

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

May 15, 2017

To the American Bahá'í community
for the Feast of 'Azamat

Dearly loved Friends,

Just two short weeks ago, delegates and guests assembled from the far corners of the country joyfully welcomed in the second year of the Five Year Plan at the 109th Bahá'í National Convention, held during the final days of the Festival of Ridván in the sacred environs of the Mother Temple of the West.

This annual occasion, central to our unique Bahá'í electoral process, was this year energized by a high degree of unity, singleness of purpose, and confidence, doubtless inspired in part by the friends' maturing experience in advancing the processes at the heart of the Plan. No less important was a powerful sense of the opportunities now open before us, as described by the Universal House of Justice in its Ridván message to the Bahá'ís of the world.

Acknowledging the enthusiastic response of the friends everywhere to the Plan launched at Ridván last year, the Supreme Body noted the various ways in which new levels of capacity are being seen in communities across the globe. These have given rise to a growing anticipation on its part that the "signs could hardly be more promising . . . for what the coming year might bring." Their next observation captured the imaginations of delegates to such an extent, it became the overarching theme of the Convention:

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.

The reflections of Convention participants on this passage and the work underway in their respective communities led them to articulate a series of questions well worth our collective consideration as we all contemplate how best to fulfill the wishes of the House of Justice in the coming months:

- How can we engage in "meaningful conversations" with the greatest possible number of our fellow citizens, representing the rich diversity of our nation?
- What is the nature of these "meaningful conversations"? For example, are we inviting people simply to attend an event or to take part in a process of spiritual and social transformation?
- How might the coming bicentenaries of the Twin Holy Birthdays complement the overall aims and processes of the Plan?

- What plans have we made for the participation of children and youth in these events? Have they been invited to join in the planning process? What about friends of the Faith whose hearts are attracted to Bahá'u'lláh, even if they have not yet formally enrolled?
- How can we ensure that the bicentenary observances are more than just standalone events? What are our plans for following up with those who attend? How will our relationships with them be further developed?

Fundamental was the friends' understanding that the bicentenaries call for universal participation in the celebration of these sacred anniversaries—expressed in a variety of settings, including homes, neighborhoods, Bahá'í Centers, and other venues, and expressive of the wide range of creativity possessed by the diverse populace of America. As the Supreme Body put the matter:

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.

In future messages, we will share some of the fruits of your consultation and planning.

Our confidence is high that you will take full advantage of this unparalleled moment of spiritual potency. Be assured our abiding love and prayers are at all times with you.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

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Kenneth E. Bowers
Secretary