

Ridvan 1997

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To the Baha'is of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

We acclaim with grateful hearts the eager response on all continents to the Four Year Plan launched last Ridvan. Consultations of the Continental Counsellors 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.

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 international pioneers and travelling 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 Ridvan; in the increasing endeavours to hold regular devotional meetings; in the widening efforts to make use of the arts in the teaching work and community activities--in all these respects could be discerned the friends' keen awareness 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.

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 Camoens in Paris where the beloved Master, Abdu'l-Baha, 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 Baha'i Faith into that country--a unique, official occasion at which Amatu'l-Baha Ruhiyyih Khanum was present as the honoured guest; the launching last July of the Baha'i International Community's site on the World Wide Web, entitled "The Baha'i World", which to date has received from more than 90 countries and territories over 50,000 visits, averaging some 200 per day.

Hardly outpaced by such accomplishments, the construction projects on Mount Carmel maintained a dazzling momentum highlighted by the completion of the marble colonade of the Centre for the Study of the Texts, by the rise of the International Teaching Centre building towards its seventh level, and by the ongoing emergence of the far-stretching features of the Terraces of the Shrine

of the Bab. In this connection must be mentioned 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 terraces through which the glorious pathway rises up towards the sacred Edifice and beyond it to the crest of the Hill of God.

Also of acute relevance to the progress thus described was the maintenance 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 sustained 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 Baha'i International Fund.

Such an auspicious beginning to the Four Year Plan as has been experienced cannot but inspire confidence in the hearts of the members of our worldwide community that they are fully equipped to execute its requirements as outlined in the messages that launched it, and as elaborated in the plans adopted by their respective Assemblies. A further and especially appreciated encouragement as we enter this second year is that circumstances have made it feasible for the re-establishment this Ridvan 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 Baha'i Convention to be held next Ridvan at the Baha'i World Centre. How dearly we hope that by then, at the very midpoint of the Plan, the Baha'i 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!

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 benefit 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 Abha 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