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Report from Conference in the Holy Land —
Fourth Epoch of the Formative Age Begins

2 January 1986

The Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly-loved Friends,

The eager expectation with which we welcomed to the World Centre, on 27 December, sixty-four Counsellors from the five continents to discuss, with the International Teaching Centre, the challenges and opportunities facing the Bahá'í world community, has, at the conclusion of their historic conference, been transmuted into feelings of deepest joy, gratitude and love.

Graced by the presence of the Hands of the Cause Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhiyyih Khanum, Ugo Giachery, 'Alí-Akbar Furután, 'Alí-Muhammad Varqa and Collis Featherstone, the Conference was organized and managed with admirable foresight and efficiency by the International Teaching Centre, whose individual members watched over and served untiringly the needs of the participants and the progress of the Conference itself.

Convened in the concourse of the Seat of the Universal House of Justice as the Counsellors of the Bahá'í world entered upon their new five-year term of office, within months of the termination of the Seven Year Plan and the opening of the new Six Year Plan, its aura heightened by the spiritual potencies of the Holy Shrines and the euphoric sense of victory and blessing now pervading the entire Bahá'í world, the Conference attained such heights of consultative exaltation, spirituality and power as only those serving the Blessed Beauty can enjoy.

The organic growth of the Cause of God, indicated by recent significant developments in its life, becomes markedly apparent in the light of the main objectives and expectations of the Six Year Plan: a vast expansion of the numerical and financial resources of the Cause; enlargement of its status in the world; a world-wide increase in the production, distribution and use of Bahá'í literature; a firmer and world-wide demonstration of the Bahá'í way of life requiring special consideration of the Bahá'í education of children and youth, the strengthening of Bahá'í family life and attention to universal participation and the spiritual enrichment of individual life; further acceleration in the process of the maturation of local and national Bahá'í communities and a dynamic consolidation of the unity of the two arms of the Administrative Order; an extension of the involvement of the Bahá'í world community in the needs of the world around it; and the pursuit of social and economic development in well-established Bahá'í communities. These are some of the features of the Six Year Plan which will open on 21 April 1986 and terminate on 20 April 1992.

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Ridvan 1992 will mark the inception of a Holy Year, during which the Centenary of the Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh will be observed by commemorations around the world and the inauguration of His Covenant will be celebrated, in the City of the Covenant, by the holding of the second Bahá'í World Congress.

The beloved Counsellors, strengthened and enriched by their experience in the Holy Land, will, as early as possible, consult with all National Spiritual Assemblies on measures to conclude triumphantly the current Plan, and on preparations to launch the Six Year Plan. In anticipation of those consultations, National Spiritual Assemblies will receive the full announcement of the aims and characteristics of that Plan, so that together with the Counsellors they may formulate the national plans which will, for each community, establish its pursuit of the overall objectives.

This new process, whereby the national goals of the next Plan are to be largely formulated by National Spiritual Assemblies and Boards of Counsellors, signalizes the inauguration of a new stage in the unfoldment of the Administrative Order. Our beloved Guardian anticipated a succession of epochs during the Formative Age of the Faith; we have no hesitation in recognizing that this new development in the maturation of Bahá'í institutions marks the inception of the fourth epoch of that Age.

Shoghi Effendi perceived in the organic life of the Cause a dialectic of victory and crisis. The unprecedented triumphs, generated by the adamant steadfastness of the Iranian friends, will inevitably provoke opposition to test and increase our strength. Let every Bahá'í in the world be assured that whatever may befall this growing Faith of God is but incontrovertible evidence of the loving care with which the King of Glory and His martyred Herald, through the incomparable Centre of His Covenant and our beloved Guardian, are

preparing His humble followers for ultimate and magnificent triumph. Our loving prayers are with you all.

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5 February 1986

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

In the letter dated 2 January 1986 written by the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of the world, reference was made to the inception of the fourth epoch of the Formative Age. In response to questions subsequently put to the House of Justice about the periods related to the earlier epochs of that Age, the Research Department was requested to prepare a statement on the subject. This has now been presented, and a copy is enclosed.

Kindly share this material of topical interest with the friends, as you deem fit, so that it may be studied in their deepening classes, summer schools, conferences and similar gatherings.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

Enclosure

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THE EPOCHS OF THE FORMATIVE AGE

Prepared by the Research Department
of the Universal House of Justice

Introduction:

In disclosing the panoramic vision of the unfoldment of the Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh, Shoghi Effendi refers to three major evolutionary stages through which the Faith must pass - the Apostolic or Heroic Age (1844-1921) associated with the Central Figures of the Faith; the Formative or Transitional Age (1921-), the "hall-mark" of which is the rise and establishment of the Administrative Order, based on the execution of the provisions of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Will and Testament; and, the Golden Age which will represent the "consummation of this glorious Dispensation". Close examination of the details of Bahá'í history reveals that the individual Ages are comprised of a number of periods - inseparable parts of one integrated whole.

In relation to the Heroic Age of our Faith, the Guardian, in a letter dated 5 June 1947 to the American Bahá'ís, specified that this Age consisted of three epochs and described the distinguishing features of each:

"...the Apostolic and Heroic Age of our Faith, fell into three

distinct epochs, of nine, of thirty-nine and of twenty-nine years' duration, associated respectively with the Babi Dispensation and the ministries of Bahá'u'lláh and of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. This Primitive Age of the Bahá'í Era, unapproached in spiritual fecundity by any period associated with the mission of the Founder of any previous Dispensation, was impregnated, from its inception to its termination, with the creative energies generated through the advent of two independent Manifestations and the establishment of a Covenant unique in the spiritual annals of mankind."

The Formative Age, in which we now live and serve, was ushered in with the passing of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Its major thrust is the shaping, development and consolidation of the local, national and international institutions of the Faith. It is clear from the enumeration of the tasks associated with the Formative Age that their achievement will require increasingly mature levels of functioning of the Bahá'í community:

"During this Formative Age of the Faith, and in the course of present and succeeding epochs, the last and crowning stage in the erection of the framework of the Administrative Order of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh - the election of the Universal House of Justice - will have been completed, the Kitab-i-Aqdas, the Mother-Book of His Revelation, will have been codified and its laws promulgated, the Lesser Peace will have been established, the unity of mankind will have been achieved and its maturity attained, the Plan conceived by 'Abdu'l-Bahá Will have been executed, the emancipation of the Faith from the fetters of religious orthodoxy will have been effected, and its independent religious status will have been universally recognized,..."

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The epochs of the Formative Age mark progressive stages in the evolution of the organic Bahá'í community and signal the maturation of its Institutions, thus enabling the Faith to operate at new levels and to initiate new functions. The timing of each epoch is designated by the Head of the Faith, and given the organic nature of evolutionary development, the transition from one epoch to another may not be abrupt, but may well occur over a period of time. This is the case, for example, in relation to both the inception of the Formative Age and the end of its first epoch. In relation to the former, the passing of 'Abdu'l-Bahá is the transitional event most often identified with the close of the Heroic Age and the beginning of the Formative Age. However, the Guardian also asserts that the Apostolic Age of the Faith concluded "more particularly with the passing [in 1932] of His well-beloved and illustrious sister the Most Exalted Leaf - the last survivor of a glorious and heroic age". With regard to the termination of the first epoch of the Formative Age, Shoghi Effendi has placed this between the years, 1944 and 1946.

Before describing the individual epochs of the Formative Age, it is important to comment on the use of the term "epoch" in the writings of the Guardian. In a letter dated 18 January 1953, written on his behalf to a National Spiritual Assembly, it is explained that the term is used to apply both to the stages in the Formative Age of the Faith, and to the phases in the unfoldment of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Divine Plan. We are currently in the fourth epoch of the Formative Age and the second epoch of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Divine Plan. (The first epoch of the Divine Plan began in 1937 with the inception of the First Seven Year Plan of the North American Bahá'í community, and concluded with the successful completion of the Ten Year Crusade in 1963. The second epoch of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Divine Plan commenced in 1964 with the inauguration of the Nine Year Plan of the Universal House of Justice.)

The primary focus of this statement is on the epochs of the Formative Age of the Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh.

The First Epoch of the Formative Age: 1921-1944/46

The first epoch of this Age witnessed the "birth and the primary stages in the erection of the framework of the Administrative Order of the Faith". The epoch was characterized by concentration on the formation of local and national institutions in all five continents, thereby initiating the erection of the machinery necessary for future systematic teaching activities. This epoch was further marked by the launching, at the instigation of the Guardian, of the First Seven Year Plan (1937-1944) by the American Bahá'í community. This Plan, drawing its inspiration from the Tablets of the Divine Plan, represented the first systematic teaching campaign of the Bahá'í community and inaugurated the initial stage of the execution of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Divine Plan in the Western Hemisphere.

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The Second Epoch of the Formative Age: 1946 — 1963

This epoch extended the developments of the first epoch by calling for the "consummation of a laboriously constructed Administrative Order", and was to witness the formulation of a succession of teaching plans designed to facilitate the development of the Faith beyond the confines of the Western Hemisphere and the continent of Europe. This epoch was distinguished, in the first instance, by the simultaneous and often spontaneous prosecution of Bahá'í national plans in both the East and the West. For example, in a letter written at Naw-Ruz 105 B.E. to the Bahá'ís in the East, the beloved Guardian listed the specific plans undertaken by the United States, British, Indian, Persian, Australian and New Zealand, and 'Iraqi National Spiritual Assemblies, and indicated that this concerted action signaled the transition into the second epoch of the Formative Age. The internal consolidation and the administrative experience gained by the National Assemblies was utilized and mobilized by the Guardian with the launching of the Ten Year World Crusade

a crusade involving the simultaneous prosecution of twelve national plans. The plans derived their direction from 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Divine Plan, and the goals were assigned by Shoghi Effendi from the World Centre of the Faith. A second distinguishing feature of this epoch was the "rise" and "steady consolidation" of the World Centre of the Faith.

The second epoch thus clearly demonstrated the further maturation of the institutions of the Administrative Order. It witnessed the appointment of the Hands of the Cause, the introduction of Auxiliary Boards, and the establishment of the International Bahá'í Council. The culminating event of the epoch was the election of the Universal House of Justice in 1963. It further demonstrated the more effective and co-ordinated use of the administrative machinery to prosecute the goals of the first global spiritual crusade, and the emergence in ever sharper relief of the World Centre of the Faith.

The Third Epoch of the Formative Age: 1963-1986

In addressing the British National Spiritual Assembly in 1951, the Guardian foreshadowed "world-wide enterprises destined to be embarked upon, in future epochs of that same [Formative] Age, by the Universal House of Justice". In announcing the Nine Year Plan, "the second of those world-encircling enterprises destined in the course of time to carry the Word of God to every human soul", the Universal House of Justice embarked upon the process anticipated by the Guardian and proclaimed the commencement of the third epoch of the Formative Age, an epoch which called the Bahá'ís to a yet more mature level of administrative functioning, consistent with the expected vast increase in the size and diversity of the community, its emergence as a model to mankind, and the extension of the influence of the Faith in the world at large. The House of Justice, in a letter dated October 1963, stated:

"Beloved friends, the Cause of God, guarded and nurtured since its inception by God's Messengers, by the Centre of His Covenant, and by His Sign on earth, now enters a new epoch, the third of the Formative Age. It must now grow rapidly in size, increase its spiritual cohesion and executive ability, develop its institutions,

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and extend its influence into all strata of society. We, its members, must, by constant study of the life-giving Word, and by dedicated service, deepen in spiritual understanding and show to the world a mature, responsible, fundamentally assured, and happy way of life, far removed from the passions, prejudices, and distractions of present-day society.'

The period of the third epoch encompassed three world plans, involving all National Spiritual Assemblies, under the direction of the Universal House of Justice, namely, the Nine Year Plan (1964-1973), the Five Year Plan (1974-1979), and the Seven Year Plan (1979-1986). This third epoch witnessed the

emergence of the Faith from obscurity and the initiation of activities designed to foster the social and economic development of communities. The institution of the Continental Boards of Counsellors was brought into existence leading to the establishment of the International Teaching Centre. Assistants to the Auxiliary Boards were also introduced. At the World Centre of the Faith, the historic construction and occupation of the Seat of the Universal House of Justice was a crowning event.

The Fourth Epoch of the Formative Age: 1986 -

In a letter dated 2 January 1986 written by the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of the World, the Supreme Body announced the inception of the fourth epoch of the Formative Age. It highlighted the significant developments that have taken place in the "organic growth of the Cause of God" during the course of the recently completed third epoch, by assessing the readiness of the Bahá'í community to begin to address the objectives of the new Six Year Plan scheduled to begin on 21 April 1986, and, outlined the general aims and characteristics of this new Plan. Whereas national plans had previously derived largely from the World Centre, in this new epoch the specific goals for each national community will be formulated, within the framework of the overall objectives of the Plan, by means of consultation between the particular National Spiritual Assembly and the Continental Board of Counsellors. As the Universal House of Justice states:

"This new process...signals the inauguration of a new stage in the unfoldment of the Administrative Order. Our beloved Guardian anticipated a succession of epochs during the Formative Age of the Faith; we have no hesitation in recognizing that this new development in the maturation of Bahá'í institutions marks the inception of the fourth epoch of that Age." [44]

Future Epochs

The tasks that remain to be accomplished during the course of the Formative Age are many and challenging. Additional epochs can be anticipated, each marking significant stages in the evolution of the Administrative Order and culminating in the Golden Age of the Faith. The Golden Age, itself, will involve "successive epochs' leading ultimately to the establishment of the Most Great Peace, to the World Bahá'í Commonwealth and to the "birth and efflorescence of a world civilization".

Enclosure: Source Materials

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"Messages to the Bahá'í World, 1950-1957", p. 13. Cablegram dated 25 April 1951.

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"Messages to the Bahá'í World, 1950-1957", p. 13. Cablegram dated 25 April 1951.

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25 February 1986

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

The Six Year Plan

On 2 January 1986, on the closing day of the Counsellors' Conference, the Universal House of Justice announced certain features of the Six Year Plan and the methods by which the national goals were to be worked out in consultation between the Counsellors and National Spiritual Assemblies. Before Ridvan you will receive a message from the Universal House of Justice to the entire Bahá'í world and also one addressed specifically to the Bahá'ís within the jurisdiction of each National Spiritual Assembly.

In the meantime the House of Justice wishes you to begin your consultations on the goals of the Six Year Plan for your country. The preliminary steps in goal-setting have already been taken, namely the assessment of each country's strengths and weaknesses which the National Spiritual Assemblies recently made at the request of the Universal House of Justice, and which will undoubtedly be of great assistance to each one of you as you enter the next stage of the process.

The House of Justice has instructed us to send you the following additional

guidelines together with the enclosed statement of the Major Objectives of the Plan at the national level, which includes some suggestions for specific goals to provide a basis for your consultations. You should not, however, confine yourselves to these suggestions.

A special characteristic of the Six Year Plan is that the conceiving of the detailed national goals is itself to be one of the tasks of the Plan, but this fact should not hold up in any way the activities of your communities. With this letter you are being acquainted with the Major Objectives of the Plan and every believer, every Local Spiritual Assembly, and all the national committees can pursue immediately, with increasing vigour, many projects towards their attainment, both projects already in process and others which will be newly conceived, so that when the specific national goals for each community are announced they will be received by a united company of devoted followers of Bahá'u'lláh already in the full flood of activity.

It is the hope of the Universal House of Justice that each National Assembly will be able to meet before Ridvan with a representative of the Continental Board of Counsellors so that from this initial consultation a basis will be laid for consultation on the goals at the National Conventions.

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Other consultations will no doubt continue following the Ridvan Festival. Their duration will depend on the condition of each national community, its size and the complexity of its circumstances. As soon as specific goals have been formulated and agreed they should be immediately sent to the World Centre. They will then be considered by the Universal House of Justice and the International Teaching Centre and, as soon as possible, the National Assembly will be informed of the approval or modification of its proposal. Each submission will be considered on its arrival; the earlier they arrive the better, and in no case should a submission reach the World Centre later than 1 November 1986.

Among the elements of the Plan which are not covered by the list of Major Objectives are the goals for international assistance including pioneering, resident teaching projects, travelling teaching, assistance for development projects, and for the acquisition of properties and vehicles. Notes relating to these elements have been provided to the Continental Boards of Counsellors who will share them with National Assemblies during the process of consultation. Since they are international in nature, these goals will have to be consolidated and approved at the World Centre before being generally announced.

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. It is the ardent hope of the Universal House of Justice

that every faithful follower of Bahá'u'lláh will search his or her heart and turn with full attention and loving self-sacrifice to the consideration of the goals of the Six Year Plan, and determine how to play a part in their achievement.

The prayers of the Universal House of Justice and the International Teaching Centre at the Sacred Threshold will surround the institutions of the Faith in every continent and nation as you assume your weighty task of conceiving the goals which will guide the national communities of the Faith through the next six years.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
Department of the Secretariat
Enclosure

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THE SIX YEAR PLAN

143-149

1986-1992

The Major Objectives

The major objectives of the Six Year Plan include: carrying the healing Message of Bahá'u'lláh to the generality of mankind; greater involvement of the Faith in the life of human society; a worldwide increase in the translation, production, distribution and use of Bahá'í literature; further acceleration in the process of the maturation of national and local Bahá'í communities; greater attention to universal participation and the spiritual enrichment of individual believers; a wider extension of Bahá'í education to children and youth and the strengthening of Bahá'í family life; and the pursuit of projects of social and economic development in well-established Bahá'í communities.

* * *

Set out below are suggestions for possible ways of achieving the above objectives to act as a basis for consultation and a stimulus for thinking. National Assemblies should not confine themselves to these points if they feel that there are other matters which deserve attention.

1. Carrying the healing Message of Bahá'u'lláh to the generality of mankind

Increase the number of believers from all strata of society, identifying as goals of the plan those specific sectors, minority groups, tribal peoples, etc. which are at present under-represented in the Bahá'í community and which will, therefore, be given special attention during the Plan.

Increase the number of localities where Bahá'ís reside, opening, in the process, virgin states, provinces, islands or other major civil

sub-divisions of the country.

Seize teaching opportunities by planning projects in areas where receptivity is found, aiming at large-scale enrolment and entry by troops where possible.

Be alert to opportunities for international collaboration with other Bahá'í communities in the promotion of the Faith through: border teaching projects; the sending of travelling teachers; and the teaching of special groups such as those temporarily abroad for study or work, particularly those from countries which are difficult of access, such as China or countries in Eastern Europe.

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Raise up homefront pioneers and travelling or resident teachers to assist in the fulfilment of teaching goals and plans.

Utilize mass media systems for greater proclamation.

Make use of drama and singing in the teaching and deepening work and in Bahá'í gatherings, where advisable.

2. Greater involvement of the Faith in the life of human society

Develop the proper understanding and practice of consultation among members of the Bahá'í community and in the work of Bahá'í institutions, and foster the spirit of consultation in the conduct of human affairs and the resolution of conflicts at all levels of society.

Foster association with organizations, prominent persons and those in authority concerning the promotion of peace, world order and allied objectives, with a view to offering the Bahá'í teachings and insights regarding current problems and thought.

Train suitable Bahá'ís to undertake public relations activities.

Foster appreciation of the Faith in scholarly and academic circles by developing Bahá'í scholarship, by endeavouring to have the Faith included in the curricula and textbooks of schools and universities, and by other means.

Encourage Bahá'í youth to move towards the front ranks of those professions, trades, arts and crafts necessary to human progress.

Promote the establishment of Bahá'í clubs in universities and other similar educational institutions.

Foster the practice of the equality of the sexes both in the life of the Bahá'í community and in society as a whole and, for this purpose, hold special conferences and training programs for women and for men.

3. A worldwide increase in the translation, production, distribution and use of Bahá'í literature

Foster the use of Bahá'í literature, especially in local languages, supplemented as need be by tape recordings and visual aids.

Improve the distribution of Bahá'í literature by taking specific steps, such as the establishment of regional depots where necessary, and the education of Local Spiritual Assemblies in their responsibilities to acquaint the friends with Bahá'í literature and ensure its easy availability.

Produce greater supplies of Bahá'í literature in accordance with well-thought-out plans of translation, production and distribution.

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Produce, where required for translations into vernacular languages, simplified versions of the Sacred Scriptures, the writings of the Guardian and the statements of the Universal House of Justice.

Establish Bahá'í lending libraries.

4. Further Acceleration in the process of the maturation of local and national Bahá'í communities

Adopt specific programmes to assist and encourage the development of isolated centres into groups, and groups into communities with Local Spiritual Assemblies, resulting in a steady increase of such Assemblies.

Adopt specific goals and programmes to consolidate and strengthen Local Spiritual Assemblies, so that they will:

Hold regular meetings with harmonious and productive consultation,

Properly organize and conduct the work of their Secretariat and Treasury,

Appoint and coordinate the work of local committees for special aspects of their work, such as teaching, child education, youth activities, literature distribution, etc.,

Win the respect and confidence of their local communities so that the believers will turn to them for the resolution of problems and advice in their services to the Cause,

Where appropriate, acquire and develop the use of Local Centres,

Obtain incorporation or equivalent recognition as a legal entity,

Exercise their responsibilities in relation to marriages and funerals,

Maintain registers of declarations, births, transfers of membership, marriages and deaths.

Adopt specific goals and programmes to consolidate communities with Local Spiritual Assemblies so that the believers will be encouraged to:

Attend regularly Nineteen Day Feasts and the observances of Bahá'í Holy Days, and enhance the spiritual quality of such gatherings,

Pursue local teaching and deepening activities,

Foster the realization of the equality of men and women,

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Develop local activities for children and youth,

Support the fund,

Carry out extension teaching projects.

Develop the functioning of National Spiritual Assemblies, adopting specific plans and programmes to:

Improve their standard of united, productive, loving consultation,

Develop efficiently functioning national secretariats,

Enhance the standard of the functioning of national treasuries and promote the goal of financial independence of the national Bahá'í community,

Appoint strong national committees to carry out, under the general supervision of the National Spiritual Assembly, the many specialized aspects of the work of the Cause, including the detailed planning and prompt execution of the work necessary to achieve all the goals of the Six Year Plan.

Acquire, where needed and feasible, national and local properties, such as Haziratu'l-Quds, teaching institutes, summer schools, Bahá'í cemeteries, etc. and ensure their proper care and maintenance.

Obtain where legally possible, official recognition for Bahá'í marriage and Holy Days and exemption from the payment of taxes on Bahá'í institutions and their activities.

Ensure the rapid and regular dissemination of news to all believers.

Hold regular, well-planned and well-run summer and winter schools and conferences at costs and in localities which will permit the largest attendance.

Encourage collaboration between or amongst Local Spiritual Assemblies in mutually agreed projects.

Develop and administer correspondence courses for teaching and deepening.

5. Greater attention to universal participation and the spiritual enrichment of individual believers

Promote universal participation in the life of the Faith and an increased sense of their Bahá'í identity among children, youth and adults.

Encourage, where feasible, the practice of dawn prayer.

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Encourage individual believers to adopt teaching goals for themselves.

Carry out activities designed to deepen the believers in both a spiritual and intellectual understanding of the Cause.

Encourage the believers to make greater use of Bahá'í literature.

Encourage the believers to enhance their command of language to assist them to understand the Bahá'í writings ever more clearly.

Develop and foster Bahá'í scholarship and lend support to the Associations for Bahá'í Studies.

Foster obedience to the Bahá'í laws of personal behaviour such as abstention from the drinking of alcoholic beverages and from the taking of habit-forming drugs, and inspire the believers to follow the Bahá'í way of life.

6. A wider extension of Bahá'í education to children and youth, and the strengthening of Bahá'í family life

Encourage the holding of regular classes for the Bahá'í education of children.

Develop systematic lesson plans and other materials for the Bahá'í education of children.

Train believers to teach Bahá'í children's classes.

Establish a programme for the guidance of parents, especially mothers, in the care and training of Bahá'í children.

Sponsor institutes on Bahá'í marriage and family life.

Encourage community activities involving Bahá'í families.

7. The pursuit of projects of Social and Economic Development in well-established Bahá'í communities

Encourage Local Spiritual Assemblies and the rank and file of the believers to consider ways in which they can advance the social and

economic development of their communities.

Establish tutorial schools and pre-schools where needed and feasible.

Encourage and sponsor adult literacy programmes where needed, especially for women.

Foster collaboration with other agencies involved in social and economic development in areas where the Bahá'í communities can contribute to the work.

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Naw-Ruz Message 1986 to the
Bahá'ís of the United States

Naw-Ruz 1986

To the Bahá'ís of the United States

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

This new year marks the seventieth anniversary of the Tablets of the Divine Plan, that sublime series of letters addressed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá to the North American Bahá'ís and which, constituting one of the mighty Charters of His Father's Faith, have inspired your highly prized community to achieve during the first three epochs of the Formative Age what no mind can fully assess, nor tongue adequately praise. Now, at the inception of the fourth epoch of that Age, your National Spiritual Assembly, working in close collaboration with the Continental Board of Counsellors and drawing upon the advice of the delegates to your National Convention and of your Local Spiritual Assemblies, has the inestimable privilege of devising the plans that will chart your course during the next six years to the eve of the Holy Year when you will join your sister communities in commemorating the centenary of the Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh and host, in the City of the Covenant, the second Bahá'í World Congress.

The performance of the American Bahá'í Community during the Plan now coming to a close has indeed enhanced by its monumental success in various fields the splendour of its past accomplishments. Although it is yet too soon to sum up the results of your seven-year-long efforts, the highlights of the outstanding array of achievements finally to be reported will undoubtedly include: the astonishing progress of your relations with your national government, particularly in defense of our oppressed brethren in Iran; the remarkable campaign you have mounted to diffuse the Peace Statement to all ranks of American society, beginning with the presentation to your Head of State; the resounding conference and accompanying activities which marked your observance of International Youth Year; the early attainment of your Local Assembly and locality goals; the enormous output of your human and material resources for international pioneering and traveling teaching; and the inauguration of your radio station, WLGI. Indeed, the primacy invested in your community by the beloved Master remains intact.

In a sense, the imminent launching of the Six Year Plan, with all the special features it will entail, is a salute to your immortal triumphs as "spiritual descendants of the Dawn-breakers" and a fresh reminder that you possess the vast, largely unrealized potential of a community blessed by Bahá'u'lláh with a unique destiny in the unfoldment of His mighty World Order.

We appeal, therefore, to each and every one of you, whether or not you occupy

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any position in the Bahá'í Administration, to respond wholeheartedly to the call of your National Spiritual Assembly to assist in meeting the goals to be set. As the beloved Guardian repeatedly stated in his letters to the American believers, it is the individual who has the power to act, and on whom, "in the last resort, depends the fate of the entire community." Onward, then, with your inescapable but glorious tasks!

Our prayers will be offered at the Holy Threshold for your guidance and the further success of your mighty endeavours.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

[signed — The Universal House of Justice]

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Ridvan Message 1986

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly-loved Friends,

The Divine Springtime is fast advancing and all the atoms of the earth are responding to the vibrating influence of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation. The evidences of this new life are clearly apparent in the progress of the Cause of God. As we contemplate, however momentarily, the unfolding pattern of its growth, we can but recognize, with wonder and gratitude, the irresistible power of that Almighty Hand which guides its destinies.

This progress has accelerated notably during the Seven Year Plan, witnessed by the achievement of many important enterprises throughout the Bahá'í world and vital developments at the heart of the Cause itself. The restoration and opening to pilgrimage of the southern wing of the House of 'Abdu'llah Pasha; the completion and occupation of the Seat of the Universal House of Justice; the approval of detailed plans for the remaining edifices around the Arc; the expansion of the membership and responsibilities of the International Teaching Centre and the Continental Boards of Counsellors; the establishment of the offices of Social and Economic Development, and of Public Information; the dedication of the Mother Temple of the Pacific, and dramatic progress with the building of the Temple in India; the expansion of the teaching work throughout the world, resulting in the formation of twenty-three new National Spiritual Assemblies, nearly 8,000 new Local Spiritual Assemblies,

the opening of more than 16,000 new localities and representation within the Bahá'í community of 300 new tribes; the issuing of 2,196 new publications, 898 of which are editions of the Holy Text and the enrichment of Bahá'í literature by productions in 114 new languages; the initiation of 737 new social and economic development projects; the addition of three radio stations, with three more soon to be inaugurated - these stand out as conspicuous achievements in a Plan which will be remembered as having set the seal on the third epoch of the Formative Age.

The opening of that Plan coincided with the recrudescence of savage persecution of the Bahá'í community in Iran, a deliberate effort to eliminate the Cause of God from the land of its birth. The heroic steadfastness of the Persian friends has been the mainspring of tremendous international attention focussed on the Cause, eventually bringing it to the agenda of the General Assembly of the United Nations, and, together with world-wide publicity in all

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the media, accomplishing its emergence from the obscurity which characterized and sheltered the first period of its life. This dramatic process impelled the Universal House of Justice to address a Statement on Peace to the Peoples of the World and arrange for its delivery to Heads of State and the generality of the rulers.

Paralleling these outstanding events has been a remarkable unfoldment of organic growth in the maturity of the institutions of the Cause. The development of capacity and responsibility on their part and the devolution upon them of continually greater autonomy have been fostered by the encouragement of ever closer co-operation between the twin arms of the Administrative Order. This process now takes a large stride forward as the National Spiritual Assemblies and Counsellors consult together to formulate, for the first time, the national goals of an international teaching plan. Together they must carry them out; together they must implement the world objectives of the Six Year Plan as they apply in each country. This significant development is a befitting opening to the fourth epoch of the Formative Age and initiates a process which will undoubtedly characterize that epoch as national communities grow in strength and influence and are able to diffuse within their own countries the spirit of love and social unity which is the hallmark of the Cause of God.

The goals to be achieved at the World Centre include publication of a copiously annotated English translation of the Kitab-i-Aqdas and related texts, education of the Bahá'í world in the law of the Huququ'llah, pursuit of plans for the erection of the remaining buildings on the Arc, and the broadening of the basis of the international relations of the Faith.

The major world objectives of the Plan have already been sent to National Spiritual Assemblies and Continental Boards of Counsellors for their mutual

consultation and implementation.

Dear friends, as the world passes through its darkest hour before the dawn, the Cause of God, shining ever more brightly, presses forward to that glorious break of day when the Divine Standard will be unfurled and the Nightingale of Paradise warble its melody.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

[signed — The Universal House of Justice]

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25 March 1987

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

In furtherance of the goal of the Six Year Plan to educate the friends throughout the world in the Law of Huququ'llah 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 spontaneously by some friends in Australia 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 Huququ'llah which has already been sent to you.

To help the friends increase their understanding of the significance of this Law of God, the Research Department was also requested by the Universal 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. 'Ali Muhammad Varqa, apart from the final section about Dr. Varqa himself, which has been added by the Research Department.

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

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

Enclosures

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CODIFICATION OF THE LAW OF HUQUQU'LLAH

March 1987

Prepared by the Research Department

at the request of the Universal House of Justice

I. PREAMBLE

Huququ'llah (The Right of God) is a great law (7) and a sacred institution (72). Laid down in the Most Holy Book (Kitab-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 Centre of His Faith.

By identifying this law as "The Right of God" Bahá'u'lláh has re-emphasized 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 Huququ'llah, within the general guidelines set forth, are exclusively a matter of conscience between the individual and God (8, 104); demanding or soliciting the Huququ'llah is prohibited (8, 9, 38, 71, 96, 104), only appeals, reminders and exhortations of a general nature, under the auspices of the institutions of the Faith, are permissible (38, 70, 99, 104, 107). That the observance and enforcement of this law, so crucial to the material well-being of the emerging Bahá'í commonwealth, should 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 Huququ'llah 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 increasingly become manifest as the friends assume in ever greater measure the responsibility for observing it.

The fundamentals of the law of Huququ'llah are promulgated in the Kitab-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 compiled 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.

1. The numbers in brackets refer to the paragraphs of the compilation on Huququ'llah issued by the House of Justice.

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I. (cont'd)

The following is a preliminary attempt at codifying the information in the Writings on the subject of Huququ'llah. 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 principles 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 Huququ'llah 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

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).

The Huququ'llah is to be offered joyfully and without hesitation (2, 9, 32). When the Huququ'llah 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 endeavours (48).

III . DETERMINING THE HUQUQU'LLAH

Everything that a believer possesses, with the exception of certain specific items, is subject once and only once to the payment of Huququ'llah.

A. Exempt from assessment to Huququ'llah are:

The residence and its needful furnishings (11).

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

B. Payment falls due:

Huququ'llah is payable as soon as a person's assessable possessions reach or exceed the value of 19 mithqals of gold (18, 19, 30). [19 mithqals equals approximately 2.2 troy ounces, or approximately 69.2 grammes (87, 105, 110). At the present time - March 1987 - this is equivalent to some US\$914.]

2. See III.C.1.

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III.B.1 (cont'd)

The amount to be paid is 19% of the value of the assessable property (10, 14).

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

2. Huququ'llah is payable on further units of 19 mithqals 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:

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

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

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, Huququ'llah 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, Huququ'llah 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 Huququ'llah (22).

7. The payment of Huququ'llah is dependent on the person's financial ability to meet his obligations (24).

8. On the death of a believer, the completion of his payment of Huququ'llah is accomplished in the following manner:

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

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

The Huququ'llah still due on the property should then be paid.

In establishing the value of the property on which Huquq 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).

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III. (cont'd)

C. Further notes on determining Huququ'llah:

1. It is left to the discretion of the individual believer to decide what is "needful" for himself and his family (104-106, 112).
2. Although references are made to annual payments of Huququ'llah 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 fulfil one's current obligations to Huququ'llah (103).
3. Husband and wife are free to decide whether they want to honour their Huququ'llah obligations jointly or individually (109, 110).
4. The account of Huququ'llah should be kept separate from other contributions, inasmuch as the disposition of the funds of the Huququ'llah 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 Huququ'llah has priority over making contributions 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 Huququ'llah that he is due to pay (105).

IV. APPLICABILITY OF THE LAW OF HUQUQU'LLAH

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 Huququ'llah 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 Huququ'llah if they wish to do so (82, 93, 102, 103, 109, 110).

V. PAYMENT OF HUQUQU'LLAH

The Huququ'llah is normally paid to the Trustee of Huququ'llah his Deputies, or their appointed Representatives (35, 58). These persons issue receipts and forward the funds to the World Centre (56).

VI. MANAGEMENT OF THE HUQUQU'LLAH

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

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THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE INSTITUTION FOR THE HUQUQU'LLAH

March 1987

Prepared by the Research Department

at the request of the Universal House of Justice

In one of His Tablets Bahá'u'lláh refers to this Law as ranking in importance 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 characterised by kindness, forgiveness, tolerance and magnanimity. 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 fulfilment of which is a direct responsibility of each believer towards God, not subject to the sanctions or impositions of His institutions 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.

After the Kitab-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, endeavoured to offer the Huququ'llah 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.

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 Huququ'llah to be accepted, provided the donor made the offering willingly with joy and awareness.

To receive the Huququ'llah Bahá'u'lláh brought into being one of the great Institutions of the Faith, the Trusteeship of Huququ'llah.

The first to be honoured with appointment as Trustee of Huququ'llah was Jinab-i-Shah Muhammad from Manshad, Yazd, who eventually received from the Blessed Beauty the title of Aminu'l-Bayan (Trustee of the Bayan). Haji Shah Muhammad 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 Huququ'llah and their petitions to the Sacred Threshold and, in return, bring them news and Tablets from the Blessed Perfection.

One of the most sacred tasks entrusted to Aminu'l-Bayan was to go to Iran to receive the Remains of the Bab from their custodian, the devoted and valiant Hand of the Cause of God Jinab-i-Haji Akhund, and to transfer them

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through innumerable dangers to a safe hiding place in the Mosque of the Imamzadih Zayd in Tihran, 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.

The attention of Jinab-i-Shah Muhammad was drawn to the rare qualities of nobility and detachment of one of the believers, Haji Abu'l-Hasan Ardakani, who was also from Yazd. The bond of fellowship between them became so strong that they became the closest of companions. Jinab-i-Shah Muhammad chose Haji Abu'l-Hasan to be his assistant and confidant in his services as the Trustee of Huququ'llah. They were among the first group of pilgrims who, after encountering grave hardships and difficulties, were able to visit Bahá'u'lláh in 'Akka. 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 Jinab-i-Haji Shah Muhammad was seriously wounded. Bahá'u'lláh instructed that, following the passing of Jinab-i-Shah Muhammad, the office of Trustee of Huququ'llah should be conferred upon his loyal assistant and companion, Jinab-i-Haji Abu'l-Hasan, who was subsequently entitled Amin (the Trusted One) or Jinab-i-Haji Amin.

Jinab Haji Amin 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 imprisoned twice, by order of Nasiri'd-Din Shah and his son, Kamran Mirza. In the course of his second imprisonment, in the prison of Qazvin, referred to as Sijn-i-Matin (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 Haji Akhund. Here, Jinab-i-Amin 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 gathering with his presence. He was continually on the move, travelling to most Iranian cities and being the trusted adviser of many Bahá'í friends in their personal affairs.

Among the countless journeys that Haji Amin made was one to Paris where he attained the presence of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. During his long life he witnessed the last eleven years of the Ministry of Bahá'u'lláh, the twenty-nine years of

the Ministry of the Centre 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 assistant, Haji Ghulam Rida, who, at the express desire of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, had been appointed his successor as Trustee of Huququ'llah. Upon his passing in 1928, Haji Amin was named by the beloved Guardian a Hand of the Cause of God.

The third Trustee of Huququ'llah h, Jinab-i-Ghulam Rida, was entitled Amin-i-Amin (Trustee of the Trustee). This distinguished soul was born into the wealthy merchant class of Tihiran 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

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engaged in his business, he ventured to search out and associate with followers 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, Jinab-i-Haji Ghulam Rida 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 attachment to Jinab-i-Amin and became his constant assistant. In due course he received a Tablet from 'Abdu'l-Bahá urging him to emulate Jinab-i-Amin and appointing him as Trustee of Huququ'llah. While ever mindful of the responsibilities of his new position, he took the utmost care of Jinab-i-Amin for the remainder of his life.

Jinab-i-Ghulam Rida held the rank of Trustee of Huququ'llah for eleven years. His home became a centre 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 endowments in Iran, and he was assiduous in doing his utmost for their protection and preservation. In 1938 he fell ill and passed away.

The fourth Trustee of Huququ'llah appointed to this position by the beloved Guardian, was Jinab-i-Valfyu'llah Varqa, the third son of Varqa the martyr. He was born in Tabriz 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-Shahid (the Brother of the Martyr), managed to remove him from this agonizing atmosphere of prejudice and took him to his home in Miyandu'ab. There he introduced him to the Bahá'í Faith and its teachings, opening a new world to Jinab-i-Varqa. 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 Tihran to join his elder brother Jinab-i-'Azizu'llah Varqa.

After his schooling in Tihran, Jinab-i-Varqa's longing to make his pilgrimage 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 services on the Local Spiritual Assembly of Tihran, in many Bahá'í administrative agencies, and ultimately on the National Spiritual Assembly. His loyal and dedicated service as Trustee of Huququ'llah was to follow, occupying him for seventeen years, during which time the observance of the Law of Huququ'llah 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, Jinab-i-Varqa resigned from the work in which he was employed.

In 1951 Jinab-i-Valiyu'llah Varqa was among the first contingent of eminent 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 teaching work, especially during the Ten Year Crusade, which opened at Ridvan 1953. These

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memorable services culminated in the fulfilment of his long-cherished desire to visit the beloved Guardian.

On his return to Iran from pilgrimage, a previous ailment grew worse, and Jinab-i-Varqa was forced to go to Tubingen in Germany for hospital treatment

and an operation. The treatment, alas, was unsuccessful, and, in November 1955 his noble life drew to a close.

In the cable announcing the passing of Valfyu'llah Varqa, Shoghi Effendi included the words: "His mantle as Trustee Huquq now falls on 'Ali Muhammad, his son.... Newly appointed Trustee Huquq now elevated rank Hand Cause."

Just two years following the appointment of Jinab-i-'Ali-Muhammad Varqa 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 Ridvan 1963, the Universal House of Justice.

The following twenty-three years have seen storms of tribulation and persecution afflicting the Bahá'í community in Iran, causing immense problems to be wrestled with in relation to the safeguarding and sale of properties donated for the Huququ'llah as well as a multitude of other historic tasks that have fallen to the lot of Jinab-i-Varqa in his capacity as a Hand of the Cause of God.

The successive teaching plans caused an outflow of pioneers from Iran to all corners of the world, requiring the Trustee of Huququ'llah 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 Huququ'llah in their adopted countries, but, increasingly, other friends have been moved to offer the Huquq.

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.

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Ridvan Message 1987

Ridvan 1987

Dearly-loved Friends,

The launching of the Six Year Plan at Ridvan 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 signaled by a development of far-reaching consequence to the internal life of the Bahá'í community and by an outward activity of a magnitude unprecedented in its entire history.

The former was a devolution of responsibility whereby all national communities, through their National Spiritual Assemblies, in consultation with Counsellors, 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 Centre for coordination into the world-embracing Six Year Plan.

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 estimated 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.

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.

The steadfastness of the sorely-tried Persian believers continues to be the mainspring of this world-wide attention increasingly being focussed 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 — giving 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 defenceless Bahá'ís by the Commission on Human Rights, and by many powerful nations including the various governments constituting the European Community.

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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 stations — of which there are seven now broadcasting — to schools, literacy programmes, agricultural assistance and a host of small but valuable undertakings at village level in many parts of the world.

National Bahá'í communities have organized and successfully conducted inter-religious 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" have, through their many gatherings, attracted large numbers 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.

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.

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 sacrificially continued, ensuring the enrolment 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 inter-assembly assistance projects, the re-formation of the National Spiritual Assembly of Zaire at Ridvan 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 pioneers, 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 Counsellors, the best means of ensuring the effective service of those who respond.

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 Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh, which links the past and the future with the progressive 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

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of past ages and centuries, as the consummation 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, signaling the end of the Prophetic Era and the beginning of the Era of Fulfilment, unsurpassed alike in the duration of its Author's ministry and the fecundity and splendour of His mission...". The questions that such concentrated study should answer will undoubtedly include the meaning of the Bahá'í Covenant, its origin and what should be our attitude towards it.

Ever present in our contemplation of these profound questions is the magnetic figure of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the Centre 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. Simultaneously, 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.

Great and wonderful tasks challenge us as never before. They demand equally great and wonderful sacrifice, dedication and single-minded devotion from every one of us. At present, the Bahá'í International Fund is utterly 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,

[signed — The Universal House of Justice]

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Completing the Arc on Mount Carmel

31 August 1987

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

Beloved Friends,

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 Centre of His Faith, calling into being the metropolis of the Kingdom of God on Earth. Through decades of oppression and expansion, persecution and emancipation, His followers have successfully laboured 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 centre of human attention.

On this same Mount Carmel 'Abdu'l-Bahá, with infinite pains, raised the Mausoleum of the Bab 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 Centre 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 construction of the Administrative Centre 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 fulfilment of a goal of the Seven Year Plan, and are now being detailed.

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 Centre, and we must without delay stride forward resolutely on this path.

Five closely related projects demand our attention: the erection of the three remaining buildings on the Arc and, added now to these, the construction of the terraces of the Shrine of the Bab 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.

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The Terraces of the Shrine of the Bab. In His plans for the development 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 Bab 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.

The International Teaching Centre will be the seat of that institution 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 established 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.

The Centre 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 Centre, which will assist the Universal House of Justice in consulting the Sacred Writings, and will prepare translations of and commentaries on the authoritative texts of the Faith.

The International Archives Building. We have decided to construct, westwards, an extension to the basement of the present Archives Building to provide accommodation for the central office of the ever-growing Archives at the World Centre. This institution is charged with responsibility for the preservation of the Sacred Texts and Relics and the historic documents of the Cause of God.

The International Bahá'í Library. This Library is the central depository of all literature published on the Faith, and is an essential source of information for the institutions of the World Centre 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 centre for knowledge in all fields, and it will become the kernel of great institutions of scientific investigation and discovery.

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.

The great work of constructing the terraces, landscaping their surroundings, and erecting the remaining buildings of the Arc will bring into being a vastly augmented World Centre structure which will be capable of meeting 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

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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 transformations 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 victory. 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". 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". This is the time for which we must now prepare ourselves; this is the hour whose coming it is our task to hasten.

At this climactic of human history, we are called upon to rise up in sacrificial endeavour, 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 unshakable 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,

[signed — The Universal House of Justice]

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Ridvan Message 1988

Ridvan 1988

To the Bahá'ís 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 Bahá'u'lláh as its banner rises to more stately heights. It is 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 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 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 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 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 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.

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This recognition prompted a meeting in Germany last November of national Bahá'í external affairs representatives from Europe and North America, together with senior representatives of the Offices of the Bahá'í 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 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 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 Kitáb-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 Bahá'í activity is teaching. All that has been done or will be done revolve around this central activity, the "head corner-stone 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.

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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 Bahá'u'lláh, sustained by daily prayers 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 Bahá'u'lláh".

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 Bahá'u'lláh"

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.

[signed — The Universal House of Justice]

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Education of Bahá'ís in the Law of Huququ'llah

7 July 1988

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

One of the important topics addressed during the Sixth International Convention was that of the education of the believers in the Law of Huququ'llah. Thus far the progress towards this goal of the Six Year Plan has been encouraging and heartwarming, both in the East and in the West. The letters received at the World Centre from many of the friends have shown a profound understanding of the spiritual significance of this law and a joy in being able to obey its precepts.

The Universal House of Justice has asked us to send to you the enclosed copy of the address that was given by the Hand of the Cause of God Dr. 'Ali Muhammad Varqa in one of the plenary sessions of the Convention, and to suggest that you share this with the friends in your community in such manner as you deem most effective. It points out that the worldwide education of the believers in the Law of Huququ'llah will require sustained efforts by the institutions of the Faith and, to assist you in this, we enclose a list of available publications on Huququ'llah which you can order directly from the Publishing Trusts or through the appropriate National Spiritual Assemblies.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

Enclosures

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TALK GIVEN BY THE HAND OF THE CAUSE OF GOD DR. 'ALI MUHAMMAD VARQA

Sixth International Convention, 1 May 1988

Dearly loved friends,

At the inception of the Six Year Plan of the Universal House of Justice, which coincided with dramatic changes in many aspects of society, a new arena for rapid development of the Faith of God has been attained and the purpose and aim of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation have been unveiled before the very eyes of Government Authorities, Heads of States and Scholars who were not even aware of its existence.

At this rightful time the Universal House of Justice has emphasized the importance of acquiring knowledge of the laws and ordinances revealed by Bahá'u'lláh, and adopted the translation of the most Holy Book, the Kitab-i-Aqdas, into English as one of the sublime goals of this new plan.

Among the commandments and decrees revealed in this sacred Book is the law of

Huququ'llah, previously applicable only to the friends in the East. The Western friends became aware of this law with the dissemination of the compilation of the Holy text and the Sacred writings prepared by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice.

Huququ'llah is an Arabic word composed of two words, "Huquq" meaning "Rights" and "Allah" meaning "God". Therefore, Huququ'llah means "The Rights of God", a part of the individual's possessions and income offered at the Threshold of the Lord.

In a Tablet addressed to Jinab-i-Zayn referring to Huququ'llah, Bahá'u'lláh states that the progress and the promulgation of the Faith of God, depend on material means, therefore, the expansion and the advancement of God's Revelation and the establishment of a new order and a new world civilization cannot be achieved without material means.

The embryo of this sacred law was established, by the Beloved Bab in the Bayan where, for the first time, the word Huququ'llah was mentioned by Him. Bahá'u'lláh brought some modifications in its contents and accepted it as one of the executive ordinances of His Revelation.

Although Huququ'llah is one of the most significant laws of the Kitab-i-Aqdas, we should not take the word "Law" in its rigid and literal meaning, defined in the encyclopedia as "the obligatory rule promoted by a sovereign authority". It is not a law which is enforced with pressure, but rather a spiritual obligation based on the love of the believer who is eager to obey the will of his Beloved. In this ordinance there is no room for pressure or intimidation. Obedience is a reflection of the highest degree of love and ardent desire.

Huququ'llah, by its special and unique characteristic, combines might and humility, power and humbleness. It is one of the fundamental ordinances of the Bahá'í Faith, like prayer and fasting. Its importance has been manifested by these words of Bahá'u'lláh:

"Say: O people, the first duty is to recognize the one true God — magnified be His glory — the second is to show forth constancy in His Cause and, after these, one's duty is to purify one's riches and earthly possessions according to that which is prescribed by God..." (31)*

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By studying the writings revealed by Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá regarding ,
Huququ'llah four essential points emerge:

First, in the Kitab-i-Aqdas, Bahá'u'lláh states:

"Should a person acquire one hundred mithqals of gold, nineteen mithqals thereof belong unto God, the Creator of earth and heaven. Take heed, O people, lest ye deprive yourselves of this great

bounty....n (10)*

'Abdu'l-Bahá emphasizes that Huququ'llah is payable on whatever is left over after deducting the yearly expenses.

The payment of Huququ'llah is based on the calculation of the value of one's income in respect of the gold unit. Whenever the annual income of the individual, after the deduction of his complete year's expenses, reaches nineteen mithqals of gold value, (equivalent to 2.22456 ounces or 69.19112 grams), 19% of this amount is the Right of God and should be submitted to the Focal Point of the Faith. The calculation of sustaining means of livelihood which are exempted from Huququ'llah depends on the spiritual maturity of every believer and his innermost conscience. No criterion can be established for this purpose, for it varies according to the living conditions and social status of each believer, and the degree of his spiritual attachment and material detachment.

The second point is that the payment of the Right of God is like a magnet, which attracts divine blessings and, confirmation. It is the mainspring of God's mercy and compassion. Bahá'u'lláh, in His writings, showers His limitless benediction upon those who observe this law.

Again, in the Kitab-i-Aqdas, the Pen of Glory decrees:

"...and whoso fulfilleth the things he hath been commanded, divine blessings will descend upon him from the heaven of the bounty of his Lord, the Bestower, the Bountiful, the Most Generous, the Ancient of Days...." (10)*

In another Tablet we read:

"They that have kept their promises, fulfilled their obligations, redeemed their pledges and vows, rendered the Trust of God and His Right unto Him — these are numbered among the inmates of the all-highest Paradise...." (26)*

In a Tablet revealed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, we find:

"Those who have observed this weighty ordinance have received heavenly blessings and in both worlds their faces have shone radiantly and their nostrils perfumed by the sweet savours of God's tender mercy...." (62)*

The third factor is that just as the payment of Huququ'llah would attract divine bounty and blessings, its negligence or failure causes deprivation and is interpreted as tantamount to treachery to a Fund rightfully belonging to God.

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This Fund is to be spent on whatever is of benefit for the promulgation of the Faith under the complete and absolute decision of the authority "to which all must turn." (96)* Only this authority and none other, not even the donor, has

the right to interfere in its management.

In the Kitab-i-Aqdas, the Pen of Glory warns those who neglect the payment of Huququ'llah:

"O people! Act not treacherously in the matter of Huququ'llah and dispose not of it, except by His leave...." (10)*

And He continues:

"Whoso dealeth dishonestly with God will in justice be exposed, and whoso fulfilleth the things he hath been commanded, divine blessings will descend upon him from the heaven of the bounty of his Lord, the Bestower, the Bountiful, the Most Generous, the Ancient of Days...." (ibid)

Therefore, withholding the payment of Huququ'llah or spending it on other concerns, no matter how charitable their nature, would be interpreted as misappropriation of the fund belonging to God, and an act of dishonesty. Any donation for charity and beneficent purposes such as contributions to the various funds should be made after the contributor is free of his debt to God.

And finally, God Almighty has decreed that the payment of the Right of God is conducive to prosperity, and assists the progress of the human soul in the spiritual realms of the Everlasting world.

Bahá'u'lláh says:

"...the treasures laid up by kings and queens are not worthy of mention, nor will they be acceptable in the presence of God. However, a grain of mustard offered by His loved ones will be extolled in the exalted court of His holiness and invested with the ornament of His acceptance...." (39)*

The high station of Huququ'llah and its exceptional rank among the commandments of Bahá'u'lláh is endowed with great veneration and respect. 'Abdu'l- Bahá, referring to the words of Bahá'u'lláh says:

"...the utmost honesty hath to be observed in matters related to the Huquq. The Institution of Huquq is sacred." (72)*

In order to respect its sanctity, Bahá'u'lláh strongly forbids soliciting Huququ'llah. No individual or institution is authorized to demand it. Whenever it is necessary to bring the importance of this obligation to the attention of the believers, it should be mentioned as a general reminder. Spiritual maturity must stir the conscience of the believers and, nothing else. In a

Tablet addressed to Haji Amin the second Trustee of Huququ'llah, Bahá'u'lláh says:

"No one should demand the Huququ'llah. Its payment should depend on the volition of the individuals themselves...n (51)*

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And again:

"...Ye may relinquish the whole world but must not allow the detraction of even one jot or tittle from the dignity of the Cause of God. Jinab-i-Amin — upon him be My glory — must also refrain from mentioning this matter, for it is entirely dependent upon the willingness of the individuals themselves. They are well acquainted with the commandment of God and are familiar with that which was revealed in the Book. Led him who wisheth observe it, and led him who wisheth ignore it...." (8)*

The concept of Huququ'llah is an evolutionary process subject to great changes, dependent on our spiritual growth, and our deepening of the Holy writings.

Most of the friends believe Huququ'llah is a way for fund raising, and its aim is to strengthen the material potential of the Faith.

Indeed the payment of Huququ'llah contributes to a large extent to the needs of the Cause. It is an important instrument for building and strengthening the structure of the edifice of the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, and when it is fully established there will be an ever-flowing source of revenue at the disposal of the Focal Point of the Cause of God to promote the Faith and to meet the growing needs of establishing a new world order. But, in fact, the purpose and aim of Huququ'llah is far beyond that and much greater and more spiritual than we imagine.

In 1978/79, following the Iranian upheaval, when the most important source of revenue of the Faith stopped functioning, I asked the Universal House of Justice if it was time for the implementation of Huququ'llah in some of the Western countries. The Universal House of Justice replied that Huququ'llah is a very important law, and its implementation needs time and consultation in the future. At the time, I could not comprehend the wisdom of what had been stated. It was after studying the Holy writings with more depth, that I have realized that Huququ'llah which could be interpreted as the material aspect of the Covenant of God, in reality is a spiritual and learning process, a way of strengthening the link of love and dedication between man and God, and its implementation needs studying and deepening.

Bahá'u'lláh in the Kitab-i-Aqdas says:

"Indeed there lie concealed in this command, mysteries and benefits which are beyond the comprehension of anyone save God, the All-Knowing, the All-Informed...." (10)*

Therefore, we cannot expect to comprehend the essence and the wisdom hidden in this sacred law. They are kept in the treasury of God's knowledge and are related to the evolution and progress of the human soul in the world of God. What we can conceive by our human understanding is that the payment of

Huququ'llah is the sign of our love and obedience, a proof of our firmness and steadfastness and a symbol of our trustworthiness in the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh. It creates and develops our spiritual quality which leads us towards perfection; it harmonizes and balances our material endeavour, protects us from excessive desire which is born in our human nature, and when unleashed turns into a preventive element for our spiritual growth. When man realizes that a

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his life in a Just and legitimate manner in order that his offering may deserve to be spent in the path of God.

It is important to note that although there is some similarity between Huququ'llah and the other donations, and that all are the marvelous fruits of love, enthusiasm and devotion of the believers to the Faith, there are four major differences between them:

1. The payment of Huququ'llah has priority over all other contributions because it belongs to God. The contribution of the believers to the funds should be made from their possessions and not from what belongs to the Lord.
2. The payment of Huququ'llah according to the explicit text of the Kitab-i-Aqdas is an obligation subject to specific laws and ordinances, whereas other donations are not considered as a law. They are rather an indication of the sacrifice, generosity, detachment and magnanimity of the contributor to meet the needs of the administration of the Cause.
3. Huququ'llah is determined precisely on accurate calculation, whereas there are no rules related to the frequency or the amount of the contribution to the funds.
4. The disposal of the Huququ'llah is left solely to the Focal Point of the Faith, and none other, whereas the disposal of the other contributions can depend on the purpose for which the contribution has been earmarked.

Undoubtedly, the awareness of the friends about Huququ'llah will raise many questions, including those related to its calculation and the appraisal of that part of one's belongings which is subject to exemption. One should consider that what is revealed in the Kitab-i-Aqdas about Huququ'llah is only the fundamental basis of this injunction, and the approach of the Blessed Beauty is confined to these guiding lines and general principles. He has not set any special rules or legislation. In all His writings related to this matter, God's self-sufficiency and independence of all things has been manifested, and the fragrance of His compassion, generosity and mercy is inhaled. According to the letter written in 1878 by His secretary to an early believer, for the first time the acceptance of Huququ'llah was granted to those Persian friends who had the desire to contribute, therefore, during five years after the revelation of the law, Bahá'u'lláh did not accept Huququ'llah and on many occasions the offering of the friends was returned to them. It could be assumed that since He, Himself, as the Central Figure of His Revelation, is the only

recipient of Huququ'llah, He did not want to go into details, but left them, in conformity to the Will of God, to the Universal House of Justice, the Body which has the power to enact laws that are not precisely given in the Book.

When the Kitab-i-Aqdas reached Iran and as the friends became aware of its contents, a consultative body, which could be the nucleus of our actual Local Spiritual Assemblies, was formed in Tihiran. In their minutes we notice that the dissemination of the knowledge of Huququ'llah was one of the goals set by that body 101 years ago.

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The growing eagerness of the believers for the execution of God's injunction led them to ask Bahá'u'lláh for elucidation regarding Huququ'llah and this was given to them in various Tablets. The most important guidance was revealed — in response to Jinab-i-Zayn's request — as an annex to the Kitab-i-Aqdas in the form of questions and answers. More guidance from the Beloved Master, the Guardian, and in recent decades from the Universal House of Justice has shed light on Huququ'llah which we can find in the compilation issued by the World Centre.

With the increasing awareness of the Bahá'ís and the fast growing complexity of the social and economic system of society, the Bahá'í community will witness the establishment of rules and guidance on Huququ'llah by the Supreme Authority of the Faith. Meanwhile, according to the Universal House of Justice's letter of March 1, 1984, in the absence of explicit text and Holy writings on Huququ'llah, the friends are free to honour the obligation of Huququ'llah based on their own judgement and conscience.

Indeed, while the establishment of rules and directions can explain the different aspects of Huququ'llah, the ideal functioning and efficiency of these legislations depend on the spiritual advancement of the friends and their deepening in the Holy Writings.

That is why the Universal House of Justice has, as one of its major goals of the Six Year Plan, adopted the education of Huququ'llah as a priority, preparing the way for the implementation of the law of God in the Bahá'í world, and has asked the fervent collaboration of the major institutions of the Faith, such as the National Spiritual Assemblies and the Continental Boards of Counsellors to share this important task with the Institution of Huququ'llah in promoting the education of God's injunction to the Bahá'í community at large.

During the last two years, some of the National Spiritual Assemblies — in particular the National Spiritual Assemblies of the United States and Canada and a few others in other parts of the world — offered remarkable assistance for this sublime goal and it is hoped many more will join in the future to assist with this task.

As a result of the effort of such National Spiritual Assemblies, a number of

Western friends are contributing to Huququ'llah even before its formal implementation. This leads us to hope that education on this subject will become more widespread and that, by the end of the Six Year Plan, the Bahá'í world will have attained a higher level of flourishing spiritual advancement.

*Refers to number of excerpt in compilation on Huququ'llah compiled June 1985 by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice.

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The Huququ'llah Compilation prepared by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice in June 1985 is available in the following languages from Bahá'í agencies indicated:

English

Bahá'í Canada Publications, Thornhill, Ontario, Canada

Huququ'llah

Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Huququ'llah

National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of New Zealand, Auckland, New Zealand

Huququ'llah

Bahá'í Publishing Trust, Oakham, England

Huququ'llah the right of God

Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Sierra Leone, Freetown, Sierra Leone

The Law of Huququ'llah

[abridged version]

Arabic

Bahá'í Publishing Trust of Lebanon, Beirut, Lebanon

Huququ'llah

Chinese

Bahá'í Publishing Trust Committee, Klang, Selangor, Malaysia

Hu ku qu la qu qui

French

Maison d'Editions Bahá'íes, Brussels, Belgium

Huququ'llah ou le droit de Dieu

German

National Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Germany, Hofheim-Langenhain, Germany

Huququ'llah: die Kronende Zier aller Ernten der Welt

Italian

Casa Editrice Bahá'í, Rome, Italy

Huququ'llah

Persian, Arabic

The Hand of the Cause of God 'Ali-Muhammad Varqa, Montreal, Quebec, Canada

Maju'i'i az nusūs-i-mubarakih va dastkhatthay-i-Baytu'l-Adl-i

Azam-i-Ilahi dar bariy-i-huququ'llah

Bahá'í Publishing Trust, Karachi, Pakistan

Huququ'llah

Spanish

Editorial Bahá'í de Espana, Terrassa, Barcelona, Spain

El Huququ'llah y 108 fondos Bahá'ís

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Bahá'í Publishing Trust Committee, Klang, Selangor, Malaysia

Hukukulla

Urdu

Bahá'í Publishing Trust, Karachi, Pakistan

Huququ'llah

The compilation "A Codification of the law of Huququ'llah" prepared by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice 1987 is available in the following languages from Bahá'í agencies indicated:

English

Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Sierra Leone, Freetown, Sierra Leone

A Codification of the law of Huququ'llah

National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States, Wilmette, Illinois, U.S.A.

A Codification of the law of Huququ'llah

Gen an

National Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Germany, Hofheim-Langenhain, Germany

Systematische Darstellung tes Huququ'llah-Gesetzes: tie Entwicklung ter Institution fur das Huququ'llah

Spanish

E.B.I.L.A., Buenos Aires, Argentina

Una Codificacion de la ley del huququ'llah

The compilation "The Development of the institution for the Huququ'llah" prepared by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice in 1987 is available in the following languages from Bahá'í agencies indicated:

English

Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Sierra Leone, Freetown, Sierra Leone

The Development of the institution for the Huququ'llah

National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States, Wilmette, Illinois, U.S.A.

The Development of the institution for the Huququ'llah

French

Maison t'Editions Bahá'íes, Brussels, Belgium

Huququ'llah, historique ed codification

Spanish

E.B.I.L.A., Buenos Aires, Argentina

El Desarrollo te la institucion tel Huququ'llah

National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Mexico, Mexico City, Mexico

El Desarrollo de la institucion del Huququ'llah

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The compilations "The Development of the-institution for the Huququ'llah" and "A

Codification of the law of Huququ'llah" prepared by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice in 1987 are available in one publication in the following languages from Bahá'í agencies indicated:

English

Bahá'í Publishing Trust Committee, Klang, Selangor, Malaysia

Huququ'llah

Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Transkei, Umtata, Transkei

The law of the Huququ'llah: codification and other documents

Other works on the Huququ'llah are available in the following languages from Bahá'í agencies indicated:

French

National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Gabon, Libreville, Gabon

Huququ'llah, le droit de Dieu

Persian

Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Pakistan, Karachi, Pakistan

Huququ'llah

National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United Kingdom, London,
United Kingdom

Huququ'llah

'Andalib, Thornhill, Ontario, Canada

Matalib va nikatf chand dar bariy-i-Huququ'llah, v.S no.19 (summer 1988)

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Ridvan Message 1989

Ridvan 1989

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

The spiritual current which exerted such galvanic effects at the International Bahá'í Convention last Ridvan 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 million 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 nations communities, whatever the current status of their teaching effort, will ultimately be involved.

We look back with feelings of humble gratitude and heightened expectations 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. Fariburz Sahba for the Terraces of the Shrine of the Bab, 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 'Ishqabad to restore the Local Spiritual Assembly of that city; the initiation of steps to open a Bahá'í Information Centre 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 Information in Hong Kong in

anticipation of the time when the Faith can be proclaimed on the mainland of China.

Also outstanding among these developments have been the successful co-sponsorship by the Bahá'í International Community of the "Arts for Nature" programme 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 curriculum 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.

No reference to such marvelous progress could fail to acknowledge the spiritual and social impact effected by the decade-long episode of persecution inflicted with such cruel excesses on our Iranian fellow-believers. Only in

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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.

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

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 construction 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 during 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, although 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.

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 organizations, 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 Counsellors, the Auxiliary Board members and their assistants, all of whose burgeoning energies are being skillfully coordinated by the International Teaching Centre — an institution whose augmented membership has already displayed a verve, a vision and a versatility evocative of warm admiration?

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. Led us continue, therefore, undeflected and confident, to seize the magnificent possibilities which the mix and blend of these ongoing 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.

In conjunction with the ever-widening thrust of teaching, we must proceed by every possible means with projects of the most critical importance. Work is continuing on the preparation for publication in English of the *Kitab-i-Aqdas*,

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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.

Regarding the projects on Mount Carmel, the Office of the Project Manager

has been established, and a technical staff is being assembled. Geological 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.

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 regular reading and study of the Holy Word.

Beloved Friends: The momentum generated by this past year's achievements 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 moment 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.

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".

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

[signed — The Universal House of Justice]

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Commencement of Work on Projects
on Mount Carmel

28 April 1989

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

On Thursday and Friday, 27 and 28 April 1989, the Universal House of Justice transmitted by electronic means the following message to selected National Spiritual Assemblies.

REJOICE ANNOUNCE COMMENCEMENT GEOLOGICAL SURVEY ESSENTIAL PRELIMINARY STEP IMPLEMENTATION PROJECTS MOUNT CARMEL. THIS STEP SHARPENS NEED SPEEDY ACCUMULATION FIFTY MILLION DOLLAR RESERVE CALLED FOR PERMIT INITIATION MAJOR WORKS, OF WHICH ONE THIRD 50 FAR CONTRIBUTED. URGE SHARE INFORMATION FRIENDS.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

The House of Justice has requested that in forwarding this message each National Spiritual Assembly be asked to ensure that the friends in its area of jurisdiction become aware of these urgent financial needs of the Faith in a manner best suited to its community.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

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The Importance of Literacy

10 July 1989

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

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 individual 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.

The blessings which flow from the Word of God are implicit in this instruction of Bahá'u'lláh in the *Kitab-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". 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."

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 command to parents to ensure the instruction of their sons and daughters in the "art of reading and writing". For this essential reason, in our last Ridvan message we called attention to the need for systematic attention to be given to eventually eliminating illiteracy from the Bahá'í community. This matter must assume its proper importance as a continuing objective of that community.

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 Effendi, 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 programme 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.

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Some local or national Bahá'í communities may wish to follow the example of those who have already instituted their own literacy projects and are achieving notable success; others may wish to participate in literacy programmes organized by governmental or non-governmental 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 institutions 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 favours and confirmations.

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 information concerning activities associated with International Literacy Year and how Bahá'í communities may become involved. Moreover, agencies at the Bahá'í World Centre having a special interest in literacy programmes will offer helpful advice as necessary, but Spiritual Assemblies need not wait to hear from them before proceeding with their own plans.

We look forward with confident expectation to your achievements toward the ultimate fulfilment 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,

[signed — The Universal House of Justice]

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The Nineteen Day Feast

27 August 1989

To the Followers of Bahá'u'lláh

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

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 Convention

last year, and we feel the time has come for us to offer clarifications.

The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh encompasses all units of human society; 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.

"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 endowed with a power that is not of this world." 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 Centre 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 to not violate principles of the Faith or the essential character of the Feast.

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 consultation 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 felt, and therefore conducive to the upliftment and enjoyment of its participants.

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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 community with the idea of the Nineteen Day Feast as an institution. It was as if a symphony, in three movements, had now been completed.

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 togetherness — 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."

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 society is built or restored. Here, for instance, the Feast is an arena of democracy 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.

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.

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Important aspects of the preparation of the Feast include the proper selection of readings, the assignment, in advance, of good readers, and a sense of decorum both in the presentation and the reception of the devotional programme. 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 significant part. Punctuality is also a measure of good preparation.

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 offers the following advice: "Give ye great weight to the Nineteen Day gatherings, 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 communions, beseech God's help, become joyfully enamoured 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 ardours of the spirit."

In absorbing such advice, it is illuminating indeed to view the Nineteen Day Feast in the context in which it was conceived. It is ordained in the "Kitab-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". It is clear, then, that the Feast is rooted in hospitality, with all its implications of friendliness, courtesy, service, generosity 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 laboured 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.

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.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

[signed — The Universal House of Justice]

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Compilation on Conservation of the
Earth's Resources

26 October 1989

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

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 assisting the friends in responding to the call, in the Ridvan message, for an increase in Bahá'í activities aimed at supporting endeavours to protect the environment.

The compilation was assembled, primarily, to deepen the believers' appreciation of the Bahá'í concept of nature and to enhance their understanding 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.

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 believers 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".

With great pleasure the House of Justice takes this opportunity to announce 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 non-governmental organizations 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

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Compilation on Sanctity and
Nature of Bahá'í Elections

10 December 1989

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

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.

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 programme 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 programme with the Counsellors, so that the rank and file of the believers, with the whole-hearted 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.

The Universal House of Justice wishes to stress at this point how

important 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 national 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.

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

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Progress on Projects on Mount Carmel

23 January 1990

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

KINDLY CONVEY ALL BELIEVERS NEWS PROGRESS HISTORIC MOUNT CARMEL PROJECTS.

FOLLOWING STRENUOUS DETAILED Negotiations, TOWN PLANNING SCHEME ESSENTIAL FOR INITIATION OP PROJECTS WAS OFFICIALLY APPROVED BY LOCAL TOWN PLANNING COMMITTEE AND CITY COUNCIL OF HAIFA ON 11 OCTOBER 1989, CONFIRMING GOOD WILL TOWARDS PROJECTS EXPRESSED BY CITY COUNCIL AT TIME INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION. SCHEME IS NOW BEFORE DISTRICT TOWN PLANNING COMMISSION FOR FINAL APPROVAL. THIS PLAN INCLUDES CANCELLATION TWO ROADS PREVIOUSLY APPROVED TO CROSS BAHAI LANDS AND LOWERING LEVEL MAIN THOROUGHFARE, THUS PERMITTING CONSTRUCTION TERRACES LINKING GARDENS SURROUNDING SHRINE BAB WITH THOSE ADJACENT ARCHIVES BUILDING. GRANTING OF APPROVALS INVOLVES OUR COMMITMENT IMMEDIATELY START WORK.

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

BUILDING PERMIT DRAWINGS FOR ARCHIVES BUILDING EXTENSION AND CENTRE FOR THE STUDY OF THE TEXTS SUBMITTED, ENABLING CONSIDERATION APPLICATION BUILDING PERMIT RUN CONCURRENTLY LAST STAGE APPROVAL TOWN PLANNING SCHEME.

OF \$50,000,000 CALLED FOR AS ESSENTIAL RESERVE FOR INITIATION CONSTRUCTION, APPROXIMATELY \$26,000,000 SO FAR CONTRIBUTED. REMAINING SUM NOW URGENTLY NEEDED.

EXECUTION STUPENDOUS COLLECTIVE UNDERTAKING GATHERING MOMENTUM, PARALLELING EXTRAORDINARY DEVELOPMENTS WORLD SCENE, ACCELERATION CONVERSION PEOPLES CAUSE GOD, WIDER DIFFUSION MESSAGE BAHAI U'LLAH REMAINING

AREAS GLOBE. SUPPLICATING BLESSINGS ALMIGHTY REINFORCE EVERY EFFORT HIS DEVOTED FOLLOWERS ACCOMPLISHMENT VITAL TASKS.

[SIGNED — THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE]

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Subsidiary Two Year Teaching Plan for
Eastern Europe and Asia

8 FEBRUARY 1990

TO THE FOLLOWERS OF BAHÁ'U'LLAH THROUGHOUT THE WORLD

FAR-REACHING EVENTS BEING ENACTED WORLD STAGE, PARTICULARLY IN EASTERN EUROPE AND Soviet UNION, ON THRESHOLD FINAL FATE-LADEN DECADE CENTURY OF LIGHT, PROVIDE FURTHER DRAMATIC EVIDENCE RESISTLESS OPERATION OF GOD'S MAJOR PLAN FOR TRANSFORMATION OF HUMAN SOCIETY. RAPID UNFORESEEN DEVELOPMENTS NECESSITATE CORRESPONDING PARALLEL ACCELERATION IN LIFE-GIVING ENTERPRISES BEING PURSUED BY INHERITORS BAHÁ'U'LLAH'S RESPLENDENT REVELATION.

REJOICE THEREFORE ANNOUNCE LAUNCHING AT RIDVAN 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-BAHA ALREADY IN ADVANCED STAGE OF OPERATION OTHER AREAS PLANET. REGIONAL ENTERPRISE, CONCEIVED IN CONSULTATION INTERNATIONAL TEACHING CENTRE, DESIGNED SIGNIFICANTLY REINFORCE CURRENT SIX YEAR GLOBAL PLAN. OBJECTIVES INCLUDE ATTRACTION NUMEROUS NEW SUPPORTERS FAITH, GREAT INCREASE TRANSLATION, PUBLICATION AND DISSEMINATION BAHÁ'I LITERATURE IN REQUISITE LANGUAGES ENTIRE AREA, AND EXTENSION BENEFICENT INFLUENCE DIVINELY APPOINTED ADMINISTRATIVE ORDER THROUGH ERECTION FRAMEWORK LOCAL NATIONAL BAHÁ'I INSTITUTIONS IN AS MANY EASTERN COUNTRIES AS POSSIBLE UP TO AND INCLUDING RIDVAN 1992.

CALLING UPON THOSE NATIONAL ASSEMBLIES EUROPE, ASIA AND AMERICA WHICH BEAR PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITY FOR INDIVIDUAL NATIONS INVOLVED, TO CONSULT WITH COUNSELLORS AND FORMULATE DETAILS SPECIFIC GOALS INCORPORATING 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 LABOURING ADVANCEMENT CAUSE IN EASTERN EUROPE AND Soviet UNION, ACHIEVEMENTS WHICH HAVE BLAZED TRAILS FOR COMING LARGE-SCALE INITIATIVE. CALL UPON BAHÁ'I WORLD ARISE SUPPORT DIFFUSION WORLD-REDEEMING MESSAGE FAITH GOAL AREAS THROUGH SETTLEMENT PIONEERS AND THROUGH DESPATCH STEADY FLOW TRAVELLING TEACHERS, ESPECIALLY THOSE WITH KNOWLEDGE LANGUAGES COUNTRIES AND REPUBLICS EASTERN BLOC.

CONCOMITANT THESE MEASURES, VITAL ONGOING PROCESS CHINESE TEACHING RECEIVING FURTHER IMPETUS.

BROAD VISTAS NOW OPEN TO FAITH GOD PROVIDE UNPRECEDENTED OPPORTUNITIES WIN FRESH VICTORIES AS WORTHY OFFERING SACRED THRESHOLD BLESSED BEAUTY

OCCASION COMMEMORATION FIRST CENTENARY HIS ASCENSION COMING HOLY YEAR.
IMPLORING ABUNDANT OUTPOURING DIVINE CONFIRMATIONS PARTICIPANTS ALL FACETS
HISTORIC SIX YEAR CAMPAIGN.

[SIGNED — THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE]

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Ridvan Message 1990

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

Having ended a year of momentous achievements, we stand at the threshold of the last decade of this radiant twentieth century facing an immediate future of immense challenges and dazzling prospects. The swiftness of events during the past year is indicative of the acceleration, as the hundredth anniversary of Bahá'u'lláh's Ascension approaches, of the spiritual forces released with the advent of His revolutionizing mission. It is an acceleration 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".

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. Led us rejoice, therefore, in the wondrous signs of the beneficence of God's abounding grace. The high level of teaching and enrolments reported last Ridvan 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 re-creation last Ridvan of the Local Spiritual Assembly of 'Ishqabad, the recent election of that of Cluj in Romania, the first new Assembly in the "East Bloc", the re-establishment and formation this Ridvan of Local Spiritual Assemblies in other parts of the Soviet Union and in other countries of Eastern Europe — all these achievements and immediate 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 developments that prompted our recent announcement of a subsidiary Two Year Teaching Plan, now formally launched, to which we commend your urgent and active attention.

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How staggering, how far-reaching have been the activities which propelled 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 association of Hands of the Cause with the developments in Europe and Asia. Amatu'l-Bahá Ruhiyyih Khanum, 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 Expedition" 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. 'Ali-Akbar Furutan is visiting the USSR, which he was forced to leave during the persecution of the Faith there; now he has returned in triumphant fulfilment of a wish expressed to him by our beloved Guardian some sixty years ago.

Nor have the Counsellor members of the International Teaching Centre 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 Counsellors 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 Counsellors 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.

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 collaboration with other environmental organizations, re-instituted 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 organizations 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 representative 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

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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.

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 representative 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 emancipation 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.

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-Ruz, the District Town Planning Commission, after delicate and complex negotiations, decided to approve the plan submitted by the Bahá'í World Centre. This paves the way for the ultimate issuance of building permits.

Beloved Friends: Merely two years separate us from the conclusion of the Six Year Plan and the beginning at Ridvan 1992 of the Holy Year, that special 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.

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 participate 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 liberated Spirit, will be the depositing beneath the floor at the entrance door of His Shrine of a receptacle containing the illuminated Roll of Honour 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.

The other event will be the Bahá'í World Congress to celebrate the centennial 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 Centre and Who anticipated that "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".

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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.

The friends everywhere must now orient themselves to the significance 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. Led 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. Led these requisites be the standard of their efforts to teach His Cause, the hallmark of their homage to the King of Kings.

Our dear and valued Co-workers: It is at such a time of profound anticipation 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 situation is equally a bright portent and a weighty challenge.

It is portentous of the profound change in the structure of present-day society 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 Bab and the remaining buildings on the Arc of the World Administrative Centre 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.

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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 diverse 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 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. We have every encouragement to believe that large-scale enrolments 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 fulfilment 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.

An expansion of thought and action in certain aspects of our work would enhance our possibilities for success in meeting our aforementioned commitments. 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 actions 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.

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 appreciated 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.

Thus far, we have achieved a marvellous diversity in the large numbers of ethnic groups represented in the Faith, and everything should be done to fortify it through larger enrolments 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

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of people of capacity, including persons of accomplishment and prominence in the various fields of human endeavour. 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 Counsellors and National Spiritual Assemblies to devote serious attention to it in their consultations and plans.

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 attention 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 disillusioned members of society.

That there are indications that the Lesser Peace cannot be too far distant, 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.

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, led 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 unceasing blessings of such a Father that we shall continue to supplicate on behalf of each and every one of you at the Sacred Threshold.

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Commencement of Work on Extension
of Terraces on Mount Carmel

24 May 1990

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

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 TERRACES COMMENCED. THIS HISTORIC OCCASION MARKED BY VISIT HIS SHRINE AND SHRINE OF 'ABDÚ'L-BAHÁ BY THE HANDS OF THE CAUSE OF GOD AMATU'L-BAHÁ RUHIYYÍH KHANUM AND 'ALÍ-AKBAR FURUTÁN, THE MEMBERS OF THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE AND COUNSELLOR MEMBERS OF THE INTERNATIONAL TEACHING CENTRE WITH FARIBURZ 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, MAKING IT EQUAL TO EXISTING WESTERN WING.

GLORIOUS UNDERTAKING CREATION BEFITTING RESTING PLACE MARTYR-HERALD FAITH WAS ENVISAGED BY BAHÁ'U'LLÁH HIMSELF, WAS SOLEMNLY INITIATED BY 'ABDÚ'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 BEAUTIFICATION NINE EXISTING TERRACES AND CONSTRUCTION NINE MORE TO REALIZE MONUMENTAL CONCEPT REACHING FROM FOOT TO CREST HOLY MOUNTAIN.

CALL UPON FRIENDS EVERY LAND RALLY SUPPORT THIS SACRED ENTERPRISE NOW

INSEPARABLY LINKED WITH ARC PROJECT EXPRESS BEFITTINGLY THEIR AWARENESS
MAGNITUDE BOUNTY CONFERRED UPON MANKIND BY MINISTRY AND SACRIFICE BLESSED
BAB, DEMONSTRATE THEIR COMMITMENT TO BAHÁ'U'LLAH'S CALL IN TABLET OF CARMEL
TO ESTABLISH UPON THAT MOUNTAIN SEAT GOD'S THRONE AND FULFIL, THROUGH THEIR
GENEROUS CONTRIBUTIONS, 'ABDU'L-BAHA'S AND SHOGHI EFFENDI'S VISION OF
EFFLORESCENCE MIGHTY INSTITUTIONS FAITH ON MOUNTAIN OF THE LORD.

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The Holy Year, 1992-1993

1 June 1990

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

The Holy Year, 1992-1993

In its Ridvan 1990 message, the Universal House of Justice described the nature of the major events that will highlight the observance of the Holy Year beginning on 21 April 1992 and ending on 20 April 1993. We have now been directed by it to convey information concerning practical preparations for these events.

Centenary of the Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh

The activities relating to this commemoration in the Holy Land will involve two days, 28-29 May 1992, and will include:

A ceremony at Bahji on the morning of Thursday, 28 May for the placement of the Roll of Honour of the Knights of Bahá'u'lláh at the entrance of the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh.

A devotional programme and related activities in the vicinity of the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh, on the night of 28-29 May, to mark the hundredth anniversary of His passing.

Ascent to and circumambulation of the Shrine of the Bab, visit to the Arc and subsequent viewing of the portrait of Bahá'u'lláh at the Seat of the Universal House of Justice on the afternoon of Friday, 29 May.

Regarding attendance, as it will not be possible to accommodate at the World Centre as many friends as might wish to attend, the House of Justice has decided to authorize the attendance of believers, in addition to the Knights of Bahá'u'lláh, on the basis of quotas: 19 from each National Spiritual Assembly jurisdiction and 9 from every other country as will be specified in due course by the House of Justice. Each National Spiritual Assembly is therefore requested to do the following:

Devise a fair basis for selecting 19 attendees, bearing in mind the overall expectation of the House of Justice of the widest possible ethnic and indigenous representation.

Send the names of those selected to the World Centre no later than 30 June 1991.

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The friends should plan to spend up to four nights in the 'Akka-Haifa area and should depart before sunset of the fifth day, but may visit other parts of Israel for an additional period of 10 days, before or after their stay in the 'Akka-Haifa area.

Further details concerning hotel and other living accommodations and travel will be sent to you at a later date.

Bahá'í World Congress

This event will mark the Centenary of the Inauguration of the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh and will take place in New York City at the Jacob K. Javits Convention Centre. The main programme of the Congress will occur on Monday, 23 November through Thursday, 26 November 1992. However, pre-Congress activities and orientation will commence on Saturday, 21 November, and the friends are encouraged to attend.

Communications. The House of Justice has appointed two agencies to administer the affairs of the Congress, namely:

The Bahá'í World Congress Programme Committee, which is responsible for planning and executing the programme as approved by the House of Justice. The Programme Committee operates from the Office of the Bahá'í International Community in New York.

The Bahá'í World Congress Logistics Office, which is responsible for the physical arrangements (i.e., travel, hotel accommodations, Congress facilities) and for registration. The Logistics Office operates from the Bahá'í National Centre in Wilmette, Illinois.

These two agencies have been authorized to communicate with National Spiritual Assemblies and others concerning their work, and you are requested to cooperate with them in every possible way.

Travel and accommodations. By authorization of the Universal House of Justice, the United States National Spiritual Assembly has engaged the services of a travel agency to deal with travel and hotel accommodations connected with the Congress and to obtain the lowest possible rates and group discounts. Kindly await and follow the advice of the Logistics Office on these matters. You are requested to ask the friends in your communities not to contact the New York area hotels either individually or in groups as this could jeopardize the delicate negotiations for low rates.

Registration. Registration for the Congress will open by April 1991 and close one year later. It is hoped to accommodate 32,000. In assisting the World Centre to arrive at an estimated attendance, a number of National Spiritual Assemblies have already submitted lists of names of those definitely

planning to attend. However, when registration opens, all the friends who wish to attend, without exception, should be sure to complete the registration forms which will be supplied by the Logistics Office, so as to be guaranteed seats at the Congress.

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Attendance. Kindly note that non-Bahá'í spouses will be permitted to attend the Congress; but regarding children, attendance will be limited to those who have passed their twelfth birthday, as it will be impossible to provide, in New York City at the time of the Congress, facilities and care for children under 12.

Your keen attention to these matters as they are amplified in further communications from the Programme Committee and Logistics Office, as well as from the World Centre, will ensure success of the activities of the Holy Year and a rich, befitting and memorable experience for the entire community. The House of Justice assures you of its ardent prayers that you may be guided, assisted and confirmed by the Blessed Beauty.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

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Compilation on Reaching People of
Capacity and Prominence

28 September 1990

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

The Universal House of Justice draws to your attention that portion of the most recent Ridvan 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.

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

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Progress of Teaching Work in Eastern Europe
and Projects on Mount Carmel

12 November 1990

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

The following message has been sent electronically to selected National Spiritual Assemblies.

TO THE FOLLOWERS OF BAHÁ'U'LLAH THROUGHOUT THE WORLD

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 SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY EACH IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA, HUNGARY AND YUGOSLAVIA. DEVELOPMENT FAITH IN ALL THESE COUNTRIES AS WELL AS IN ALBANIA, BULGARIA, MONGOLIA AND POLAND GOING FORWARD WITH EXTRAORDINARY SPEED, FORMATION MORE LOCAL ASSEMBLIES IN PROCESS OR EXPECTED SHORTLY.

IN HOLY LAND WORK ON TERRACE OF SHRINE OF THE BAB PROGRESSING. RESERVE 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 HUQUQU'LLAH AND THE BAHÁ'I INTERNATIONAL FUND. IMPERATIVE FULFIL INITIAL GOAL \$50,000,000 FORTHWITH, AND ENSURE ANNUAL CONTRIBUTION \$20,000,000 FOR MOUNT CARMEL PROJECTS TO ENABLE WORK PROCEED WITHOUT INTERRUPTION.

CONFIDENT INVINCIBLE SPIRIT BAHÁ'U'LLAH WILL ENABLE HIS FOLLOWERS EVERY LAND MEET CHALLENGE WORLD-WIDE EXPANSION CAUSE AND INTERNATIONAL NEEDS OF THE FAITH AT WORLD CENTRE.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

Kindly ensure that this important message reaches the believers in your community with dispatch.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

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Compilation on Marriage

10 December 1990

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

A number of communications received recently indicate a lack of appreciation of the sanctity of Bahá'í marriage. We therefore decided to request the Research Department to make a special study concerning the pressing need for safeguarding the sacred marriage tie in the spirit of the Teachings.

Accordingly a memorandum has been prepared, a copy of which is enclosed, together with a compilation of extracts from the Bahá'í Writings and the letters of Shoghi Effendi and the Universal House of Justice on preserving Bahá'í marriages. Reading the memorandum in conjunction with the appropriate extracts in the compilation will enhance the efficacy of a study of the material presented.

We hope that this additional measure to acquaint the believers with the significance of the institution of Bahá'í marriage will lead to a deeper appreciation of individual and community responsibility in taking action to fulfil the true function for which it has been ordained.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

[signed — The Universal House of Justice]

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Call for Election of National Spiritual Assemblies
of the U.S.S.R. and Romania

9 January 1991

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

Under today's date, the Universal House of Justice has sent by electronic means to selected National Spiritual Assemblies the following message.

REJOICE ANNOUNCE DECISION ESTABLISH AT RIDVAN 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 BAHA'U'LLAH FOR OUTPOURING HIS DIVINE CONFIRMATIONS.

UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

Kindly share this exciting news with the members in your community in whichever manner you deem most expedient.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

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Call for Election of National Spiritual Assembly

of Czechoslovakia and Report on Projects
on Mount Carmel

20 February 1991

TO THE FOLLOWERS OF BAHÁ'U'LLAH IN EVERY LAND

OUTSTANDING PROGRESS TEACHING WORK CZECHOSLOVAKIA MOVES US CALL FOR ELECTION COMING RIDVAN NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY THAT COUNTRY WITH SEAT IN PRAGUE. WITH FORMATION NATIONAL ASSEMBLIES USSR AND ROMANIA ALREADY ANNOUNCED, AND THAT OF WEST LEEWARD ISLANDS WITH ITS SEAT IN BASSETERRE, ST. KITTS, NUMBER OF PILLARS UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE WILL BE RAISED TO ONE HUNDRED FIFTY-FIVE.

WORK MOUNT CARMEL PROJECTS CONTINUING WITH UTMOST SPEED IN SPITE OF REPERCUSSIONS TROUBLED CONDITIONS MIDDLE EAST. REJOICE ANNOUNCE INITIAL GOAL FIFTY MILLION DOLLARS FUND THIS PURPOSE NOW ACHIEVED. URGE FRIENDS ALL LANDS CONTINUE FLOW VITALLY NEEDED CONTRIBUTIONS ENABLE THESE HISTORIC PROJECTS PROCEED WITHOUT ABATEMENT DURING MONTHS AND YEARS IMMEDIATELY AHEAD.

IRRESISTIBLE ADVANCE CAUSE GOD DURING CURRENT CRISES STRIKING EVIDENCE UNINTERRUPTED DIVINE CONFIRMATIONS. PRAYING FERVENTLY HOLY SHRINES CONTINUING BESTOWALS BLESSED BEAUTY HIS LOVED ONES EVERY LAND.

[SIGNED — THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE]

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Ridvan Message 1991

Ridvan 1991

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

No earthly tongue can voice the gratitude we feel for the extraordinary bestowals vouchsafed by the Blessed Beauty to His world-wide community and to the-World Centre 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.

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 between 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".

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 arrangement 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 behaviour 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 manifest justice."

Indeed, from whatever direction we gaze, the power of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation 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 defining 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 indication 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".

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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 occurring in the Soviet Union and its former satellite countries. Just one year since the re-establishment 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 association with the right to spread the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh; here, too, a National Spiritual Assembly is to be formed this Ridvan. 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.

We are happy to say that three Hands of the Cause of God will represent the Universal House of Justice at these historic events: Amatu'l-Bahá Ruhiyyih Khanum in Romania, Mr. 'Ali Akbar Furutan in the Soviet Union, and Dr. 'Ali-Muhammad Varqa in Czechoslovakia. Counsellor Ruth Pringle will be the representative in the West Leeward Islands.

Another illustration of the rising authority of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh in the public mind emerges from Germany, where the Federal Constitutional 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 legally 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.

Yet another instance of the growing public appreciation for the penetrating 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.

Whatever may be the individual effects of any one of these aforementioned developments — and of such others as the appearance of a representative 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

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at a reception during his recent visit to Burundi; 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.

In contemplating these marvellous signs and portents, we cannot resist the impulse to express our profound love and appreciation to the Continental Counsellors, and to their Auxiliary Boards, who stimulate and buttress efforts which make possible the accomplishment of such stupendous developments 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 Counsellors have made as they entered the new term of their indispensable and highly appreciated services to the Bahá'í world. The fresh initiatives to which, with the whole-hearted encouragement and splendid support of the International Teaching Centre, they now bent 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 world-wide 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.

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 beginning 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:

The preparation of the long-expected, annotated English translation of the *Kitab-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.

Earthwork on the lower Terraces of the Shrine of the Bab and excavation for the Centre 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.

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 distinctive character and world-shaking importance of the two occasions.

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The one: the gathering of representatives of the Bahá'í world, along with Knights of Bahá'u'lláh, at Bahji in the precincts of the Mansion, 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 Honour 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 Bahji 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 experience of the entire Bahá'í world during this centennial observance.

The other: the World Congress scheduled to be held on 23-26 November 1992 in New York City, where the beloved Master revealed the implications of His station as the appointed Centre 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 auxiliary 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 alms 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 endeavour to blazon the Name of Bahá'u'lláh across the globe, to make it a known eminence in the consciousness of peoples everywhere.

Such an exceptional confluence of imminent achievements — the publication of the *Kitab-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 endeavours 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

Institution 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 favourable 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 Ridvan 1992, the beginning of the Holy Year, the Law of Huququ'llah, the Right of God, will become universally applicable. All are lovingly called to observe it.

Our very dear brothers and sisters: Witness how the Beloved One has answered 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 guide-lines for the behaviour of nations large and small. Surely such abounding benedictions 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.

May you continue, through your selfless deeds in His service, to be blessed from the inexhaustible treasury of His love and tender care.

[signed — The Universal House of Justice]

METADATA

Views25119 views since posted 1999; last edit 2026-04-10 01:17 UTC;

previous at archive.org.../uhj_six-year_plan_1986;

URLs changed in 2010, see archive.org.../bahai-library.org

Language

English

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History

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