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THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE
BAHA'I WORLD CENTRE

To the Baha'is of the World

Dearly-loved Friends,

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

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 evidences of an accelerated trend towards peace. In the Faith of God, it is the growing strength of the Order of Baha'u'llah as its banner rises to more stately heights. It is a strength that attracts. The media are giving increasing attention to the Baha'i 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 investigated, but its advice and active help are also being sought for the alleviation of social problems and the carrying out of humanitarian activities.

A thrilling consequence of these favourably conjoined developments is the emergence of a new paradigm of opportunity for further growth and consolidation of our world-wide 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 expansion of the Community of the Most Great Name, such as has not yet been experienced, is, indeed, at hand.

The spark which ignited the mounting interest in the Cause of Baha'u'llah was the heroic fortitude and patience of the beloved friends in Iran, which moved the Baha'i world community to conduct a persistent, carefully orchestrated programme 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 important 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 non- governmental organizations and with the public in general.

This recognition prompted a meeting in Germany last November of national Baha'i external affairs representatives from Europe and North America, together with senior representatives of the Offices of the Baha'i International Community, intent on effecting greater coordination of their work. This was a preliminary step towards the gathering of more and more National 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 international 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.

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 Baha'i 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 Abha 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.'" Reflections 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.

The great projects already launched must be pursued to their completion. The Terraces below and above the Shrine of the Bab 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 inauguration of that Covenant; the steadily advancing work on the translation and annotation of the Kitab-i-Aqdas, the Most Holy Book, must be brought to publication; the interest shown by the friends in the law of Huququ'llah must be cultivated; the pioneers and travelling teachers must go forth; the expenses of the Cause must be met; all objectives of the Six Year Plan must be achieved.

But the paramount purpose of all Baha'i activity is teaching. All that has been done or will be done revolve around this central activity, the "head cornerstone of the foundation itself", to which all progress in the Cause is due. 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". 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 completed, 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 vigour.

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.

Every individual believer, man, woman, youth and child, is summoned 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 community depends. Well-grounded in the mighty Covenant of Baha'u'llah, 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 endeavour 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 teaching. 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 splendour of those eternal principles proclaimed by Baha'u'llah".

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", 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 progress 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, sundering, 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 Baha'u'llah.

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 remembereth Him".

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

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