

Naw-Ruz 1979: Baha'i Era 136

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Launching of the Seven Year Plan(see also Elucidation of Seven Year Plan Goals, below)

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

The decline of religious and moral restraints has unleashed a fury of chaos and confusion that already bears the signs of universal anarchy. Engulfed in this maelstrom, the Bahá'í world community, pursuing with indefeasible unity and spiritual force its redemptive mission, inevitably suffers the disruption of economic, social and civil life which afflicts its fellowmen throughout the planet. It must also bear particular tribulations. The violent disturbances in Persia, coinciding with the gathering in of the bountiful harvest of the Five Year Plan, have brought new and cruel hardships to our long-suffering brethren in the Cradle of our Faith and confronted the Bahá'í world community with critical challenges to its life and work. As the Bahá'í world stood poised on the brink of victory, eagerly anticipating the next stage in the unfoldment of the Master's Divine Plan, Bahá'u'lláh's heroic compatriots, the custodians of the Holy Places of our Faith in the land of its birth, were yet again called upon to endure the passions of brutal mobs, the looting and burning of their homes, the destruction of their means of livelihood, and physical violence and threats of death to force them to recant their faith. They, like their immortal forebears, the Dawn-Breakers, are standing steadfast in face of this new persecution and the ever-present threat of organized extermination.

Remembering that during the Five Year Plan the Persian friends far surpassed any other national community in their outpouring of pioneers and funds, we, in all those parts of the world where we are still free to promote the Cause of God, have the responsibility to make good their temporary inability to serve. Therefore, with uplifted hearts and radiant faith, we must arise with redoubled energy to pursue our mighty task, confident that the Lord of Hosts will continue to reward our efforts with the same bountiful grace He vouchsafed to us in the Five Year Plan.

Teaching Victories in the Five Year Plan

The teaching victories in that Plan have been truly prodigious; the points of light, those localities where the Promised One is recognized, have increased from sixty-nine thousand five hundred to over ninety-six thousand; the number of Local Spiritual Assemblies has grown from seventeen thousand to over twenty-five thousand; eighteen new National Spiritual Assemblies have been formed. The final report will disclose in all their manifold aspects the magnitude of the victories won.

In the world at large the Bahá'í community is now firmly established. The Institution of the Hands of the Cause of God, the Chief Stewards of

Bahá'u'lláh's embryonic World Commonwealth, is bearing a precious fruit in the development of the International Teaching Center as a mighty institution of the World Center of the Faith; an institution blessed by the membership of all the Hands of the Cause; an institution whose beneficent influence is diffused to all parts of the Bahá'í community through the Continental Boards of Counselors, the members of the Auxiliary Boards and their assistants.

Advised, stimulated and supported by this vital arm of the Administrative Order, 125 National Spiritual Assemblies are rapidly acquiring experience and growing in wisdom as they administer the complex affairs of their respective communities as organic parts of one worldwide fellowship. More and more Local Spiritual Assemblies are becoming strong focal centers of local Bahá'í communities and firm pillars of the National Spiritual Assembly in each land. Even in those countries where the Bahá'í Administration cannot operate or has had to be disbanded, countries to which have now been added Afghanistan, the Congo Republic, Niger, Uganda and Vietnam, the believers, while obedient to their governments, nevertheless staunchly keep alive the flame of faith.

Spiritual Development of the Bahá'í Community

Beyond the expansion of the community, vital as it is, the Five Year Plan witnessed great progress in the spiritual development of the friends, the growing maturity and wisdom of Local and National Assemblies, and in the degree to which Bahá'í communities embody the distinguishing characteristics of Bahá'í life and attract, by their unity, their steadfastness, their radiance and good reputation, the interest and eventual wholehearted support of their fellow citizens.

This is the magnet which will attract the masses to the Cause of God, and the leaven that will transform human society.

Obstacles and Opportunities

The conditions of the world present the followers of Bahá'u'lláh with both obstacles and opportunities. In an increasing number of countries we are witnessing the fulfillment of the warnings that the writings of our Faith contain. "Peoples, nations, adherents of divers faiths," the beloved Guardian wrote, "will jointly and successively arise to shatter its unity, to sap its force, and to degrade its holy name. They will assail not only the spirit which it inculcates, but the administration which is the channel, the instrument, the embodiment of that spirit. For as the authority with which Bahá'u'lláh has invested the future Bahá'í Commonwealth becomes more and more apparent, the fiercer shall be the challenge which from every quarter will be thrown at the verities it enshrines." In different countries, in varying degrees, the followers of Bahá'u'lláh at this very hour are undergoing such attacks, and are facing imprisonment and even martyrdom rather than deny the Truth for whose sake the Bab and Bahá'u'lláh drained the cup of sacrifice.

In other lands, such as those in Western Europe, the faithful believers have to struggle to convey the message in the face of widespread indifference, materialistic self-satisfaction, cynicism and moral degradation. These friends, however, still have freedom to teach the Faith in their homelands, and in spite of the discouraging meagerness of outward results they continue to proclaim the Message of Bahá'u'lláh to their fellow-citizens, to raise high the reputation of the Cause in the public eye, to acquaint leaders of thought and those in authority with its true tenets, and to spare no effort to seek out those receptive souls in every town and village who will respond to the divine summons and devote their lives to its service.

In many lands, however, there is an eager receptivity for the teachings of the Faith. The challenge for the Bahá'ís is to provide these thousands of seeking souls, as swiftly as possible, with the spiritual food that they crave, to enlist them under the banner of Bahá'u'lláh, to nurture them in the way of life He has revealed, and to guide them to elect Local Spiritual Assemblies which, as they begin to function strongly, will unite the friends in firmly consolidated Bahá'í communities and become beacons of guidance and havens of refuge to mankind.

Faced by such a combination of danger and opportunity, the Bahá'ís, confident in the ultimate triumph of God's purpose for mankind, raise their eyes to the goals of a new Seven Year Plan.

World Center Goals

In the Holy Land the strengthening of the World Center and the augmentation of its worldwide influence must continue: The Seat of the Universal House of Justice will be completed and designs will be adopted for the remaining three buildings of the World Administrative Center of the Faith.

The Institution of the International Teaching Center will be developed and its functions expanded. This will require an increase in its membership and the assumption by it and by the Continental Boards of Counselors of wider functions in the stimulation on an international scale of the propagation and consolidation of the Faith, and in the promotion of the spiritual, intellectual and community aspects of Bahá'í life.

The House of 'Abdu'llah Pasha in 'Akka will be opened to pilgrimage.

Work will be continued on the collation and classification of the Sacred Texts and a series of compilations gleaned and translated from the writings of the Faith will be sent out to the Bahá'í world to help in deepening the friends in their understanding of the fundamentals of the Faith, enriching their spiritual lives, and reinforcing their efforts to teach the Cause.

The ties binding the Bahá'í International Community to the United Nations will be further developed.

Continued efforts will be made to protect the Faith from opposition and to emancipate it from the fetters of persecution.

International Goals

Each National Spiritual Assembly has been given goals for these first two years of the Plan, designed to continue the process of expansion, to consolidate the victories won, and to attain, where circumstances permit, any goals that may have had to remain unaccomplished at the end of the Five Year Plan. During these first two years we shall be examining, with the Continental Boards of Counselors and National Spiritual Assemblies, the conditions and possibilities in each country, and shall be considering in detail the capacities and needs of each of the rapidly differentiating national Bahá'í communities before formulating the further goals towards which each community is to work following the opening phase of the Plan. Throughout the world the Seven Year Plan must witness the attainment of the following objectives:

The Mashriqu'l-Adhkar of Samoa is to be completed and progress will be made in the construction of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar in India.

Nineteen new National Spiritual Assemblies are to be brought into being: eight in Africa, those of Angola, Bophuthatswana, the Cape Verde Islands, Gabon, Mali, Mozambique, Namibia and Transkei; eight in the Americas, those of Bermuda, Dominica, French Guiana, Grenada, the Leeward Islands, Martinique, St. Lucia and St. Vincent; and three in the Pacific, those of the Cook Islands, Tuvalu and the West Caroline Islands. Those National Spiritual Assemblies which have had to be dissolved will, circumstances permitting, be reestablished.

The Message of Bahá'u'lláh must be taken to territories and islands which are as yet unopened to His Faith.

The teaching work, both that organized by institutions of the Faith and that which is the fruit of individual initiative, must be actively carried forward so that there will be growing numbers of believers, leading more countries to the stage of entry by troops and ultimately to mass conversion. This teaching work must include prompt, thorough and continuing consolidation so that all victories will be safeguarded, the number of Local Spiritual Assemblies will be increased and the foundations of the Cause reinforced.

The interchange of pioneers and traveling teachers, which contributes so importantly to the unity of the Bahá'í world and to a true understanding of the oneness of mankind, must continue, especially between neighboring lands. At the same time, each national Bahá'í community must aspire to a rapid achievement of self-sufficiency in carrying out its vital activities, thus acquiring the capacity to

continue to function and grow even if outside help is cut off.

Especially in finance is the attainment of independence by national Bahá'í communities urgent. Already the persecutions in Iran have deprived the believers in that country of the bounty of contributing to the international funds of the Faith, of which they have been a major source. Economic disruption in other countries threatens further diminution of financial resources. We therefore appeal to the friends everywhere to exercise the utmost economy in the use of funds and to make those sacrifices in their personal lives which will enable them to contribute their share, according to their means, to the local, national, continental and international funds of the Faith.

For the prompt achievement of all the goals and the healthy growth of Bahá'í community life National Spiritual Assemblies must pay particular attention to the efficient functioning, in the true spirit of the Faith, of their national committees and other auxiliary institutions, and, in consultation with the Continental Boards of Counselors, must conceive and implement programs that will guide and reinforce the efforts of the friends in the path of service.

National Spiritual Assemblies must promote wise and dignified approaches to people prominent in all areas of human endeavor, acquainting them with the nature of the Bahá'í community and the basic tenets of the Faith, and winning their esteem and friendship.

At the heart of all activities, the spiritual, intellectual and community life of the believers must be developed and fostered, requiring: the prosecution with increased vigor of the development of Local Spiritual Assemblies so that they may exercise their beneficial influence and guidance on the life of Bahá'í communities; the nurturing of a deeper understanding of Bahá'í family life; the Bahá'í education of children, including the holding of regular Bahá'í classes and, where necessary, the establishment of tutorial schools for the provision of elementary education; the encouragement of Bahá'í youth in study and service; and the encouragement of Bahá'í women to exercise to the full their privileges and responsibilities in the work of the community--may they befittingly bear witness to the memory of the Greatest Holy Leaf, the immortal heroine of the Bahá'í Dispensation, as we approach the fiftieth anniversary of her passing.

A Time of Testing: A Time for Clinging to the Covenant

As lawlessness spreads in the world, as governments rise and fall, as rival groups and feuding peoples struggle, each for its own advantage, the plight of the oppressed and the deprived wrings the heart of every true Bahá'í, tempting him to cry out in protest or to arise in wrath at the perpetrators of injustice. For this is a time of testing which calls to mind Bahá'u'lláh's words, "O concourse of the heedless! I swear by God! The promised day is come, the day when tormenting trials will have

surged above your heads, and beneath your feet, saying: 'Taste ye what your hands have wrought!'"

Now is the time when every follower of Bahá'u'lláh must cling fast to the Covenant of God, resist every temptation to become embroiled in the conflicts of the world, and remember that he is the holder of a precious trust, the Message of God which, alone, can banish injustice from the world and cure the ills afflicting the body and spirit of man. We are the bearers of the Word of God in this day and, however dark the immediate horizons, we must go forward rejoicing in the knowledge that the work we are privileged to perform is God's work and will bring to birth a world whose splendor will outshine our brightest visions and surpass our highest hopes.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

Elucidation of Seven Year Plan Goals

Naw-Ruz 1979

To National Spiritual Assemblies

Beloved Friends,

In the message of the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of the world and in its letters to individual communities setting the goals of the first phase of the Seven Year Plan are a number of references which it wishes to amplify for your guidance. Not all will apply to every national Bahá'í community, but you will all undoubtedly find interest in reading even those which do not immediately apply to your specific situation. The points we have been asked to set forth are as follows.

Local Spiritual Assemblies

In August 1970 the House of Justice sent to all National Spiritual Assemblies a compilation of the words of Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi on the Local Spiritual Assembly. To supplement this fundamental and most important guidance we now enclose a compilation of extracts from the letters of the Universal House of Justice written between 1966 and 1975, covering the importance of Local Spiritual Assemblies, their development, the supporting role of the Auxiliary Board members and their assistants, and suggested goals for Local Assemblies.

In selecting goal towns for the formation of Local Spiritual Assemblies a National Assembly should ensure that there will be a wide distribution of Local Assemblies throughout the country.

National Assemblies should consider calling upon every Local Assembly to meet at least once every Bahá'í month, and to appoint a local teaching committee wherever it is desirable to do so and has not already been done.

Pioneers and Traveling Teachers

The need for the services of pioneers and traveling teachers remains very great. In the goals for the initial two-year phase of the Plan few specific assignments for the sending of pioneers and traveling teachers have been made. In recent years a steady stream has begun to flow, and the Universal House of Justice calls upon the followers of Bahá'u'lláh in the stronger national communities to arise to join this stream.

Enclosed are two lists showing those countries which are particularly in need of pioneers and traveling teachers at the present time. You should publish these as soon as possible. They are also being supplied to the Continental Pioneer Committees, and those friends who arise will be able to decide upon their area of service in consultation with their National Assembly and the appropriate committees. The international funds of the Faith are now very limited, and this adds to the need for pioneers and traveling teachers to be self-supporting.

Youth Teaching

Experience has shown that youth can render valuable service in many activities of the community, and particularly in taking the message to the members of their own generation. Those in schools and universities have many opportunities to teach their fellow students and faculty members, and many can be particularly effective by attending a school or university in a pioneer goal. During vacations youth can often render outstanding services as traveling teachers. Traveling in teams has been very useful.

Border Teaching

It is very important that there be collaborative teaching between national Bahá'í communities in border areas, both by travel teaching across the border and in the organization of joint teaching campaigns on both sides of it. Each National Spiritual Assembly should study this possibility and, if it finds such projects profitable, should seek the collaboration of its sister National Assemblies and request the advice and assistance of the Continental Board of Counselors.

Teaching Conferences

These conferences, whether national or regional, in addition to providing good opportunities for fanning the enthusiasm of the friends and fostering their unity, have been effectively used by many National Assemblies as working conferences where reports are given of the status of the goals of the Plan and of the urgent needs and priorities; and, where necessary, calls are raised for pioneers, traveling teachers and funds.

Summer and Winter Schools

The Guardian once described the institution of the Summer School in a letter written on his behalf, as "a vital and inseparable part of any teaching campaign." In April 1972 the House of Justice issued a compilation on the importance of Bahá'í Summer Schools, and it commends this to every National Spiritual Assembly for study. In only a few

countries has it been possible or timely to acquire properties to house Summer and Winter Schools; in most they are still held in rented premises, and the House of Justice stresses the importance of holding them at as low a cost as possible in a place that is easily accessible to the friends, so that large numbers of believers and inquirers can attend. It is hoped that this activity will become at least an annual feature of the Bahá'í community life in every land.

The Bahá'í Education of Children

It is important to hold regular Bahá'í children's classes to give the children a thorough grounding in knowledge of the teachings and history of the Faith, to imbue them with its spirit, to establish loving ties between them and to provide them with that firm foundation in the Faith which will enable them to grow up as staunch and enlightened servants of Bahá'u'lláh. Non-Bahá'í parents will often welcome the opportunity of having their children take part in such classes, and this, in addition to the benefit it confers upon the children, may well be a means of attracting their parents to the Faith.

Tutorial Schools

This is a term, originally adopted in the Bahá'í community of India, to describe the simple type of school, organized and conducted under the auspices of the Bahá'í administrative institutions, wherein one teacher is employed to conduct classes in reading and writing and elementary subjects for the Bahá'í and non-Bahá'í children in a village. In addition to the academic subjects he also conducts Bahá'í classes for the children and, in his spare time, makes a valuable contribution to the teaching and consolidation work in his own and neighboring Bahá'í communities. The school may be held in the open air, in one of the houses of the Bahá'ís, in the local Haziratu'l-Quds, or in a simple building constructed for the purpose, as conditions allow.

The teacher's salary as well as the other costs of the school are provided out of fees paid by the parents, supplemented, if necessary and possible, by allocations from the local or national funds.

In the Tablet of the World Bahá'u'lláh states that "Everyone, whether man or woman, should hand over to a trusted person a portion of what he or she earneth through trade, agriculture or other occupation, for the training and education of children, to be spent for this purpose with the knowledge of the Trustees of the House of Justice." In many countries this duty is fulfilled through the taxes that the government levies for the support of the state educational system, but there are other lands where no such facilities are provided and the Local Spiritual Assemblies may well begin to fulfill this aspect of their duties by encouraging the local friends to contribute to a special education fund which can be used for the support of tutorial schools or to assist the children of indigent believers to obtain schooling.

Publications

Every National Spiritual Assembly should have a well conceived plan for the provision and dissemination of a balanced supply of Bahá'í literature for the believers and for the teaching work. In translation and publication, priority should be given to the Sacred Texts and the writings of Shoghi Effendi, for without access to the life-giving waters of the Holy Word, how are the believers to deepen in their understanding of the Teachings and convey them accurately to others?

Recordings

In addition to the publication of Texts and teaching materials for the friends, it would be helpful in areas where the degree of literacy is not high, to find ways to teach the friends Bahá'í songs, poems, stories and brief quotations from the Writings as well as prayers. This can be done through the use of cassette tapes or radio broadcasts.

The goal given to certain national communities to make recordings of the Holy Texts is not intended to imply the large-scale production of cassette tapes but rather the development of locally based programs for the recording on cassette tapes of passages in the indigenous languages. Such tapes can then be carried by traveling teachers to outlying areas, used in the teaching work, or left behind if there are tape-recorders locally available.

Communications

Keeping the friends informed of the news of the Faith is so important that every National Assembly is urged to devote attention to the prompt and regular dissemination of its national newsletter, supplemented, where necessary and feasible, by regional and local news organs. Some National Assemblies have also found that cassette recordings can be useful for communicating with friends in outlying areas, and radio programs can, of course, fulfill a similar purpose.

Correspondence Courses

Such courses have proved their usefulness both for teaching the Faith and deepening the knowledge of the believers, and their production has been given as a goal to some national communities. If any National Assembly assigned this goal is not certain how to proceed, it may consult with the Continental Board of Counselors or write to the Universal House of Justice which will put it in touch with those National Assemblies most likely to be able to help.

Properties

Many properties have already been acquired in the course of previous plans. It is important that these properties be properly maintained in good repair. National Spiritual Assemblies should set aside sums annually in their budgets for the maintenance of national properties so that when a repair becomes necessary the funds will be available without creating a sudden crisis for the national fund. As far as possible, local Haziratu'l-Quds and other local properties should be kept up by

the local friends themselves.

It is also important to make full use of the properties of the Faith for the purposes for which they were acquired. Well maintained and regularly used properties will not only be a means of fostering Bahá'í community life, but will add to the prestige and dignity of the Faith in the eyes of the non-Bahá'í public.

A number of properties called for in the Five Year Plan, such as district and local Haziratu'l-Quds and local endowments, have not yet been acquired, usually as a result of local circumstances beyond the control of the friends. These goals should continue to be diligently pursued so that they will be attained as soon as conditions permit. If there are insuperable difficulties which make such a property unobtainable in the foreseeable future, a full report should be sent to the Universal House of Justice.

For goals requiring the acquisition of additional local Haziratu'l-Quds during the initial phase of the Seven Year Plan, no budget has been provided for assistance from the International Fund.

The Universal House of Justice is eagerly anticipating an upsurge of activity in the years ahead, and assures you all of its fervent prayers in the Holy Shrines for the rapid progress of all aspects of the new Plan.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

The Universal House of Justice

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