

Ridvan 2004: Baha'i Era 161

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To the Bahá'ís of the World
Dearly loved Friends,

Three years of the Five Year Plan have passed. The processes set in motion in the Four Year Plan, strengthened through special attention to the Bahá'í education of children during the Twelve Month Plan, and followed up unflaggingly during these past years, are now fulfilling the high hopes with which they were launched. In every part of the world the three participants in the Plan---the individual, the community and the institutions---each playing a distinctive role, are reinforcing one another's actions. The core activities of study circles, children's classes and devotional meetings have become essential aspects and mutually enhancing achievements lending greater vigour and success to all the other elements of Bahá'í community life. Human resources are being augmented, and Local Spiritual Assemblies are responding to the fresh demands of this rising vitality.

The capacity built for the Bahá'í education of children throughout the world is extraordinarily impressive. Initial efforts for the spiritual empowerment of junior youth are meeting with success. The movement of clusters from each level of activity to a higher one is well in hand and, as it proceeds, the kernel of avowed believers is being joined by a larger circle of people, still not Bahá'ís but enthusiastically involved in core activities of the plan. Structures for administering intensive growth are already appearing in certain advanced clusters. National Assemblies, while attending to the needs of all the clusters in their countries, have learned the value of concentrating special attention on certain priority clusters that show high promise, encouraging and developing them until the human resources they have raised up through the training institutes enable them to become centers of rapid, sustained growth.

As foreseen, the training institute is proving to be an engine of growth. On assessing the opportunities and needs of their respective communities, the great majority of National Spiritual Assemblies have chosen to adopt the course materials devised by the Ruhi Institute, finding them most responsive to the Plan's needs. This has had the collateral benefit that the same materials have been translated into many languages and, wherever Bahá'ís travel, they find other friends following the same path and familiar with the same books and methods.

A chaotic international society, torn by conflicting perceptions and interests, is assailed by rising terrorism, lawlessness and corruption, and eroded by economic failure, poverty and disease. In its midst the Bahá'í community is becoming increasingly visible, inspired by a divinely revealed vision, building on solid foundations, growing in strength through the

processes that are now in place, and undaunted by seeming setbacks. An example of the capacity of the Bahá'í world to respond to unexpected conditions occurred a year ago, when multiple dangers required the cancellation of the International Bahá'í Convention; the election of the Universal House of Justice was duly held and the Plan went forward without a missed step. Concurrently, despite the disruption and chaos of life in Iraq, it was possible to contact the Bahá'ís in that land and reconstitute their Local Spiritual Assemblies. Now we announce with great joy the election, this Ridván, of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Iraq, restored after more than thirty years of stifling oppression, to take its rightful place in the international Bahá'í community.

What the Divine Plan requires at this stage is for us to continue confidently and dynamically in the present direction, undeterred by storms battering the world of humanity. Be sure that the Blessed Beauty will guide your steps and the Hosts of the Supreme Concourse will reinforce your every effort for the progress of His Faith.

— Ridvan 2004: Baha'i Era 161 (Used by permission of the curator)