language. . . .

The National Spiritual Assembly should encourage the youth who are receptive, devoted and zealous believers, Egyptian in origin, and among the staunch members of the community, to pioneer to neighbouring lands to the west and south of Egypt, settle in those countries and open new centres. The Egyptian friends should not only raise aloft the banner of the glorious Faith in the heart of their own country, but should spread the glad-tidings of this great Cause to adjoining territories in the African continent

and let the call of the Most Great Name exhilarate the ears of the tribes and peoples of that continent.

(From letter of 12 May 1933 on behalf of the Guardian to the National Spiritual Assembly of Egypt)

The Egyptian believers, through their services in the Súdán, Ethiopia, and elsewhere in Africa, have a vital part to play in carrying the Light of Bahá'u'lláh to the native tribes of Africa.

(From letter of 7 August 1950 on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer)

REJOICE SHARE BAHÁ'Í COMMUNITIES EAST WEST THRILLING REPORTS FEATS ACHIEVED HEROIC BAND BAHÁ'Í PIONEERS LABOURING DIVERS WIDELY-SCATTERED AFRICAN TERRITORIES PARTICULARLY UGANDA HEART CONTINENT REMINISCENT ALIKE EPISODES RELATED BOOK ACTS RAPID DRAMATIC PROPAGATION FAITH INSTRUMENTALITY DAWN-BREAKERS HEROIC AGE BAHÁ'Í DISPENSATION. MARVELOUS ACCOMPLISHMENTS SIGNALIZING RISE ESTABLISHMENT ADMINISTRATIVE ORDER FAITH LATIN AMERICA ECLIPSED. EXPLOITS IMMORTALIZING RECENTLY LAUNCHED CRUSADE EUROPEAN CONTINENT SURPASSED. GOAL SEVEN-MONTH PLAN INITIATED KAMPALA ASSEMBLY AIMING DOUBLING TWELVE ENROLLED BELIEVERS OUTSTRIPPED. NUMBER AFRICANS CONVERTED COURSE LAST FIFTEEN MONTHS RESIDING KAMPALA OUTLYING DISTRICTS PROTESTANT CATHOLIC PAGAN BACKGROUNDS LETTERED UNLETTERED BOTH SEXES REPRESENTATIVE NO LESS SIXTEEN TRIBES PASSED TWO HUNDRED MARK. EFFULGENT RAYS GOD'S TRIUMPHANT CAUSE RADIATING FOCAL CENTRE FAST AWAKENING CONTINENT PENETRATING ACCELERATING RATE ISOLATED REGIONS UNFREQUENTED WHITE MEN ENVELOPING THEIR RADIANCE SOULS HITHERTO INDIFFERENT PERSISTENT HUMANITARIAN ACTIVITIES CHRISTIAN MISSIONS CIVILIZING INFLUENCE CIVIL AUTHORITIES. NO LESS NINE LOCALITIES QUALIFIED ATTAIN COMING RIDVÁN ASSEMBLY STATUS WITHIN SINGLE TERRITORY LONG-SLUMBERING CONTINENT.

(Cable of the Guardian dated 5 January 1953 to the Bahá'í World, published in Messages to the Bahá'í World 1950-1957 (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust 1971) pp 133-4; Unfolding Destiny pp 290-1)

I hail with a joyous heart the convocation in the heart of the African continent of the first of the four Intercontinental Teaching Conferences constituting the highlights of the world-wide celebrations of the Holy Year which commemorates the hundredth anniversary of the birth of the Mission of the Founder of our Faith. I welcome with open arms the unexpectedly large number of the representatives of the pure-hearted and the spiritually receptive Negro race, so dearly loved by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, for whose conversion to His Father's Faith He so deeply yearned and whose interests He so ardently championed in the course of His memorable visit to the North American continent. I am reminded, on this historic occasion, of the significant words uttered by Bahá'u'lláh Himself, Who as attested by the Centre of the Covenant, in His Writings, 'compared the coloured people to the black pupil of the eye,' through which 'the light of the spirit shineth forth.' I feel particularly gratified by the substantial participation in this epoch-making Conference of the members of a race dwelling in a continent which for the most part has retained its primitive simplicity and remained uncontaminated by the evils of a gross, a rampant and cancerous materialism undermining the fabric of human society alike in the East and in the West, eating into the vitals of the conflicting peoples and races inhabiting the American, the European and the Asiatic continents, and alas threatening to engulf in one common catastrophic convulsion the generality of mankind. I acclaim the preponderance of the members of this same race at so significant a Conference, a phenomenon unprecedented in the annals of Bahá'í Conferences held during over a century, and auguring well for a corresponding multiplication in the number of the representatives of the yellow, the red and brown races of mankind dwelling respectively in the Far East, in the Far West and in the islands of the South Pacific Ocean, a multiplication designed ultimately to bring to a proper equipoise the divers ethnic elements comprised within the highly diversified world-embracing Bahá'í Fellowship.

(From a message of the Guardian dated February 1953 to the African International Conference in Kampala Uganda published in Messages to the Bahá'í World pp 135-6)

May these two Communities, carrying aloft the banner of the independence of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh, and constituting the stronghold of its institutions on the African continent, and standing on the threshold of one of the most glorious epochs of their history – a history dating back to the days of Bahá'u'lláh's exile in Adrianople more than eighty years ago – lend so great an impetus, in the course of the coming decade, to the onward march of His Cause and the consolidation of His Administrative Order as to deserve to rank among the foremost emancipators of His Faith in the East and be regarded as one of the chief pillars of His embryonic World Order in that continent.

(Letter from the Guardian dated April 1953 to the National Convention of Egypt and the Sudan)

The Guardian is very happy over the activities of the friends throughout Africa. That great continent is now becoming alive, and will certainly take its place in the forefront of Bahá'í communities.

(From letter of 15 May 1953 on behalf of the Guardian an individual believer)

The Guardian has been most happy with the teaching efforts of the dear friends in Africa. They have won new goals for the Faith, and shown new depths of devotion in their sacrificial service. God has richly blessed them, and their efforts; and through them has given new life to the people of Africa.

He is particularly gratified to learn of the number of tribes and nationalities among the Bahá'ís of Tanganyika. It demonstrates the power of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh, that, in such a short time, so many different elements of the human race can be brought together into one common Faith.

Because of the vastness of the country, and the fewness of the numbers, great responsibility devolves on the Friends. With that responsibility likewise comes the opportunity for great spiritual service and success. Africa is awakening, and the call must be taken to all parts. Thus, now that your Assembly is firmly estab-

lished, and a strong community is established, if it is possible for some of the Friends to go to new areas, it will be highly meritorious. . . .

Now is the time for 'scattering' which the Beloved Master foretold. Therefore, during this ten year period, the Friends will scatter, until the entire globe has been covered with the Glory of the Lord.

(From letter of 25 May 1953 on behalf of the Guardian to the Bahá'ís of Dar es Salaam)

The Bahá'ís of Tunis have a very great responsibility placed upon them. Tunis has been chosen as the seat of the new National Assembly to be established in this area of Africa. The friends should therefore triple their efforts, so as to build up a strong and thriving Bahá'í community and assembly. They should likewise assist in the teaching work throughout that part of Africa. . . .

The Guardian is expecting the Tunis Bahá'ís to achieve great victories for the Faith. He will be anxiously waiting to hear of new goals that have been won.

(From letter of 26 May 1953 on behalf of the Guardian to the Spiritual Assembly of Tunis)

The news from everywhere in Africa, where there are believers, has been most heartening, and shows that the hour for Africa has indeed struck, spiritually.

(From letter of 31 May 1953 on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer)

He was immensely pleased over the example shown by . . ., in withdrawing from political affiliation, and feels that some of the African friends are showing a most exemplary spirit of devotion and loyalty. He feels that a great potential strength lies in these new African believers.

(From letter of 4 June 1953 on behalf of the Guardian to the British Africa Committee published in Unfolding Destiny p 301)

The question of impressing upon the Africans who are seeking enrolment 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.

(From letter of 25 June 1953 on behalf of the Guardian to the National Spiritual Assembly of the British Isles published in Unfolding Destiny p 308)

The African Campaign, outshining the brilliant success of the enterprise launched in Latin America, throwing into shade the splendour of the victories won in recent years on the European continent, eclipsing all previous collective pioneer undertakings embarked upon in the Asiatic and Australian continents, has almost doubled, in the course of a single year, the number of territories opened since the introduction of the Faith in that continent over eighty years ago. . . .

. . . A number of the newly-won recruits in some of these territories have, moreover, been instrumental in winning the allegiance of some of the members of their race, and have, in their turn, succeeded in opening no less than three neighbouring territories in that continent.

(Letter of the Guardian dated April 1954 to the National Convention of the United States, published in Messages to the Bahá'í World p 62)

The Guardian is very gratified over the results that are being achieved by the devoted workers in Africa. He feels that if they will persevere in their tremendous undertakings really great victories will be won for the Faith as time goes on.

(From letter of 8 April 1954 on behalf of the Guardian to the Hand of the Cause of God in Africa, Músá Banání)

The continent of Africa is pre-eminent in its record of achievement. The spread of the Faith has been miraculous there. . . .

Uganda is the area producing the most remarkable results. . . .

Completely dedicated to their sacred mission, consecrated to the great service they had undertaken, their lives and conduct in accordance with the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh, the original pioneers to Uganda arose with prayerful zeal to carry the Glad Tidings of the Kingdom to the native inhabitants. They demonstrated that the Bahá'í has no prejudice of any type. Through their loving association on the basis of equality, they soon won the hearts and souls of the people.

So effective has been their teaching, that the new African Bahá'ís have arisen in numbers to carry the Message throughout the land, not only Uganda, but other consolidation territories, and more important, in virgin areas of the Crusade. Over six of the virgin areas of the Crusade have been filled by the new African Bahá'ís.

(From letter of 14 April 1954 on behalf of the Guardian to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States of America)

A great victory has been won for the Faith through the sacrifice and devotion of the African Bahá'ís in arising to fill the 5 areas designated by the Guardian. First, of course, is the devotion and sacrifice of Enoch Olinga, and the example he has set for the African believers; and then the zeal and ardour of the new Bahá'ís. The Guardian is well pleased with these friends, who have set such a remarkable example, and have woven such a beautiful star in the banner of Africa.

(From letter of 24 April 1954 on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer)

He hopes that, now that this great World Crusade has been launched, the Bahá'ís of Tunisia, which constitutes one of the oldest centres on the African continent, will arise and spread the Teachings throughout Tunisia as they have never done before. They have a standard to uphold and a reputation to maintain, and he is pray-

ing that they will meet with great success, and that Bahá'u'lláh will richly bless their efforts.

(From letter of 3 May 1954 on behalf of the Guardian to the Spiritual Assembly of Tunis)

There were a total of 19 new Spiritual Assemblies established throughout Africa on April 21st, which is a very enviable record; indeed it would appear that there never have been such remarkable victories won for the Faith in such a short time. . . .

The purpose of our teaching work in new areas is to bring the Faith to the native people. Wherever this has been done in Africa, it has achieved great results. For instance, in Uganda, 2 years ago there were no Bahá'ís. Today there are over 700 Bahá'ís, with 24 Spiritual Assemblies.

(From letter of 6 May 1954 on behalf of the Guardian to the Spiritual Assembly of Casablanca)

The Cause in Africa, and particularly in Uganda, is going forward in a truly remarkable manner; and we have every reason to thank Bahá'u'lláh from all our hearts for His infinite mercies poured out upon this continent. According to the degree of the devotion of the believers, their sacrifice, their tact and their perseverance, will we witness the results obtained in the immediate future.

(From letter of 8 May 1954 on behalf of the Guardian to the Spiritual Assembly of Nairobi)

The news which your Committee has conveyed to him has greatly rejoiced his heart. Indeed he feels that, of all the countries in the Bahá'í world, Uganda has made the most progress since the inception of the Faith there a few years back, and indeed during this year. He is immensely proud of the achievements of both the pioneers there and the African converts to the Faith. They have set a very high standard, and shown forth most exemplary devotion. The spirit of the African believers is very touching, very noble, and indeed presents a challenge to their fellow-Bahá'ís all over the world. It seems that God has endowed these races, living in the

so-called 'dark' continent, with great spiritual faculties, and also with mental faculties, which, as they mature in the Faith, will contribute immensely to the whole, throughout the Bahá'í world.

(From letter of 11 May 1954 on behalf of the Guardian to the Uganda Teaching Committee)

The remarkable progress the Faith is making throughout the African continent greatly rejoices his heart. He often looks at the map and points out to the friends these treasured Spiritual Assemblies now girdling that vast continent. They are now the lighthouses of Bahá'u'lláh, so to speak, and your Assembly is one of them.

(From letter of 20 May 1954 on behalf of the Guardian to the Spiritual Assembly of Tangier)

Africa is truly awakening and finding herself, and she undoubtedly has a great message to give, and a great contribution to make to the advancement of world civilization. To the degree to which her peoples accept Bahá'u'lláh, will they be blessed, strengthened and protected.

(From letter of 4 June 1954 on behalf of the Guardian to the British Africa Committee published in Unfolding Destiny p 330)

I need not tell you that the work in Africa, and more particularly in Uganda, is very dear to his heart. The progress made there during the last year has borne him up and encouraged him greatly when he was often weighed down with work. He feels that this country and its peoples, in the very heart of Africa, are a most precious trust. Their receptivity to the Teachings, their great desire to serve their new Faith, the number of them who have arisen to go out as pioneers, mark them as a people apart in the Bahá'í world, at least for the time being. May many others in neighbouring countries prove as worthy, and follow their example.

In dealing with people who are still backward in relation to our civilized standards, and in many cases guided by a tribal system

which has strong orders of its own, he feels that you should be both tactful and forbearing.

(From letter of 17 June 1954 on behalf of the Guardian to the National Spiritual Assembly of the British Isles published in Unfolding Destiny p 334)

Your cablegram giving the good news concerning the first South African Bahá'í who became confirmed in Pretoria on July 12th was very encouraging indeed. Let us hope that this opens the door to the natives of South Africa, and will be the means of the spirit flowing in and giving immortal life to hundreds and thousands of these suppressed but pure-hearted peoples of South Africa.

(From letter of 17 July 1954 on behalf of the Guardian to the Hand of the Cause of God in Africa, Músá Banání)

I cannot express to you in words how happy he is to welcome so many African co-workers into the glorious Cause of Bahá'u'lláh. He feels, from the letters they write him, the reports he receives, and above all, the quality of their deeds, that the people of Africa, especially those who become Bahá'ís, have wonderful characteristics which, when pooled with those of other nations and races, will greatly enrich our joint human heritage.

(From letter of 9 August 1954 on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer)

The Guardian becomes very happy when he contemplates the fact that so many of the new African Bahá'ís have arisen to pioneer for the Faith. He feels those of you who are doing this are laying the foundation for great spiritual service in the Cause of God, that you are rendering historic service, and that you are becoming the honour and glory of the African people. The full extent of your deeds and services is not known now, but in the future they will be greatly valued and appreciated.

(From letter of 24 August 1954 on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer)

Experience has demonstrated that when Friends enter the Faith without sufficient knowledge, many of them drop away – and therefore the Guardian has advised all the Teachers and Pioneers to be sure the student has every facility for study of the Faith, and actually does study, before he is accepted as a Bahá'í. . . .

The Guardian feels, therefore, you should be slow in accepting Believers, until they have had an opportunity to study carefully, and you feel assured they understand the Faith, and will be active supporters of it. So far as those who have declared their intention to become Bahá'ís, you should organize careful study classes, which they should all attend.

(From a letter on behalf of the Guardian dated 2 April 1955 to a pioneer in Gambia)

We feel sure that you are well aware of how the progress of the work in Africa has rejoiced the heart of the beloved Guardian, particularly the extraordinary advancement in Uganda. Indeed, we who see him often preoccupied and distressed over the lack of progress being made, and the problems which arise in some parts of the globe, are delighted that, through the bounty of Bahá'u'lláh and the perseverance of your dear self and the gifted members of your Auxiliary Board, as well as the spirit animating the Africans, themselves, news comes to him which truly rejoices his heart and lifts him up with new accretions of strength. Over and over we have witnessed this, and our hearts are deeply grateful that you are enabled, through your services there, to fulfil the Will of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and help keep the heart of the Guardian radiant. . . .

The Guardian would like you in your communications to the pioneers, particularly the African pioneers who have left their homes and families and shown such an exemplary spirit, to assure them of how proud he is of their accomplishments, their victories, and above all, their spirit. He hopes that all over the world the believers will follow the wonderful example set in Africa, and particularly that the American negro Bahá'ís will be inspired to carry

on much more actively their own teaching work as a result of the example set in Africa.

(9 May 1955 written by the Hands of the Cause of God residing in the Holy Land at the instruction of the Guardian to the Hand of the Cause of God in Africa, Músá Banání)

He hopes you will constantly bend your energies to the teaching of the native people themselves. This is the most meritorious of all work. The Guardian is constantly reminding the friends in different countries that the aim is to have the native people in each country or island so trained that they will in a short time be fitted to assume the responsibilities of the Faith.

(From letter of 24 June 1955 on behalf of the Guardian to the Spiritual Assembly of Tananarive, Madagascar)

As regards your question in connection with the work in Africa, it is naturally preferable to have mixed Assemblies wherever legally possible. Wherever the racial situation is acute, and makes it legally impossible, and this policy will lead to trouble, preference is to be given to the formation of a coloured Assembly, rather than one of white pioneers and believers.

(From letter of 20 August 1955 on behalf of the Guardian to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States of America)

Africa, long dormant and neglected, and now stirring in its potential spiritual strength, is, at this very hour, under the eyes of the clamorous multitude of the adversaries of the Faith pressing for its extirpation in the land of its birth, being called upon to redress the scales so weighed down through the ferocious and ignoble acts of bloodthirsty ecclesiastical oppressors. The erection of such an institution, at such a time, through the combined efforts of the undismayed, undeflected and undefeatable upholders of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh in both the East and the West, posterity will regard

as a worthy answer to the challenge flung down by its bitterest, most powerful and inveterate enemies.

(Postscript in the handwriting of the Guardian to a letter dated 20 August 1955 to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States published in Citadel of Faith p 138)

The Cause of God was introduced into Egypt and the Sudan during the days of Bahá'u'lláh, Himself. The Guardian therefore attaches the utmost importance to the expansion of the Faith in Egypt and the Sudan, and the development of the Bahá'í administrative institutions. He will especially pray for the increase in the number of believers, groups and Assemblies in both Egypt and the Sudan. He looks forward with anticipation to the friends arising with the utmost wisdom, and carrying the banner of the Faith to new areas and many new souls.

The Guardian feels Libya is a very important area; and he hopes the National Assembly will continue their efforts to get more settlers there. If they do, the settlers should be very discreet, so that there may be no difficulty such as was experienced in the past.

The Guardian likewise attaches great importance to Ethiopia, and he hopes the Egyptian Assembly will be able to assist in the teaching work there.

(From letter of 9 September 1955 on behalf of the Guardian to the Hand of the Cause of God in Africa, Músá Banání)

The persecutions of the Bahá'ís in Persia seem to have opened new doors of service in all parts of the world, and particularly in Africa, and this is the reason the Guardian has announced the construction of a Bahá'í Temple in Kampala. It is hoped that the spirit which has been released by the sufferings of the Persian Bahá'ís will open doors in all parts of the world, and the teaching work go forward by leaps and bounds.

(From letter of 13 September 1955 on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer)

He is very distressed over the conditions in South Africa, and par-

ticularly the events which are taking place which make it so difficult for the minority groups.

The Guardian assures you of his prayers in your behalf, as well as all of the friends in South Africa. He realizes the difficulties which confront them, but he is sure, with patience and perseverance, the spirit of the Cause will gradually permeate the area, and the situation be improved.

(From letter of 19 October 1955 on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer)

The country of Africa is surging with new life; and the friends should go there to assist in the awakening of that great continent.

(From letter of 14 December 1955 on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer)

In Africa the Faith is spreading very rapidly among the Negroes, and there are now more Negroes in the Faith in Africa, where the Faith has been established less than four years, than there are in America, where the Faith has existed for 60 years. The Friends should concentrate on pure-hearted people, and continue association and fellowship with them, until they themselves become active workers in the Cause of God.

(From letter of 20 December 1955 on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer)

My heart brims with joy and my soul is uplifted with thankfulness as I contemplate on this auspicious occasion, the magnificent feats which have been accomplished in recent years over the entire length and breadth of a rapidly quickening Continent, feats which, in their range, number, quality and swiftness, have eclipsed the signal victories which have distinguished the campaigns successively launched in the Continent of Europe and in Latin America.

This vast, highly receptive, spiritually famished and long downtrodden Continent – the nest of the Negro race, constituting so large a proportion of the world's population – which was first opened, in an hour of trial and adversity, in the lifetime of Bahá' –

u'lláh; whose southern fringes were, during the last epoch of the Heroic Age of the Faith, illuminated by the rays of a divinely established Covenant; on whose northern shores the standard of Bahá'í emancipation has been hoisted and the struggle for the recognition of the independent character of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh has commenced – such a continent now boasts, by virtue of the dynamic influence exerted by a rising divinely conceived Order, and the propelling forces generated by a world-embracing, three-year-old Spiritual Crusade, over three thousand avowed supporters, five-sixths of whom belong to the Negro race, scattered throughout more than fifty territories and islands, and residing in over four hundred localities. Representatives of no less than one hundred and forty of its tribes have, moreover, enlisted under the banner of the Faith. Over a hundred and twenty Bahá'í Local Assemblies are already functioning throughout its territories. Into more than fifty of its indigenous languages Bahá'í literature has been and is being translated. The process of incorporating the newly formed Local Assemblies has furthermore been inaugurated. A National Administrative Headquarters has been established in each one of its four pivotal centres, while three Temple sites situated within its confines have been recently purchased, on one of which the Mother Temple of Africa is soon to be erected.

The Concourse on high cannot but laud such remarkable, soul-stirring exploits. The Captain, guiding from His throne of glory in the Abhá Kingdom the march of the army of Bahá'u'lláh's Crusaders, undoubtedly applauds the fidelity, the valour, the zeal and the perseverance of the executors of His Design, while the Founder of the Faith Himself, the well-spring of the energizing influences nourishing the lives, and sustaining the activities, of these Crusaders, confers His benediction upon, and lays up treasures for, those who have so conspicuously contributed to the glory and honour of His Name. . . .

I cannot but feel confident that the emergence of four regional National Spiritual Assemblies, as a result of the deliberations of the delegates attending these four Bahá'í Conventions – Assem-

blies designed to pave the way for the erection of the pillars which must support the future Universal House of Justice – will, by enabling the activities of the Faith to be directed and co-ordinated from within the Continent itself, lend a tremendous impetus to the progress and eventual fruition of the stupendous undertaking launched from coast to coast through the concerted and systematic efforts of the followers of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh.

(Message from the Guardian of April 1956 to the four African Conventions)*

No doubt a fresh and dynamic impetus will be given the work through the formation of the Regional Bodies. They must however work with the greatest wisdom and caution, and consider the activities in each of the many countries under their jurisdiction as a separate problem requiring its own special measures to meet its local needs. In some places it will be possible to teach openly and dynamically. In other places the friends must labour with the utmost discretion, quietly and patiently, in order not to lose the foothold they have gained. . . .

. . . Already Africa is held up by him to the visiting pilgrims as a shining symbol of what the single-hearted dedication of the Bahá'ís can produce, when they arise with the right spirit to follow the Master's instructions, and he hopes that by next April he will have cause for even greater pride in the achievements of the African friends.

(30 May 1956 written by the Hands of the Cause of God residing in the Holy Land at the instruction of the Guardian to the Hand of the Cause of God in Africa, Músá Banání)

Surely they [the four Regional Conventions in Africa] were historic; for they marked the establishment of new pillars of the Universal House of Justice, in that newly awakening continent. Of greatest interest, is that most of the members of the Assemblies

* Conventions were held to elect National Spiritual Assemblies of Central and East Africa, North East Africa, North-West Africa, and South and West Africa.

are of the black race, and represent such a large mass of people who have been for so long mistreated and downtrodden. May this great event become the means of releasing new spiritual forces, which will bring these great peoples into their own, under the shade of the Blessed Tree of Bahá'u'lláh.

(From letter of 11 June 1956 on behalf of the Guardian to the Hand of the Cause of God in Africa, Músá Banáni)

The emergence of the Regional Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of North-West Africa is an epoch-making event, and will be hailed by future generations as the culmination of a process which was set in motion, in the days of the Centre of the Covenant, through the formation of the first Bahá'í centre in Tunisia. My heart rejoices when I contemplate the extraordinary progress made, in recent years, in the numerous and vast territories now included within the jurisdiction of your Assembly, whose responsibilities, in both the teaching and administrative spheres of Bahá'í activity are wellnigh staggering.

The administrative problems which face you are diverse and complex. The opposition which a nascent Faith must needs meet, particularly from the leaders of religious orthodoxy in the Islamic countries of the North, will, as the institutions of that Faith multiply, become more apparent and grow in severity. The ever-present challenge which your Assembly, because of its unique position, is faced with, to blend, direct and co-ordinate the activities of the Negro and Berber races, which constitute the preponderating elements within the territories your Assembly represents, will, likewise, grow in importance and become more urgent as time passes.

(2 July 1956 postscript in the Guardian's handwriting to the National Spiritual Assembly of North-West Africa)

Knowing through the membership of your National Assembly, and the reports received from Local Assemblies, the needs of each district and country, you will be able to arrange your Plan in such a way as to meet the local requirements of different places, as well as to knit the entire work in the area of Africa under your jurisdic-

tion into a co-ordinated whole. Some of the territories are practically exclusively Arab with a European minority, with a Muslim background and an advanced civilization and culture of their own. They must be approached with teaching methods suitable to the mentality of the people. On the other hand, many of the other countries represent a backward people, from the standpoint of modern civilization, but people much more receptive in heart and soul to the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh, much more sensitive to spiritual values, much readier indeed to embrace the Message of Bahá'u'lláh and arise in its service, as we have seen so wonderfully demonstrated during the last four years in the history of the Cause in Africa. These people must also be taught in a way that will attract them to the Cause.

The African Bahá'ís already enrolled will require deepening in the Administration during the coming years, in order to better fit them for the day which must inevitably come when each protectorate, country and island will possess its own National Spiritual Assembly. To the degree to which your Assembly succeeds in laying a firm foundation at the present time, will depend the rapidity of the unfoldment of the Faith in these different countries and the readiness of the believers to shoulder independently their national Bahá'í work.

As he has mentioned many times to pilgrims and in his communications to friends in North Africa, he wishes special attention paid in that area to the Berbers. Indeed every effort should be made to enrol as many Berber minorities in the Faith as possible, as well as the other races among the inhabitants of the country.

(From letter of 2 July 1956 on behalf of the Guardian to the National Spiritual Assembly of North-West Africa)

I welcome, with feelings of deep pride and lively satisfaction, the emergence, at so auspicious an hour signaling the opening of the third phase of the Ten-Year Plan, of the Regional Assembly of the Bahá'ís of South and West Africa, marking the closing of the first chapter in the history of the Faith in the southernmost part of the African continent, in whose soil the seeds of God's Cause were

planted, wellnigh four decades ago, in the course of the concluding years of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's ministry. . . .

The tasks facing your Assembly, in territories where the obstacles obstructing the path leading to the proclamation of the Faith and its ultimate recognition are numerous and formidable, are staggering and highly challenging. The foundations which the valiant pioneers from distant lands have so laboriously and patiently laid must now, under your constant vigilance, and through your unflinching care and solicitude, be jealously preserved and continually consolidated. . . .

The pitfalls and perils that beset your path, the complexity of the problems that will require your immediate and close attention, will be such as to tax your ingenuity, patience and endurance. The opposition which a highly challenging, world-redeeming Faith must needs meet in the future will, in the days to come, manifest itself and gather momentum. Every attack, however launched, whether individually or collectively, against the budding institutions of a slowly rising, majestically unfolding Order, is not only doomed to fail, but is bound to bring in its wake a further reinforcement of the numerical strength of the followers of the Faith, and a still more notable acceleration in the process of its expansion and consolidation.

(4 July 1956 postscript in the Guardian's handwriting to the National Spiritual Assembly of South and West Africa)

He urges your Assembly, in carrying on its activities, to deal with each of the countries under its jurisdiction as a separate problem. In some of them, the teaching policy can be much more open and advanced obviously, while in others, the utmost discretion is required in order to enable the work to go forward at all. Unwise enthusiasm must at no time sweep any of the Regional African Assemblies off their feet, as the work is too precious, the goals won too valuable, and the outlook too promising, to take any risks.

The most important work of all is to train the African believers as teachers and administrators, so that they can carry the Message to their own people, and be in a position to lay firm and enduring

foundations for the future Assemblies throughout all these vast territories. Every other activity falls into insignificance compared to this one.

(From letter of 4 July 1956 on behalf of the Guardian to the National Spiritual Assembly of South and West Africa)

The formation of the Regional Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Central and East Africa, at so auspicious an hour in the evolution of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh in the African Continent, will be hailed by posterity as an event of far-reaching significance, destined to stimulate the development and contribute to the consolidation of a divinely appointed Administrative Order to an extent unprecedented in African Bahá'í history. I feel confident that your Assembly, now standing on the threshold of a period of unparalleled expansion, will, through its high endeavours, lend a tremendous impetus to the historic process which has been set in motion in recent years, and will, through its achievements, attract the manifold blessings of Bahá'u'lláh.

The path you are now called upon to tread is long, steep and thorny. As the work in which you are engaged develops, and is steadily consolidated, individuals and institutions inimical to the Faith, and jealous of its rising prestige, will exert their utmost to undermine the foundations you are now laying and to extinguish the light which has been so brilliantly kindled by pioneers, settlers, and newly enrolled believers throughout the territories now included within your jurisdiction.

(From letter of 6 July 1956 on behalf of the Guardian to the National Spiritual Assembly of Central and East Africa)

The election of this particular Body has been a very happy event for him, because the extraordinary advance made throughout the Continent of Africa in the work of the Faith during the last four years has sprung from its heart, and particularly from Uganda, where dear Mr Banání has been so indefatigable in his efforts, and where such rich prizes have been won. He feels sure that a great

destiny lies before your Assembly representing as it does so many territories so rich in promise.

(From letter of 6 July 1956 on behalf of the Guardian to the National Spiritual Assembly of Central and East Africa)

He rejoices over the reports of the awakening of the peoples in South Africa, who have been deprived for so long a time, and now experience so much difficulty. He prays all these problems may be speedily overcome – and the most potent way this can be done is to spread the quickening influence of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh.

(From letter of 23 November 1956 on behalf of the Guardian to the National Spiritual Assembly of South and West Africa)

The immense strides forward which have been made all over Africa are a source of great pride to our beloved Guardian, and an inspiration to the believers in other countries. He eagerly awaits news of fresh victories in the teaching field, and feels sure that, under the wise and enthusiastic guidance of your Assembly, a marked advancement in the spread of the Faith in the area under your jurisdiction will be witnessed.

(From letter of 14 July 1957 on behalf of the Guardian to the National Spiritual Assembly of North-West Africa)

The spirit of the person is the important thing, the recognition of Bahá'u'lláh and His position in the world in this day. The friends therefore must not be too strict, or they will find that the great wave of loving enthusiasm with which the African people have turned to the Faith, many of them already accepting it, cools off; and being very sensitive, they will feel in some subtle way that they are rebuffed, and the work will suffer.

The purpose of the new National Assemblies in Africa, and the purpose of any administrative body, is to carry the Message to the people and enlist the sincere under the banner of this Faith. . . .

As regards the question of tribal practice, the Guardian wishes you to be extremely forbearing and patient in weaning the Bahá'ís away from their old customs. This can only be done by taking

each case individually as it comes up, using the greatest wisdom and kindness, and not trying rigorously to impose all Bahá'í laws in every detail at this time.

(From letter of 8 August 1957 on behalf of the Guardian to the National Spiritual Assembly of Central and East Africa)

The record of the services rendered, in the course of the first year of its stewardship to the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh, by your Assembly, representing so vast and important a section of the African continent, has brought immense joy to my heart, and served to confirm my feelings of admiration and confidence in the ability of its members to promote befittingly the interests of the Faith, and to play a worthy part in the establishment of its nascent, God-given institutions in those regions. I have followed, with deep interest and ever-growing satisfaction, the strenuous endeavours exerted so devotedly and so consistently by those whose privilege it is to represent and guide the fortunes of the diversified and numerous Bahá'í communities throughout North-West Africa, and have watched, with sympathy and extreme pleasure, their constant struggle to surmount the divers and formidable obstacles standing in their path, and their refusal to allow any setback, impeding momentarily the onward march of a rising Administrative Order, to deflect them from their high purpose or to dampen the zeal that so powerfully animates them in the service of the Cause they love so dearly and serve so well.

(14 July 1957 postscript in the Guardian's handwriting to the National Spiritual Assembly of North-West Africa)

First and foremost, the vital process of the conversion of the Africans must acquire a momentum which will surpass any hitherto witnessed in African Bahá'í history. Any barrier impeding the discharge of this pre-eminent duty must be determinedly swept aside.

(8 August 1957 postscript in the Guardian's handwriting to the National Spiritual Assembly of Central and East Africa)

Prospects of the Future

The time hath come for thee to sacrifice thy flock for the true Shepherd, and draw nigh unto the divine Fire kindled in the Burning Bush. The flame on the Mount was a blaze of light, but the Abhá Beauty is the Sun of the world of the spirit. Thus the night will not continue in darkness. America hath been illumined. Africa will be enlightened.

(From a newly translated Tablet of 'Abdu'l-Bahá to an individual believer)

Ere long shall ye see that even the darkest lands are bright, and the continents of Europe and Africa have turned into gardens of flowers, and forests of blossoming trees.

(Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre 1978) pp 255-6)

How great, how very great is the Cause; how very fierce the onslaught of all the peoples and kindreds of the earth! Ere long shall the clamour of the multitude throughout Africa, throughout America, the cry of the European and of the Turk, the groaning of India and China be heard from far and near. One and all they shall arise with all their power to resist His Cause. Then shall the Knights of the Lord, assisted by grace from on high, strengthened by faith, aided by the power of understanding and reinforced by the legions of the Covenant, arise and make manifest the truth of the verse: 'Behold the confusion that hath befallen the tribes of the defeated!'

('Abdu'l-Bahá quoted in Shoghi Effendi Bahá'í Administration: Selected Messages 1922-1932 (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust 1980) p 123)

Nor should a survey of the outstanding features of so blessed and fruitful a ministry omit mention of the prophecies which the un-

erring pen of the appointed Centre* of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant has recorded. These foreshadow the fierceness of the onslaught that the resistless march of the Faith must provoke in the West, in India and in the Far East when it meets the time-honoured sacerdotal orders of the Christian, the Buddhist and Hindu religions. They foreshadow the turmoil which its emancipation from the fetters of religious orthodoxy will cast in the American, the European, the Asiatic and African continents.

(Shoghi Effendi God Passes By (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust 1987) p 315)

* 'Abdu'l-Bahá