

NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY
OF THE BAHÁ'ÍS OF THE UNITED STATES

March 8, 2016

To the American Bahá'í community

Dearly loved Friends,

“The well-being of mankind, its peace and security are unattainable unless and until its unity is firmly established.” Such was the emphatic statement of Bahá'u'lláh, the Promised One of All Ages, well over a century ago. On such a foundation was the Bahá'í community raised, a community that welcomes all and excludes none, a community that seeks to further His vision of a world at peace and in unity—a world in which every last barrier dividing the human family one from another will at last and for all time be thrown down.

This is a presidential election year in our country and the campaign season is now in high gear. It is timely, therefore, to remind ourselves of some of the many potent statements in our writings stressing the importance of avoiding partisan politics—activity that by its very nature undermines the goal of unity. The Universal House of Justice has explained:

By becoming involved in political disputes, the Bahá'ís instead of changing the world or helping it, would themselves be lost and destroyed. The world situation is so confused, and moral issues which were once clear have become so mixed up with selfish and battling factions, that the best way Bahá'ís can serve the highest interests of their country . . . is to sacrifice their political pursuits and . . . fully support the divine system of Bahá'u'lláh.

The beloved Guardian, Shoghi Effendi, advised the Bahá'ís of North America—and, through them, believers across the world—thus:

Let them refrain from associating themselves, whether by word or by deed, with the political pursuits of their respective nations. . . . In such controversies they should assign no blame, take no side, further no design, and identify themselves with no system.

The Supreme Body leaves no doubt about our proper posture with the following:

Active support . . . of an individual who has announced his candidacy for political office is not permissible to Bahá'ís. Even if the person is not attached to a political party, the very fact of promoting his candidacy over that of other competitors is an act of partisanship, which is inimical to the principles of the Faith.

From these strong and unequivocal statements, we can clearly see that Bahá'ís are not to openly express support for one political candidate over another. Written or spoken endorsements and public praise or criticism of any candidate are obviously included. We should neither make contributions to any political party or “political action committee” representing a candidate nor should we, even as an “independent,” vote in primaries—the purpose of which is to elect delegates to political conventions. In general, we should take no action that could be construed as supporting one candidate over another—whether by wearing a campaign button, affixing a bumper sticker to our car, or posting a candidate’s photo on our social media page.

We should not, however, confuse these cautions against our being drawn into political campaigns that are intrinsically divisive with any restriction on our legitimate right as citizens to cast our vote, on election day, for the person we judge to be best qualified for office.

As the beloved Guardian puts it:

The friends may vote, if they can do it without identifying themselves with one party or another. . . . It remains for the individuals to so use their right to vote as to keep aloof from party politics, and always bear in mind that they are voting on the merits of the individual.

The Universal House of Justice adds:

As a matter of principle, the Faith regards choices in electing individuals to office and voting on issues as being a private matter. Bahá'ís are therefore left free to perform these functions according to the dictates of their own consciences.

Distancing oneself from partisan behavior by no means implies a lack of concern for the welfare of society, nor should it be thought to minimize the sincere desire on the part of many of our fellow citizens to build a just, free, and peaceful world through political action. We differ from them on process—on how such a vision can most effectively be realized. Unity and peace cannot be achieved through means in conflict with their end. For a fuller discussion of the Bahá'í attitude toward politics and the manner in which our community works for the security and welfare of society, we invite you to study the Supreme Body's letter on this issue, addressed to the Bahá'ís of Iran on March 2, 2013, which we have attached for your convenience.

We trust that you will take this guidance to heart and will consider with care the perceptions created by words and deeds in this emotionally charged political season. Let us, as the beloved Guardian advised, "rise above all particularism and partisanship" and affirm our "unyielding determination to stand, firmly and unreservedly, for the way of Bahá'u'lláh, [avoiding] the entanglements and bickerings inseparable from the pursuits of the politician."

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY OF
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Kenneth E. Bowers
Secretary

Attachment