

## THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

Riḍván 2017

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

See how the community of the Greatest Name arises! With but one year elapsed since the inception of the new Plan, reports testify to the scale of what is being attempted and beginning to be accomplished. Bringing greater intensity to 5,000 programmes of growth is demanding a level of effort quite without precedent. With a firm grasp of the fundamentals of the Plan, large numbers of the friends are acting on its requirements, demonstrating rigour and sacrifice in the quality of their response. As envisaged, some intensive programmes of growth that have been long sustained are becoming reservoirs of knowledge and resources, lending support to surrounding areas and facilitating the rapid dissemination of experience and insight. Centres of intense activity—those neighbourhoods and villages where the community-building work is most concentrated—are proving to be fertile ground for collective transformation. An expanded and invigorated legion of Auxiliary Board members and their assistants are stimulating the endeavours of the believers, helping them acquire a vision of how to advance the growth process in various circumstances and identifying approaches that suit the conditions in each cluster. Supported by their respective National Spiritual Assemblies, Regional Bahá'í Councils are learning how the momentum of the Plan can be built across a range of clusters simultaneously, while in some smaller countries without Councils, new entities at the national level are starting to do the same. Although, as would be expected of any organic process, the swift progress being witnessed in some places is yet to appear in others, the total number of intensive programmes of growth in the world is already beginning to mount. Further, we rejoice to see that participation in the activities of the Plan surged markedly during its first four cycles.

The signs could hardly be more promising, then, for what the coming year might bring. And what could be more fitting to offer the Blessed Beauty on the two hundredth anniversary of His Birth than the earnest striving of His loved ones to extend the reach of His Faith? The first of the two bicentenaries to be celebrated by the Bahá'í world is thus an occasion with prospects most thrilling. Viewed aright, this year presents the single greatest worldwide opportunity there has ever been for connecting hearts to Bahá'u'lláh. In the months ahead, let all be mindful of this precious chance and alert to the possibilities that exist in every space for acquainting others with His life and sublime mission. For the teaching opportunity that is now before the Bahá'í world to be seized to its fullest extent, creative thought needs to be given to the conversations that could unfold with every kind of person. In the course of such meaningful conversations, perception is heightened and hearts are opened—sometimes immediately. In this worthy occupation all find a calling, and of the joy that comes from being engaged in this work none should deprive themselves. We entreat the one Beloved that the whole of this bicentennial year may be filled with this joy that is purest and sweetest: telling another soul of the dawning of the Day of God.

The obligations that must be met by the company of the faithful are made the more pressing by the confusion, distrust, and cloudiness in the world. Indeed, the friends should use every opportunity to shine a light that can illuminate the way and offer assurance to the anxious, hope to the despairing. We are reminded of the counsel given by the Guardian to one Bahá'í community in words that seem intended for our own time: "As the fabric of present-day society heaves and cracks under the strain and stress of portentous events and calamities, as the fissures, accentuating the cleavage separating nation from nation, class from class, race from race, and creed from creed, multiply, the prosecutors of the Plan must evince a still greater cohesion in their spiritual lives and administrative activities, and demonstrate a higher standard of concerted effort, of mutual assistance, and of harmonious development in their collective enterprises." Always emphasizing the spiritual significance of the work of the Faith and the single-minded resolve with which the believers are to discharge their sacred duties, Shoghi Effendi warned too against having any share in political controversies, entanglements, and bickerings. "Let them rise above all particularism and partisanship," he urged on another occasion, "above the vain disputes, the petty calculations, the transient passions that agitate the face, and engage the attention, of a changing world." These are the inevitable foam and spray cast up as wave after wave convulses a turbulent and divided society. Too much is at stake to be occupied with distractions of this kind. As every follower of Bahá'u'lláh knows well, humanity's ultimate well-being is dependent upon its differences being transcended and its unity firmly established. Every contribution Bahá'ís make to the life of their society is aimed at fostering unity; every community-building endeavour is directed towards the same end. For those tired of contention, the communities growing under the shadow of the Greatest Name offer a potent example of what unity can achieve.

We render praise to the Lord of Lords at seeing so many of His loved ones, in so many ways, giving their all that the banner of the oneness of humankind may be raised aloft. Most cherished friends: As a highly auspicious year now commences, might not each one of us contemplate what heavenly deeds His grace may aid us to perform?

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