

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

2 May 2017

Transmitted by email

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

As the first of the bicentenaries to be celebrated by the Bahá'í world approaches, reports are being received at the Bahá'í World Centre of how local communities in every land are readying themselves and making preparations. Inspiring accounts of the friends' experiences were presented in a recent edition of the *Reflections on Growth* newsletter, and it is understood that the International Teaching Centre intends to share more stories of this nature in a future edition. There is a growing appreciation by the believers that the coming year, as characterized by the Universal House of Justice in its Ríḍván 2017 message, represents “the single greatest worldwide opportunity there has ever been for connecting hearts to Bahá'u'lláh”. The countless events that will occur in neighbourhoods and villages, within households and communities, attracting all comers, will form part of a single, global coming together of peoples to honour a Manifestation of God, the Unifier of the human race.

It is now well understood that the locus of activity for the bicentenaries will be at the local level, and individuals and families as much as Local Spiritual Assemblies are thinking of befitting ways to mark the first of these auspicious occasions. Notwithstanding that an efflorescence of local activity will surely be the defining characteristic of the upcoming Festival, certain initiatives at the national level may also be contemplated, through which the Bahá'í community's relations with prominent persons in society may be strengthened. The House of Justice anticipates that, in the course of normal interactions—whether formal or informal—that naturally occur in your country with senior public figures or their representatives, opportunities will arise to raise their awareness of the Faith and its Founder, especially in the context of the upcoming anniversary, and to acquaint them with what Bahá'u'lláh's followers in that nation are doing to respond to His call. The individuals you approach may decide to offer public expressions of greeting and appreciation as the bicentenary draws near. A remarkable example of what can be achieved in this regard, which featured some weeks ago on the Bahá'í World News Service, is the written tribute paid to the life and vision of Bahá'u'lláh by a head of state. From this, the many possibilities that could be explored in similar situations may be imagined. You are invited to consult about this matter and consider any steps that could be taken in your own circumstances.

While the preparations being made by Bahá'ís around the world are intensifying, measures to support the endeavours of the friends are taking shape at the Bahá'í World Centre. One initiative is the production of a film that has been commissioned by the House of Justice specifically to mark the bicentenary of the Birth of Bahá'u'lláh. More details will be provided shortly, including information about how national communities can produce separate versions

in various languages where required and feasible. The film will be available for general viewing during the Twin Birthdays, and it is hoped that the friends, in addition to their many other activities, will put on screenings that stimulate conversations about the Person of Bahá'u'lláh, about how He was willing to bear extraordinary hardship so that humankind might be rescued from its confusion and suffering, and about how He now inspires the efforts of millions of people who derive from His teachings inner strength and spiritual direction for their lives.

In the letter dated 18 May 2016 sent to all National Spiritual Assemblies about the bicentenaries, it was mentioned that arrangements would be made to share with the widest possible audience reports on how these highly significant occasions are being celebrated around the world. The instrument that is being developed for this purpose will be a dedicated section of the Bahai.org website. Starting in the days immediately leading up to the bicentenary this year, this online facility will describe community activities taking place in a selection of countries. Over the course of the hours through which the friends in every part of the world will gather for each of the Twin Birthdays, the website will be updated with information on the festivities occurring in particular places. Before, during, and after the Holy Days, it is expected that this website will serve as a resource upon which the friends may draw for inspiration and encouragement.

In the months ahead, may the great devotion of the friends, expressed through the initiatives being undertaken for this very special anniversary, result in an outpouring of heavenly grace upon your communities.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

cc: International Teaching Centre
Boards of Counsellors
Counsellors