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CLUSTERS

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

12 December 2001

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the United States

Dear Baha'i Friends,

In the months following the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors, consultations and institutional meetings were held across the Baha'i world as national communities prepared themselves for the launching of the Five Year Plan. Through such a process, the American Baha'i community, likewise, readied itself to embark on this farreaching enterprise.

Reports received by the Universal House of Justice give every indication that this period of preparation in the United States has been most productive. This past summer four of its own members had the opportunity to visit the country, and each returned with a highly favorable impression of the potentialities for the growth of the Faith, both in terms of the capacity of the Baha'i community and the receptivity of society at large. The eagerness of the believers to advance the interests of the Five Year Plan was tangible. Similar praise was given the community and its institutions by Drs. Firaydoun Javaheri and Penny Walker, Counsellor members of the International Teaching Centre, following their visits to your country this summer.

All of these reports have brought joy to the House of Justice and heightened its expectations of the American Baha'i community. It is convinced that, if two basic issues can be clarified for the friends now, in the earliest stages of the Plan, the path to outstanding achievements will open. With these thoughts in mind, the House of Justice has asked us to convey to you the following.

One issue that seems in need of clarification concerns the division of the country into geographic clusters. The 9 January 2001 message of the Universal House of Justice explains the basis for making this division. Boundaries are to be set not according to the condition of local Baha'i communities or the strength of Local Spiritual Assemblies, but on the basis of a number of specific demographic, social, and economic factors. The exercise of defining clusters in this manner has been successfully carried out in many countries around the world under a wide variety of national circumstances, and the House of Justice is confident that the concept applies equally to the United States.

What is necessary, then, is for each Regional Baha'i Council to consider the area under its jurisdiction and divide the region into clusters to the best of

its ability according to the criteria laid out in the 9 January message. In this process, the Council will naturally seek the views of knowledgeable believers, such as Auxiliary Board members, as well as Local Spiritual [2] Assemblies, since, quite likely, it may not be sufficiently familiar with its entire region to set cluster boundaries unaided. In any event, it should be borne in mind that a "cluster" is a construct that is to enable the friends to think about the growth of the Faith on a manageable scale and to design and implement plans close to the grassroots of the community. Therefore, the Councils need only come to a first, reasonable approximation of the boundaries, which can be adjusted later if necessary.

This raises the second issue on which the friends would benefit from clarification. Plans for the growth of the Faith are required at several distinct levels, each embedded in the level above it and each serving a specific purpose. A national plan is elaborated in the context of the global plan, whose features are set forth by the Universal House of Justice. Through it, the National Spiritual Assembly provides an overall vision of the tasks to be accomplished, defines the areas of action to be pursued, and elicits from the believers wholehearted response to the directives of the Universal House of Justice. In its letter to you of 28 June 2001, the House of Justice expressed its pleasure at reading your national plan, which offers a clear framework within which the various components of the community can carry out their activities during the Five Year Plan.

It would, of course, be counterproductive for a Regional Council to design a plan of a similar kind, or to operate outside the context of the national plan. Here what is required is an analysis of the specific approaches to be adopted and a determination of the lines of action to be followed. In the case of the Five Year Plan, a regional plan consists essentially of those provisions needed to help each cluster in the region move from its current stage of growth to the next advanced stage. Such a plan identifies priorities and sets objectives for a given period of time—certain clusters to be opened to the Faith, others to be strengthened, and, in those deemed ready, intensive growth programs to be established. This implies that the Regional Council will base its plan on a categorization of the clusters in the region according to their current stage of development. Such a categorization should not be misconstrued as a judgment on the quality of local communities. It should be regarded, rather, as a means through which realistic strategies for growth can be devised and executed.

Detailed plans of action, with specific goals and the corresponding methods, rightly belong to the level of the cluster. While the institute process will constitute the engine for growth in all clusters, a diversity of action is bound to appear at this level. This diversity will be a natural outcome of plans of action that take into account the particular resources of the believers, the capacity of the local Baha'i communities, and the strength of the Local Spiritual Assemblies.

It goes without saying, where Local Spiritual Assemblies are strong, they would be fully involved in all aspects of the processes of planning and

implementation at the level of the cluster. But this in no way diminishes the significant role that the Regional Councils must play. Each Council has to communicate the details of its plan to the friends, help the clusters develop the capacity to implement increasingly more complex programs of growth, see to it that the regional institutes serve the needs of each cluster, and provide the means for the exchange of ideas and methods. For the Councils to carry out these challenging tasks, your National Assembly must ensure that they are empowered to advise and urge Local Spiritual Assemblies on matters of growth and to coordinate collaboration among them.

[3] The Universal House of Justice hopes that these ideas will help the friends press ahead in their endeavors with clarity of thought. Given the great opportunities that exist in the United States and the pace at which the community moves, the House of Justice feels this letter should be shared with the Regional Councils to guide your further consultations with them and the Counsellors about the Five Year Plan. It has full confidence that the Almighty, Who has bestowed so many favors on the American Baha'i community, will bless your deliberations and reinforce your ceaseless efforts in the pursuit of His Purpose.

With loving Baha'i greetings,

For the Department of the Secretariat