

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

February 7, 2018

To the American Bahá'í community

Dearly loved Friends,

Recent unrest in Iran has persuaded us that it is timely and appropriate to focus renewed attention on the principles that should guide our conduct as American Bahá'ís in relation to the situation in that country.

We begin by noting that, according to reports received from the Bahá'í World Center, the friends both inside and outside Iran have—by and large—adhered to the principle of noninvolvement in partisan politics in their activities. Their self-discipline has not only helped to safeguard the unity of the Bahá'í community, it has protected the friends in Iran from those who would gladly use any semblance of support for the current demonstrations as an excuse to intensify their persecution of Bahá'ís. There is always a danger that the activities of Bahá'ís in other parts of the world—especially the United States—that are inconsistent with this firm principle of our Faith could result in a backlash against Bahá'ís in Iran, resulting in further repressive measures taken against them.

Avoiding entanglements in its political controversies does not mean the friends should be indifferent to events in Iran. The protests in Iran began by calling attention to widespread corruption and the current regime's failure to establish policies fostering economic growth and a measure of prosperity for all strata of Iranian society—matters for which peaceful demonstrations might well be justified. Many of the demonstrators, however, have also called, in effect, for regime change, and some have joined their voices to shouted choruses calling for the death of specific leaders. These are acts no Bahá'í anywhere could in good conscience be associated with, acts that are completely inconsistent with Bahá'í principles of loyalty to one's government and of political nonpartisanship—principles that Iran's Bahá'ís have steadfastly upheld despite nearly four decades of systematic oppression.

Political nonpartisanship has not required from the friends in Iran passive acceptance of the injustices they have been forced to bear—far from it. In the decades since the Iranian revolution, representatives of the nation's Bahá'í community have courageously expressed their views to the regime, not only about the plight of their own community but about the larger concerns of justice and governance in Iran, and the conversation continues to this day. The friends in Iran have assured the integrity of their efforts by advocating for things consistent with Bahá'í principles, not taking sides in partisan political disputes, not breaking laws in the process of presenting their views, and expressing themselves with courtesy and civility. This has applied to interactions in public with friends, neighbors, and government officials as well as to activities on blogs and social media conducted in the privacy of their homes. Their continuing efforts to be of service to their fellow citizens—despite the prejudice and indignities they have faced—reflect their nobility of character and high-mindedness.

In its letter addressed to the Bahá'ís of Iran on March 2, 2013—which we have attached for your ease of reference—the Universal House of Justice makes it clear that the principles mentioned above apply not only to the Bahá'ís in Iran but to Bahá'ís everywhere. In that

same document, the Supreme Body remarks:

Wherever they reside, Bahá'ís endeavor to uphold the standard of justice, addressing inequities directed towards themselves or towards others, but only through lawful means available to them.

Further, it offers the unequivocal statement that:

[Bahá'ís will not] affiliate themselves with political parties, become entangled in partisan issues, or participate in programmes tied to the divisive agendas of any group or faction.

Adding that:

Bahá'ís will not be party to any instigation to overthrow a government.

Much of the letter provides the framework within which Bahá'ís view history, and the role that Bahá'í individuals, institutions, the community, and non-Bahá'í collaborators can constructively play in addressing current social issues and in building a new world order, the real remedy for the many ills afflicting society. We strongly suggest a renewed study of the March 2 letter as soon as practicable, especially for those contemplating action in connection with the current situation in Iran.

Finally, Bahá'ís in Iran have managed—through their staunch adherence to principle and despite severe persecution for nearly 40 years—to create a favorable change in the attitude of the average Iranian citizen towards the Faith. It would be a great disservice to their decades of fortitude and sacrifice for some of the friends here to participate in activities inconsistent with Bahá'í principles—activities well known to political figures and leaders of thought in Iranian society, whether friends or enemies of the Faith—and thereby set back the reputation of the Bahá'í community in Iran and elsewhere.

We hope this letter will clarify the principles that should guide our conduct in relation to the recent unrest in Iran and answer questions regarding what actions on our part will best support our valiant sisters and brothers in the land of our Faith's birth.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,



Kenneth E. Bowers
Secretary

Attachment