

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE  
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

18 May 2016

Transmitted by email

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

In its message dated 29 December 2015 to the Counsellors' Conference, the Universal House of Justice drew attention to the two bicentenaries that are approaching, marking the elapse of two hundred years respectively since the Birth of Bahá'u'lláh and the Birth of the Báb. The House of Justice feels it would now be timely to explore further the manner in which these highly significant Festivals are to be celebrated so that preparations can begin to be made. As indicated in the 29 December message, these Holy Days should be viewed as special opportunities for the friends to reach out to the widest possible cross-section of society and to all those with whom they share a connection—whether through a family tie or common interest, an occupation or field of study, neighbourly relations or merely chance acquaintance—so that all may rejoice in the appearance, exactly two hundred years before, of One Who was to be the Bearer of a new Message for humankind.

The locus of activity for the bicentenaries is to be at the local level. The House of Justice anticipates that in countless places across the world, both rural settings and urban centres, the friends will find creative ways to honour the Twin Manifestations Whose lives and sacred missions will be recalled on Their anniversaries. There might also be an opportunity for initiatives at the national level, which could include a gathering to which dignitaries and prominent individuals who have a relationship with the Faith could be invited. But the most distinguishing feature of these bicentenaries will be a tremendous flourishing of activity by Bahá'ís and their friends in local communities. It should be noted that, although each anniversary is associated primarily with just one of the Manifestations, in each case the celebrations ought to encompass both of the Twin Birthdays, and events may be spread out across the full length of the two days. Naturally, these Holy Days will also be marked at the Bahá'í World Centre by those pilgrims, visitors, and staff who are in the Holy Land at the time.

At the heart of these festivities must be a concerted effort to convey a sense of what it means for humanity that these two Luminaries rose successively above the horizon of the world. Of course, this will take different forms in different contexts, extending to a myriad artistic and cultural expressions, including songs, audio-visual presentations, publications and books. Such initiatives, coupled with widespread celebrations that are both uplifting and reverent, are also sure to spark the curiosity and wonder of many who may as yet be unfamiliar with the names of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh. However, the real transformative power of the Faith is likely to be perceived more readily still if people experience how worship and

meaningful service are being woven into the fabric of the lives of Bahá'ís everywhere. Indeed, from the community-building activities of the Five Year Plan emerges a pattern of collective life within which anyone can discern the vivifying influence of the divine teachings brought by God's Manifestations. Each bicentenary will doubtless kindle a spirit of faithful endeavour that will permeate all the noble undertakings of the friends.

As suggested in this year's Riḍván message, the six cycles leading up to the first of the special anniversaries can be viewed as an initial period over which progress toward the overall goal of the Five Year Plan can be measured. The steps taken during these months, and the achievements that come as a result, will constitute an offering of ardent love, yielded collectively to Him Who is the Unifier of the world on the bicentenary of His Birth. The spiritual forces that are sure to be released on that most auspicious occasion will do much to spur the friends into action as they commence the eight cycles that lie between the two bicentenaries, during which the greatest share of the effort needed to fulfil the goal of the Plan will be required. Similarly, events surrounding the two-hundredth anniversary of the Birth of the Báb will lend an infusion of energy to the global spiritual enterprise as it enters its final six cycles leading up to Riḍván 2021. There is, therefore, every reason to expect that the emphasis given to commemorating these Holy Days will have a considerable and cumulative impact on the work of raising vibrant communities—not least on the enrichment of devotional life.

This letter is being sent now so that there is ample time for you to impress upon your respective communities the significance of the coming Festivals and encourage preparations to begin. An important aspect of what must occur is the sense of shared experience and global solidarity arising from so many gatherings being held in a concentrated span of time, and in an enormous variety of places, bringing together souls who have glimpsed the timeless splendour of those divine Figures Who set in motion an irresistible process of individual and social change. Arrangements will be put in place to enable communities to submit reports on their activities so that these can rapidly be made available to the widest possible audience. More information about these arrangements will be provided at a later date.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

cc: International Teaching Centre  
Boards of Counsellors  
Counsellors