

Letter of October 20, 1983

from the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of the World

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

1.

The soul-stirring events in Bahá'u'lláh's native land and the concomitant advance into the theater of world affairs of the agencies of His Administrative Order have combined to bring into focus new possibilities in the evolution of the Bahá'í world community. Our Ridván message this year captured these implications in its reference to the opening before us of a wider horizon in whose light can dimly be discerned new pursuits and undertakings upon which we must soon embark. These portend our greater involvement in the development of the social and economic life of peoples.

2.

From the beginning of His stupendous mission, Bahá'u'lláh urged upon the attention of nations the necessity of ordering human affairs in such a way as to bring into being a world unified in all the essential aspects of its life. In unnumbered verses and tablets He repeatedly and variously declared the “progress of the world” and the “development of nations” as being among the ordinances of God for this day. The oneness of mankind, which is at once the operating principle and ultimate goal of His Revelation, implies the achievement of a dynamic coherence between the spiritual and practical requirements of life on earth. The indispensability of this coherence is unmistakably illustrated in His ordination of the Mashríqu'l-Adhkár, the spiritual center of every Bahá'í community round which must flourish dependencies dedicated to the social, humanitarian, educational and scientific advancement of mankind. Thus, we can readily appreciate that although it has hitherto been impracticable for Bahá'í institutions generally to emphasize development activities, the concept of social and economic development is enshrined in the sacred Teachings of our Faith. The beloved Master, through His illuminating words and deeds, set the example for the application of this concept to the reconstruction of society. Witness, for instance, what social and economic progress the Iranian believers attained under His loving guidance and, subsequently, with the unfailing encouragement of the Guardian of the Cause.

3.

Now, after all the years of constant teaching activity, the community of the Greatest Name has grown to the stage at which the processes of this development must be incorporated into its regular pursuits; particularly is action compelled by the expansion of the Faith in Third World countries where the vast majority of its adherents reside. The steps to be taken must necessarily begin in the Bahá'í Community itself, with the friends endeavoring, through their application of spiritual principles, their rectitude of conduct and the practice of the art of consultation, to uplift themselves and thus become self-sufficient and self-reliant. Moreover, these exertions will conduce to the preservation of human honor, so desired by Bahá'u'lláh. In the process and as a consequence, the friends will undoubtedly extend the benefits of their efforts to society as a whole, until all mankind achieves the progress intended by the Lord of the Age.

4.

It is indeed propitious that systematic attention be given to this vital sphere of Bahá'í endeavor. We are happy, therefore, to announce the establishment at the World Centre of the Office of Social and Economic Development, which is to assist the Universal House of Justice to promote and coordinate the activities of the friends throughout the world in this new field.

5. The International Teaching Centre and, through it, the Continental Boards of Counselors are poised for the special responsibilities which devolve upon them to be alert to possibilities for extending the development of social and economic life both within and outside the Baha'i Community, and to advise and encourage the Assemblies and friends in their strivings.
6. We call now upon National Spiritual Assemblies to consider the implications of this emerging trend for their respective communities, and to take well-conceived measures to involve the thought and actions of Local Spiritual Assemblies and individuals in the devising and implementing of plans, within the constraints of existing circumstances and available resources. Progress in the development field will largely depend on natural stirrings at the grassroots, and it should receive its driving force from those sources rather than from an imposition of plans and programs from the top. The major task of National Assemblies, therefore, is to increase the local communities' awareness of needs and possibilities, and to guide and coordinate the efforts resulting from such awareness. Already in many areas the friends are witnessing the confirmations of their initiatives in such pursuits as the founding of tutorial and other schools, the promotion of literacy, the launching of rural development programs, the inception of educational radio stations, and the operation of agricultural and medical projects. As they enlarge the scope of their endeavors other modes of development will undoubtedly emerge.
7. This challenge evokes the resourcefulness, flexibility and cohesiveness of the many communities composing the Bahá'í world. Different communities will, of course, perceive different approaches and different solutions to similar needs. Some can offer assistance abroad, while, at the outset, others must of necessity receive assistance; but all, irrespective of circumstances or resources, are endowed with the capacity to respond in some measure; all can share; all can participate in the joint enterprise of applying more systematically the principles of the Faith to upraising the quality of human life. The key to success is unity in spirit and in action.
8. We go forward confident that the wholehearted involvement of the friends in these activities will ensure a deeper consolidation of the community at all levels. Our engagement in the technical aspects of development should, however, not be allowed to supplant the essentials of teaching, which remains the primary duty of every follower of Bahá'u'lláh. Rather should our increased activities in the development field be viewed as a reinforcement of the teaching work, as a greater manifestation of faith in action. For, if expansion of the teaching work does not continue, there can be no hope of success for this enlarged dimension of the consolidation process.
9. Ultimately, the call to action is addressed to the individual friends, whether they be adult or youth, veteran or newly-enrolled. Let them step forth to take their places in the arena of service where their talents and skills, their specialized training, their material resources, their offers of time and energy and, above all, their dedication to Bahá'í principles, can be put to work in improving the lot of man.
10. May all derive enduring inspiration from the following statement written in 1933 by the hand of our beloved Guardian:
11. "The problems which confront the believers at the present time, whether social, spiritual, economic or administrative will be gradually solved as the number and the resources of the friends multiply and their capacity for service and for the application of Bahá'í principles develops. They should be patient, confident and active in utilizing every possible opportunity that

presents itself within the limits now necessarily imposed upon them. May the Almighty aid them to fulfill their highest hopes.”

With loving Bahá’í greetings,
The Universal House of Justice

Guidelines on Social and Economic Development Projects

Bahá’í World Centre
Office of Social and Economic Development
Memorandum
12 December 1983

1. The message of the Universal House of Justice dated 20 October 1983 to the Bahá’ís of the World clearly sets out the concepts, defines the objectives, enunciates the guiding principles of implementation, and envisions the unifying effect of Bahá’ís development projects.
2. In selecting a development project, it must be borne in mind that the aim should not be the feasibility of the project alone, but, far more importantly, what it may bring in the form of strength, hope, and spiritual upliftment of the Bahá’ís as well as the beneficial influence its implementation and final accomplishment might exert on the members of the Bahá’í community and those of the wider community.
3. It should be possible for Bahá’í communities, following the principles enshrined in the teaching of the Faith and the guidance provided by the message of the Universal House of Justice, to select and undertake development projects, in spite of the limited resources and the constraints imposed upon them by present circumstances.
4. The success of our projects will depend upon the degree to which we bring the spiritual teachings of our Faith to reflect upon all aspects of the selected project, its objectives, design, implementation, personnel, and evaluation. While we must take notice of what is current in development, we should be careful to avoid the danger of indiscriminate imitation.
5. National Spiritual Assemblies may wish to hold conferences at the national or regional level to explain the message from the Universal House of Justice, discuss with the friends the methods that may be adopted to implement its provisions signs, and encourage them to consider and become oriented to the wider horizons now opening before us.
6. The friends at the local level may wish to sponsor a community development seminar or conference and invite Bahá’í and non-Bahá’í specialists to make presentations on areas of their specialization. These conferences would false the prestige of the Bahá’í community and would be

regarded as further evidence of the deep interest the Bahá'ís have in the improvement of the immediate environment, in the way of life of the people, and generally. In social and economic development. The people who attend will benefit greatly from the consultation on education, health and hygiene, agriculture, and appropriate technology. Officials and institutions engaged in promotion of those activities will no doubt be happy to participate and will appreciate the efforts of the Bahá'í community who have made such a forum possible.

7.

Some general guidelines are shared with you to assist you in your selection and planning of Bahá'í development projects. For information and interest, examples of such projects are attached as an appendix to this letter.

How Projects may be Initiated

1. Individual believers may, through their study, observation, and understanding of a particular problem, suggest a development project to the Local or National Spiritual Assembly.
2. Development projects may be selected by the local Bahá'í community. The Local Spiritual Assembly may wish to study the condition of the community to determine its primary needs, identifying services that are desirable and within their capacity to provide. The focal Spiritual Assembly should then decide on its priorities in consultation with the National Spiritual Assembly, its committees, or other designated agencies.
3. The National Spiritual Assembly may survey the local Bahá'í communities and assess their needs and requirements, thereafter consulting with selected Bahá'í communities to seek agreement and support for a particular development project. The Institutions must act in concert to give support to each feasible development project.
4. The World Centre may plan or suggest projects which are considered by the Universal House of Justice to have direct bearing on the spiritual growth and development of believers and communities in certain countries or localities.

Guidelines for Project Selection and Implementation

8.

It is suggested that the following points be taken into account when considering the selection and implementation of a project.

1. Projects should be attempted or undertaken only where a relatively strong and united community of Bahá'ís exists and preferably where a potential for growth is evident, and where such a potential is most likely to be enhanced by collective participation in a development project.
2. Projects should be the subject of consultation at all levels— Local and National Assemblies, Auxiliary Board members, and Counsellors, and with the World Centre, where necessary. A consultative process must be initiated and fostered among all those concerned.
3. Projects should be suited to the local needs and the resources at hand. They should be directed toward meeting the immediate and perceived needs of the community. Usually they should not be based upon the introduction of ideas or technologies that are not of

- immediate relevance to the needs and capacities of the people they are Intended to serve.
4. Projects should be consistent with the aims and purposes of the local and national civil authorities. Care must be taken to ensure, as far as possible, that the projects will be well-received and given warm support by the non-Bahá'í community. Service to the community must be the prime objective for selecting projects and this should be made clear to the local inhabitants
 5. Projects should be seen as means of rendering assistance and help. Through them, the participants should be able to gain in experience and confidence; In self respect and dignity. The concept of self-help should be a strong component in such projects.
 6. Each project should have well-defined aims and identifiable objective. It should be simple and manageable. It is advisable to start with modest goals and add to them once a project is developing with success, and as the community's experience, ability and resources grow.
 7. Great care should be taken to ensure that the number of people to be served corresponds to the resources and capacity of the Bahá'í community; that Bahá'í standards and values are applied at all stages so that no conflict may arise; and, most importantly, that the cultural and social setting in which the project is to be implemented is understood and incorporated into the plans.
 8. Project should be considered for a community which has the will and desire to host a project and where there is reason to believe that members are committed to participate and support it in all stages of its implementation. It is essential that Bahá'í development projects grow from the grass roots, and not be imposed from the top. It is important to educate the friends of a community in the merits of a development project and deepen their understanding and appreciation of its implications.
 9. Conscious and sincere effort must be made to ensure women's participation. Some projects may be entirely directed to the upliftment of the women; and in those projects, the participation and support of men must be assured.
 10. The role of youth in development must receive the careful attention of the National Spiritual Assemblies, so that this valuable source of idealism and energy may be directed to the service of mankind.
 11. Projects should be based upon ideas and techniques suitable to, and compatible with the culture and social setting and with the capacity and experience of the people they are intended to serve. Ideas and technologies that are of no immediate relevance or help to the people should be avoided.
 12. Projects should be consistent with the aims of local and national civil authorities, and should be explained to non-Bahá'ís involved in order that the projects will be well received and will be given warm support by the non-Bahá'í authorities and community.
 13. Trustworthy people who have an acceptable degree of managerial skill should be identified and if necessary given additional training to become better able to coordinate available human and material resources with care and understanding. The degree of skill required should correspond to the size and magnitude of a project.
 14. Projects should aim at becoming self-supporting or only partly assisted by local or national Bahá'í resources and become independent of outside funds in the shortest possible time— especially as such financial resources are likely to become exhausted and as non-local personnel are withdrawn.

Evaluation of Projects

All types and sizes of projects require careful appraisal before commencement and constant monitoring during operations to ensure that the aim of the project is attainable and that maximum consideration is given to all the guidelines.

10.

It is also worth remembering the; projects may need amendment to or alteration of their objectives as operational experience may show. The need for such changes can only be realized if constant monitoring is carried out and is accepted as a component part of the project.

11.

The pre-appraisal, monitoring and final evaluation of each project will be carried out by people invited to perform this service either by the National Spiritual Assembly, or in consultation with the World Centre, depending upon the magnitude of the project and its constraints.

Financing of Projects

12.

Generally, projects will come under one of the following categories.

1. Self-Financed

13.

When the resources of the community are adequate to meet all expenses connected with the implementation of the project. In some cases it may be feasible for a group to form themselves into a cooperative for the purpose of financing a project. All cooperative arrangements must be clearly ascertained and proper agreements should be drawn indicating each party's responsibility. These steps should occur, preferably, under the guidance of the National Spiritual Assembly or an agency designated by the National Assembly. Emphasis should be placed on sound business practices, honest contractual agreements and firm commitments.

2. National Fund-Financed

14.

When the project is of national character, and comes directly under the auspices of the National Spiritual Assembly, the Assembly should study the project finances and carefully consider the implications of its commitment, taking into consideration: duration, possible expansion, available personnel, materials, and all other factors necessary to carry the project to a successful conclusion; or to continue indefinitely without becoming a drain on the National resources.

15.

When a development project may be of special value to the community, but its financial resources are limited, the National Spiritual Assembly may, in consultation with the Counsellors, determine the extent of supplemental financial assistance needed and submit this to the Universal House of Justice.

16.

The Universal House of Justice will consider such development projects referred to it by National Spiritual Assemblies, will determine how implementation may be carried out and will advise the National Assembly of its views and give the necessary directions.

17.

In some instances it may be the wish of the Universal House of Justice to invite non-Bahá'í

development agencies to participate in the financing or implementation of a project. For the time being, this action will be taken only with the approval of the World Centre and referred to agencies developed for this purpose.

18.

The Teachings of our Faith are the mightiest and most powerful instrument created for the advancement of human society. We are now called upon to participate, as and when circumstances permit, collectively, in promoting social and economic aspects of human development and thereby placing the World Bahá'í community in the forefront of the progressive movements of the world.

“In the garden of thy heart, plant naught but the rose of love...”

Social & Economic Development

Extracts from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh,
The Writings and Utterances of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá,
The Letters of Shoghi Effendi
and letters written on his behalf,
The letters and messages of
the Universal House of Justice
and letters written on its behalf.

Compiled by:
The Office of Social and Economic Development,
Bahá'í World Center

I. “...the concept of social and economic development is enshrined in the sacred Teachings of our Faith.”

Universal House of Justice, 20 October 1983

1.

...is not the object of every Revelation to effect a transformation in the whole character of mankind, a transformation that shall manifest itself both outwardly and inwardly, that shall affect both its inner life and external conditions? For if the character of mankind be not changed, the futility of God's universal Manifestations would be apparent.

Bahá'u'lláh, KI, pp. 240-241

2.

They whom God hath endued with insight will readily recognize that the precepts laid down by God constitute the highest means for the maintenance of order in the world and the security of its peoples.

Bahá'u'lláh, SCKIA, p. 11

3.

I testify that no sooner had the First Word proceeded, through the potency of Thy will and purpose, out of His mouth, and the First Call gone forth from His lips than the whole creation was revolutionized, and all that are in the heavens and all that are on earth were stirred to the depths. Through that Word the realities of all created things were shaken, were divided, separated, scattered, combined and reunited, disclosing, in both the contingent world and the heavenly kingdom, entities of a new creation, and revealing, in the unseen realms, the signs and tokens of Thy unity and oneness. Through that Call Thou didst announce unto all Thy servants the advent of Thy most great Revelation and the appearance of Thy most perfect Cause.

Bahá'u'lláh, PM, pp. 295-296

4.

Every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God is endowed with such potency as can instill new life into every human frame, if ye be of them that comprehend this truth. All the wondrous works ye behold in this world have been manifested through the operation of His supreme and most exalted Will, His wondrous and inflexible Purpose.

Bahá'u'lláh, G, p. 141

5.

...the still greater task of converting satanic strength into heavenly power is one that We have been empowered to accomplish. The Force capable of such a transformation transcendeth the potency of the Elixir itself. The Word of God, alone, can claim the distinction of being endowed with the capacity required for so great and far-reaching a change.

Bahá'u'lláh, G, p. 200

6.

The All-Knowing Physician hath His finger on the pulse of mankind. He perceiveth the disease, and prescribeth, in His unerring wisdom, the remedy. Every age hath its own problem, and every soul its particular aspiration. The remedy the world needeth in its present-day afflictions can never be the same as that which a subsequent age may require. Be anxiously concerned with the needs of the age ye live in, and center your deliberations on its exigencies and requirements.

We can well perceive how the whole human race is encompassed with great, with incalculable afflictions. We see it languishing on its bed of sickness, sore-tried and disillusioned. They that are intoxicated by self-conceit have interposed themselves between it and the Divine and infallible Physician. Witness how they have entangled all men, themselves included, in the mesh of their devices. They can neither discover the cause of the disease, nor have they any knowledge of the remedy. They have conceived the straight to be crooked, and have imagined their friend an

enemy.

Bahá'u'lláh, G, p. 213

7.

Religion is verily the chief instrument for the establishment of order in the world and of tranquility amongst its peoples... The greater the decline of religion, the more grievous the waywardness of the ungodly. This cannot but lead in the end to chaos and confusion.

Bahá'u'lláh, TB, pp. 63-64

8.

...that which hath streamed forth from the Most Exalted Pen is conducive to the glory, the advancement and education of all the peoples and kindreds of the earth. Indeed it is the sovereign remedy for every disease, could they but comprehend and perceive it.

Bahá'u'lláh, TB, p. 73

9.

O people of God! Give ear unto that which, if heeded, will ensure the freedom, well-being, tranquility, exaltation and advancement of all men.

Bahá'u'lláh, TB, p. 92

10.

Unveiled and unconcealed, this Wronged One hath, at all times, proclaimed before the face of all the peoples of the world that which will serve as the key for unlocking the doors of sciences, of arts, of knowledge, of well-being, of prosperity and wealth.

Bahá'u'lláh, TB, p. 96

11.

The religion of God and His divine law are the most potent instruments and the surest of all means for the dawning of the light of unity amongst men. The progress of the world, the development of nations, the tranquility of peoples, and the peace of all who dwell on earth are among the principles and ordinances of God. Religion bestoweth upon man the most precious of all gifts, offereth the cup of prosperity, imparteth eternal life, and showereth imperishable benefits upon mankind.

Bahá'u'lláh, TB, pp. 129-130

12.

All the peoples of Europe, notwithstanding their vaunted civilization, sink and drown in this terrifying sea of passion and desire, and this is why all the phenomena of their culture come to nothing. Let no one wonder at this statement or deplore it. The primary purpose, the basic objective, in laying down powerful laws and setting up great principles and institutions dealing

with every aspect of civilization, is human happiness; and human happiness consists only in drawing closer to the Threshold of Almighty God, and in securing the peace and well-being of every individual member, high and low alike, of the human race; and the supreme agencies for accomplishing these two objectives are the excellent qualities with which humanity has been endowed.

A superficial culture, unsupported by a cultivated morality, is as “a confused medley of dreams,” and external luster without inner perfection is “like a vapor in the desert which the thirsty dreameth to be water.” For results which would win the good pleasure of God and secure the peace and well-being of man, could never be fully achieved in a merely external civilization.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, SDC, p.60-61

13.

Naught but the celestial potency of the Word of God, which ruleth and transcendeth the realities of all things, is capable of harmonising the divergent thoughts, sentiments, ideas, and convictions of the children of men. Verily, it is the penetrating power in all things, the mover of souls and the binder and regulator in the world of humanity.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, SWAB, p. 292

14.

For man two wings are necessary. One wing is physical power and material civilization; the other is spiritual power and divine civilization. With one wing only, flight is impossible. Two wings are essential. Therefore, no matter how much material civilization advances, it cannot attain to perfection except through the uplift of spiritual civilization.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, PUP, p. 12

15.

Until the heavenly civilization is founded, no result will be forthcoming from material civilization...

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, PUP, p. 96

16.

Material civilization is likened to the body, whereas divine civilization is the spirit in that body. A body not manifesting the spirit is dead; a fruitless tree is worthless.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, PUP, p. 104

17.

No matter how far the material world advances, it cannot establish the happiness of mankind. Only when material and spiritual civilization are linked and coordinated will happiness be assured. Then material civilization will not contribute its energies to the forces of evil in destroying the oneness of humanity, for in material civilization good and evil advance together

and maintain the same pace. For example, consider the material progress of man in the last decade. Schools and colleges, hospitals, philanthropic institutions, scientific academies and temples of philosophy have been founded, but hand in hand with these evidences of development, the invention and production of means and weapons for human destruction have correspondingly increased...

All this is the outcome of material civilization; therefore, although material advancement furthers good purposes in life, at the same time it serves evil ends... If the moral precepts and foundations of divine civilization become united with the material advancement of man, there is no doubt that the happiness of the human world will be attained and that from every direction the glad tidings of peace upon earth will be announced. Then humankind will achieve extraordinary progress, the sphere of human intelligence will be immeasurably enlarged, wonderful inventions will appear, and the spirit of God will reveal itself; all men will consort in joy and fragrance, and eternal life will be conferred upon the children of the Kingdom.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, PUP, pp. 109-110

18.

Material development may be likened to the glass of a lamp, whereas divine virtues and spiritual susceptibilities are the light within the glass. The lamp chimney is worthless without the light; likewise, man in his material condition requires the radiance and vivification of the divine graces and merciful attributes.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, PUP, p. 288

19.

Who else can be the blissful if not the community of the Most Great Name, whose world-embracing, continually consolidating activities constitute the one integrating process in a world whose institutions, secular as well as religious, are for the most part dissolving? They indeed are “the people of the right,” whose “noble habitation” is fixed on the foundations of the World Order of Bahá’u’lláh— the Ark of everlasting salvation in this most grievous Day. Of all the kindreds of the earth they alone can recognize, amidst the welter of a tempestuous age, the Hand of the Divine Redeemer that traces its course and controls its destinies. They alone are aware of the silent growth of that orderly world polity whose fabric they themselves are weaving.

Shoghi Effendi, WOB, p. 194

20.

We are indeed living in an age which, if we would correctly appraise it, should be regarded as one which is witnessing a dual phenomenon. The first signalizes the death-pangs of an order, effete and godless, that has stubbornly refused, despite the signs and portents of a century-old Revelation, to attune its processes to the precepts and ideals which that Heaven-sent Faith proffered it. The second proclaims the birth-pangs of an Order, divine and redemptive, that will inevitably supplant the former, and within Whose administrative structure an embryonic civilization, incomparable and world-embracing, is imperceptibly maturing. The one is being rolled up, and is crashing in oppression, bloodshed, and ruin. The other opens up vistas of a justice, a unity, a peace, a culture, such as no age has ever seen. The former has spent its force,

demonstrated its falsity and barrenness, lost irretrievably its opportunity, and is hurrying to its doom. The latter, virile and unconquerable, is plucking asunder its chains, and is vindicating its title to be the one refuge within which a sore-tried humanity, purged from its dross, can attain its destiny.

Shoghi Effendi, PDC, p.16

21.

The primary consideration is the spirit that has to permeate our economic life and this will gradually crystallize itself into definite institutions and principles that would help to bring about the ideal condition foretold by Bahá'u'lláh.

From a letter dated 20 December 1931 written on behalf of the Guardian to a National Spiritual Assembly

22.

Technocracy,¹ as well as the other movements now existing in the world, every one of them, has some wonderful point that connects it very closely to the teachings of the Faith. But all these see the light partially. The spirit of the Cause pulsates in their veins but they have to become conscious of the center of inspiration and light if they desire to reform fully our corrupted and despairing society. Our troubles are not purely economic. There are also basic spiritual reforms that have to set in. There is the human heart that has to be changed.

We cannot segregate the human heart from the environment outside us and say that once one of these is reformed everything will be improved. Man is organic with the world. His inner life moulds the environment and is itself also deeply affected by it. The one acts upon the other and every abiding change in the life of man is the result of these mutual reactions.

No movement in the world directs its attention upon both these aspects of human life and has full measures for their improvement save the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh, And this is its distinctive feature. If we desire therefore the good of the world we should strive to spread those teachings and also practice them in our own life. Through them will the human heart be changed and also our social environment provides the atmosphere in which we can grow spiritually and reflect in full the light of God shining through the revelation of Bahá'u'lláh.

From letter dated 17 February 1933 written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer

23.

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 splendour will outshine our brightest visions and surpass our highest hopes.

Universal House of Justice, Letter to the Bahá'ís of the World, Naw-Ruz 1979

24.

A wider horizon is opening before us, illumined by a growing and universal manifestation of the inherent potentialities of the Cause for ordering human affairs. In this light can be discerned not only our immediate tasks but, more dimly, new pursuits and undertakings upon which we must shortly become engaged... The powers released by Bahá'u'lláh match the needs of the times. We may therefore be utterly confident that the new throb of energy now vibrating throughout the Cause will empower it to meet the oncoming challenges of assisting, as maturity and resources allow, the development of the social and economic life of peoples, of collaborating with the forces leading towards the establishment of order in the world, of influencing the exploitation and constructive uses of modern technology, and in all these ways enhancing the prestige and progress of the Faith and uplifting the conditions of the generality of mankind.

Universal House of Justice, Letter to the Bahá'ís of the World, Ridván 140 BE

25.

The greatest need of all peoples is for the Faith itself, so that they may know the destiny towards which they as individuals and as members of society must strive, and will learn from the teachings those virtues and methods which will enable them to work together in harmony, forbearance and trustworthiness... The principle remains, however, that the spiritual precedes the material. First comes the illumination of hearts and minds by the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh and then the grass roots stirring of the believers wishing to apply these teachings to the daily life of their community. Such stirrings can be fostered, encouraged and assisted by the national and continental institutions of the Faith, but without them any activities introduced from above might well prove abortive.

From a letter dated 8 May 1984, written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly

II. “...the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár, the spiritual center of every Bahá'í community round which must flourish dependencies dedicated to the social, humanitarian, educational and scientific advancement of mankind.”

The Universal House of Justice, 20 October 1983

26.

Although to outward seeming the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár is a material structure, yet it hath a spiritual effect. It forgoeth bonds of unity from heart to heart; it is a collective center for men's souls. Every city in which, during the days of the Manifestation, a temple was raised up, hath created security and constancy and peace, for such buildings were given over to the perpetual glorification of God, and only in the remembrance of God can the heart find rest. Gracious God! The edifice of the House of Worship hath a powerful influence on every phase of life.

Experience hath, in the east, clearly shown this to be a fact. Even if, in some small village, a house was designated as the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár it produced a marked effect; how much greater

would be the impact of one especially raised up.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, SWAB, pp. 95-96

27.

The Mashriqu’l-Adhkár and its accessories: “When these institutions, college, hospital, hospice, and establishments for the incurables, university for the study of higher sciences and giving postgraduate courses, and other philanthropic buildings, are built, its doors will be open to all the nations and all religions. There will be drawn absolutely no line of demarcation. Its charities will be dispensed irrespective of colour and race. Its gates will be flung wide to mankind; prejudice toward none, love for all. The central building will be devoted to the purposes of prayer and worship. Thus for the first time religion will become harmonised with science and science will be the handmaid of religion, both showering their material and spiritual gifts on all humanity. In this way the people will be lifted out of the quagmires of slothfulness and bigotry.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, SW, 2d(1), 1930, p. 20

28.

The founding of the Mashriqu’l-Adhkár will mark the inception of the Kingdom of God on earth.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, SW v(17), 1916, p. 137

29.

But however inspiring the conception of Bahá’í worship, as witnessed in the central Edifice of this exalted Temple, it cannot be regarded as the sole, nor even the essential, factor in the part which the Mashriqu’l-Adhkár, as designed by Bahá’u’lláh, is destined to play in the organic life of the Bahá’í community. Divorced from the social, humanitarian, educational and scientific pursuits centering around the Dependencies of the Mashriqu’l-Adhkár Bahá’í worship, however exalted in its conception, however passionate in fervour, can never hope to achieve beyond the meager and often transitory results produced by the contemplations of the ascetic or the communion of the passive worshiper. It cannot afford lasting satisfaction and benefit to the worshiper himself, much less to humanity in general, unless and until translated and transfused into that dynamic and disinterested service to the cause of humanity which it is the supreme privilege of the Dependencies of the Mashriqu’l-Adhkár to facilitate and promote. Nor will the exertions, no matter how disinterested and strenuous, of those who within the precincts of the Mashriqu’l-Adhkár will be engaged in administering the affairs of the future Bahá’í Commonwealth, fructify and prosper unless they are brought into close and daily communion with those spiritual agencies centering in and radiating from the central Shrine of the Mashriqu’l-Adhkár. Nothing short of direct and constant interaction between the spiritual forces emanating from this House of Worship centering in the heart of the Mashriqu’l-Adhkár, and the energies consciously displayed by those who administer its affairs in their service to humanity can possibly provide the necessary agency capable of removing the ills that have so long and so grievously afflicted humanity. For it is assuredly upon the consciousness of the efficacy of the Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh, reinforced on one hand by spiritual communion with His Spirit, and on the other by the intelligent application and the faithful execution of the principles and laws He revealed, that the salvation of a world in travail must ultimately depend. And of all the institutions that stand associated with His Holy Name, surely none save the institution of the

Mashriqu'l-Adhkár can most adequately provide the essentials of Bahá'í worship and service, both so vital to the regeneration of the world. Therein lies the secret of the loftiness, of the potency, of the unique position of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár as one of the outstanding institutions conceived by Bahá'u'lláh.

Shoghi Effendi, BA. pp. 185-186

30.

From the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár ordained as a house of worship by Bahá'u'lláh in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, the representatives of Bahá'í communities, both local and national, together with the members of their respective committees, will, as they gather daily within its walls at the hour of dawn, derive the necessary inspiration that will enable them to discharge, in the course of their day-to-day exertions in the Hazíratu'l-Quds— the scene of their administrative activities— their duties and responsibilities as befits the chosen stewards of His Faith.

Shoghi Effendi. GPB, p. 340

31.

In these days one of the essential requirements of the Faith which will attract divine blessings and lead to the protection of the servants at His Threshold, is to set aside a suitable place to serve as a center for Bahá'í activities in each of the localities where believers reside... In such a center, even if it is among the most modest of locations, all gatherings of the friends should be held, such as those for the reading of the Tablets, for prayers and supplications, for the meetings of the Local Spiritual Assembly, for the teaching work, for the delivery of talks, for commemorations, for festivals and for the Feasts. If the location is suitable, it would be light upon light if in the future the edifice of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár could also be erected on that spot. That center should be named Hazíratu'l-Quds, so that the musk-scented breaths of the fervent prayers offered therein, and the sweet breeze of spiritual discussions and worthy enterprises wafted from the Hazíratu'l-Quds may spread to neighboring regions, and impart healing and fragrance to the nostrils of a sorely afflicted world.

Translated from a letter of Shoghi Effendi to the friends in Iran and the East, dated July 1925

32.

A symbol of this process may be seen in the House of Worship and its dependencies. The first part to be built is the central edifice which is the spiritual heart of the community. Then, gradually, as the outward expression of this spiritual heart, the various dependencies, those "institutions of social service as shall afford relief to the suffering, sustenance to the poor, shelter to the wayfarer, solace to the bereaved, and education to the ignorant" are erected and function. This process begins in an embryonic way long before a Bahá'í community reaches the stage of building its own Mashriqu'l-Adhkár for even the first local center that a Bahá'í community erects can begin to serve not only as the spiritual and administrative center and gathering place of the community, but also as the site of a tutorial school and the heart of other aspects of community life.

From a letter dated 8 May 1984, written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly.

III. “The steps to be taken must necessarily begin in the Bahá’í Community itself, with the friends endeavoring, through their application of spiritual principles, their rectitude of conduct and the practice of the art of consultation, to uplift themselves and thus become self-sufficient and self-reliant. Moreover, these exertions will conduce to the preservation of human honor, so desired by Bahá’u’lláh, In the process and as a consequence, the friends will undoubtedly extend the benefits of their efforts to society as a whole, until all mankind achieves the progress intended by the Lord of the Age.”

Universal House of Justice, 20 October 1983

A. The Application of Spiritual Principles

33.

We prescribe unto all men that which will lead to the exaltation of the Word of God amongst His servants, and likewise, to the advancement of the world of being and the uplift of souls. To this end, the greatest means is education of the child. To this must each and all hold fast. We have verily laid this charge upon you in manifold Tablets as well as in My Most Holy Book. Well is it with him who deferreth thereto.

We ask of God that He will assist each and every one to obey this inescapable command that hath appeared and been caused to descend through the Pen of the Ancient of Days.

Bahá’u’lláh, BCE, p. 4

34.

Know thou that all men have been created in the nature made by God, the Guardian, the Self-Subsisting. Unto each one hath been prescribed a pre-ordained measure, as decreed in God’s mighty and guarded Tablets. All that which ye potentially possess can, however, be manifested only as a result of your own volition.

Bahá’u’lláh. G, p. 149

35.

It is enjoined upon every one of you to engage in some form of occupation, such as crafts, trades and the like. We have graciously exalted your engagement in such work to the rank of worship unto God, the True One. Ponder ye in your hearts the grace and the blessings of God and render thanks unto Him at eventide and at dawn. Waste not your time in idleness and sloth. Occupy yourselves with that which profiteth yourselves and others. Thus hath it been decreed in this Tablet from whose horizon the day-star of wisdom and utterance shineth resplendent.

The most despised of men in the sight of God are those who sit idly and beg. Hold ye fast unto the cord of material means, placing your whole trust in God, the Provider of all means. When anyone occupieth himself in a craft or trade, such occupation itself is regarded in the estimation of God as an act of worship; and this is naught but a token of His infinite and all-pervasive bounty.

Bahá'u'lláh, TB p. 26

36.

The first Taráz and the first effulgence which hath dawned from the horizon of the Mother Book is that man should know his own self and recognize that which leadeth unto loftiness or lowliness, glory or abasement, wealth or poverty. Having attained the stage of fulfillment and reached his maturity, man standeth in need of wealth, and such wealth as he acquireth through crafts or professions is commendable and praise-worthy in the estimation of men of wisdom, and especially in the eyes of servants who dedicate themselves to the education of the world and to the edification of its peoples. They are, in truth, cup-bearers of the life-giving water of knowledge and guides unto the ideal way. They direct the peoples of the world to the straight path and acquaint them with that which is conducive to human upliftment and exaltation.

Bahá'u'lláh, TB, pp. 34-35

37.

The third Tajallí is concerning arts, crafts and sciences. Knowledge is as wings to man's life, and a ladder for his ascent. Its acquisition is incumbent upon everyone. The knowledge of such sciences, however, should be acquired as can profit the peoples of the earth, and not those which begin with words and end with words. Great indeed is the claim of scientists and craftsmen on the peoples of the world. Unto this beareth witness the Mother Book on the day of His return. Happy are those possessed of a hearing ear. In truth, knowledge is a veritable treasure for man, and source of glory, of bounty, of joy, of exaltation, of cheer and gladness unto him. Thus hath the Tongue of Grandeur spoken in this Most Great Prison.

Bahá'u'lláh, TB pp. 51-52

38.

The purpose of learning should be the promotion of the welfare of the people, and this can be achieved through crafts. It hath been revealed and is now repeated that the true worth of artists and craftsmen should be appreciated, for they advance the affairs of mankind. Just as the foundations of religion are made firm through the Law of God, the means of livelihood depend upon those who are engaged in arts and crafts. True learning is that which is conducive to the well-being of the world, not to pride and self-conceit, or to tyranny, violence and pillage.

Bahá'u'lláh, from a newly translated Tablet

39.

...the happiness and greatness, the rank and station, the pleasure and peace, of an individual have never consisted in his personal wealth, but rather in his excellent character, his high resolve, the breadth of his learning, and his ability to solve difficult problems. How well has it been said: "On

my back is a garment which, were it sold for a penny, that penny would be worth far more; yet within the garment is a soul which, if you weighed it against all the souls in the world, would prove greater and nobler.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, SDC, pp. 23-24

40.

Wealth is praiseworthy in the highest degree, if it is acquired by an individual’s own efforts and the grace of God, in commerce, agriculture, art and industry, and if it be expanded for philanthropic purposes. Above all, if a judicious and resourceful individual should initiate measures which would universally enrich the masses of the people, there could be no undertaking greater than this, and it would rank in the sight of God as the supreme achievement, for such a benefactor would supply the needs and insure the comfort and well-being of a great multitude. Wealth is most commendable, provided the entire population is wealthy. If, however, a few have inordinate riches while the rest are impoverished, and no fruit or benefit accrues from that wealth, then it is only a liability to its possessor. If, on the other hand, it is expended for the promotion of knowledge, the founding of elementary and other schools, the encouragement of art and industry, the training of orphans and the poor— in brief, if it is dedicated to the welfare of society— its possessor will stand out before God and man as the most excellent of all who live on earth and will be accounted as one of the people of paradise.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, SDC pp. 24-25

41.

The world of politics is like the world of man; he is a seed at first, and then passes by degrees to the condition of embryo and fetus, acquiring a bone structure, being clothed with flesh, taking on his own special form, until at last he reaches the plane where he can befittingly fulfill the words: “the most excellent of Makers.”[Qur’an 23:14]Just as this is a requirement of creation and is based on the universal Wisdom, the political world in the same way cannot instantaneously evolve from the nadir of defectiveness to the zenith of rightness and perfection. Rather, qualified individuals must strive by day and by night, using all those means which will conduce to progress, until the government and the people develop along every line from day to day and even from moment to moment.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, SDC, pp. 107-108

42.

The primary, the most urgent requirement is the promotion of education. It is inconceivable that any nation should achieve prosperity and success unless this paramount, this fundamental concern is carried forward. The principal reason for the decline and fall of peoples is ignorance. Today the mass of the people are uninformed even as to ordinary affairs, how much less do they grasp the core of the important problems and complex needs of the time.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, SDC p. 109

43.

It is, furthermore, a vital necessity to establish schools throughout Persia, even in the smallest

country towns and villages, and to encourage the people in every possible way to have their children learn to read and write. If necessary, education should even be made compulsory. Until the nerves and arteries of the nation stir into life, every measure that is attempted will prove vain; for the people are as the human body, and determination and the will to struggle are as the soul, and a soulless body does not move. This dynamic power is present to a superlative degree in the very nature of the Persian people, and the spread of education will release it.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, SDC, p. 111-112

44.

To state the matter briefly, the Teachings of Bahá’u’lláh advocate voluntary sharing, and this is a greater thing than the equalization of wealth. For equalization must be imposed from without, while sharing is a matter of free choice.

Man reacheth perfection through good deeds, voluntarily performed, not through good deeds the doing of which was forced upon him. And sharing is a personally chosen righteous act: that is, the rich should extend assistance to the poor, they should expend their substance for the poor, but of their own free will, and not because the poor have gained this end by force. For the harvest of force is turmoil and the ruin of the social order. On the other hand voluntary sharing, the freely-chosen expending of one’s substance, leadeth to society’s comfort and peace. It lighteth up the world; it bestoweth honor upon humankind.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, SWAB, p. 115

45.

O ye recipients of the favors of God! In this new and wondrous Age, the unshakeable foundation is the teaching of sciences and arts. According to explicit Holy Texts, every child must be taught crafts and arts, to the degree that is needful. Wherefore, in every city and village, schools must be established and every child in that city or village is to engage in study to the necessary degree.

It followeth that whatever soul shall offer his aid to bring this about will assuredly be accepted at the heavenly Threshold, and extolled by the Company on high.

Since ye have striven hard toward this all-important end, it is my hope that ye will reap your reward from the Lord of clear tokens and signs, and that the glances of heavenly grace will turn your way.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, SWAB, pp. 134-135

46.

As preordained by the Fountainhead of Creation, the temple of the world hath been fashioned after the image and likeness of the human body. In fact each mirroreth forth the image of the other, wert thou but to observe with discerning eyes. By this is meant that even as the human body in this world which is outwardly composed of different limbs and organs, is in reality a closely integrated, coherent entity, similarly the structure of the physical world is like unto a single being whose limbs and members are inseparably linked together.

Were one to observe with an eye that discovereth the realities of all things, it would become clear that the greatest relationship that bindeth the world of being together lieth in the range of created things themselves, and that co-operation, mutual aid and reciprocity are essential characteristics in the unified body of the world of being, inasmuch as all created things are closely related together and each is influenced by the other or deriveth benefit therefrom, either directly or indirectly.

Consider for instance how one group of created things constituteth the vegetable kingdom, and another the animal kingdom. Each of these two maketh use of certain elements in the air on which its own life dependeth, while each increaseth the quantity of such elements as are essential for the life of the other. In other words, the growth and development of the vegetable world is impossible without the existence of the animal kingdom, and the maintenance of animal life is inconceivable without the co-operation of the vegetable kingdom. Of like kind are the relationships that exist among all created things. Hence it was stated that co-operation and reciprocity are essential properties which are inherent in the unified system of the world of existence, and without which the entire creation would be reduced to nothingness.

In surveying the vast range of creation thou shalt perceive that the higher a kingdom of created things is on the arc of ascent, the more conspicuous are the signs and evidences of the truth that co-operation and reciprocity at the level of a higher order are greater than those that exist at the level of a lower order. For example the evident signs of this fundamental reality are more discernible in the vegetable kingdom than in the mineral, and still more manifest in the animal world than in the vegetable.

And thus when contemplating the human world thou beholdest this wondrous phenomenon shining resplendent from all sides with the utmost perfection, inasmuch as in this station acts of co-operation, mutual assistance and reciprocity are not confined to the body and to things that pertain to the material world, but for all conditions, whether physical or spiritual, such as those related to minds, thoughts, opinions, manners, customs, attitudes, understandings, feelings or other human susceptibilities. In all these thou shouldst find these binding relationships securely established. The more this inter-relationship is strengthened and expanded, the more will human society advance in progress and prosperity. Indeed without these vital ties it would be wholly impossible for the world of humanity to attain true felicity and success.

Now consider, if among the people who are merely the manifestations of the world of being this significant matter is of such importance, how much greater must be the spirit of co-operation and mutual assistance among those who are the essences of the world of creation, who have sought the sheltering shadow of the heavenly Tree, and are favoured by the manifestations of divine grace; and how the evidences of this spirit should, through their earnest endeavor, their fellowship and concord, become manifest in every sphere of their inner and outer lives, in the realm of the spirit and divine mysteries and in all things related to this world and the next. Thus there can be no doubt that they must be willing even to offer up their lives for each other...

We earnestly hope that in this Most Great Cycle the wondrous attributes of the All-Merciful may, through the infinite bounty and blessings of the King of Glory, find expression in the lives of the servants of God in such wise that the sweet savours thereof will shed fragrance upon all regions.

This matter needeth further details, but We have treated it in brief.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Compilation on Huqúqu’lláh, pp. 14-15.

47.

O ye friends of the east and the west!

One of the greatest foundations of the religion of God, the significance of the Word of God and the duty of the believers of God is mutual assistance and co-operation. For the world of humanity, nay, rather, all the infinite beings exist by this law of mutual action and helpfulness. Should this law of joint interchange of forces be removed from the arena of life, the existence would be entirely destroyed.

When we ponder deeply upon the connection and interdependence of beings, we clearly realize that the life of every being draws benefit and sustenance from all the other innumerable existences. This mutual helpfulness is realized either directly or through mediation, and if, for the twinkling of an eye, this confirmation and assistance does not descend upon the living being, that one will become non-existent, for all the existing things are linked together and draw help from each other. Therefore, the greatest foundation of the world of existence is this cooperation and mutuality.

Liken the world of existence to the temple of man. All the limbs and organs of the human body assist each other, therefore life continues. When, in this wonderful organism, there is a disconnection, life is changed into death and the parts of the body disintegrate. Likewise, among the parts of existence, there is a wonderful connection and interchange of forces, which is the cause of the life of the world and the continuation of these countless phenomena...

From this illustration, one can see the base of life is this mutual aid and helpfulness; and the cause of destruction and non-existence would be the interruption of this mutual assistance.

The more the world aspires to civilization, the more this most important matter of co-operation and assistance becomes manifest. Therefore, in the world of humanity, one sees this matter of helpfulness attain to a high degree of efficiency; so much so, that the continuance of humanity entirely depends upon this interrelation. The believers of God must especially fortify the foundation of this reality among themselves, so that all may help each other under all circumstances, whether in the degree of truth and significances or in the stations of this world of matter and, especially, in founding public institutions which shall benefit all the people, and, still more, the founding of the Mashriq’l-Adhkár, which is the greatest of the divine foundations.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, SW. x(17), pp. 138-139

48.

The education of each child is compulsory... In addition to this widespread education each child must be taught a profession, art, or trade, so that every member of the community will be enabled to earn his own livelihood. Work done in the spirit of service is the highest form of worship...

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, on Divine Philosophy, p. 78

49.

Commerce, agriculture and industry should not, in truth, be a bar to service of the One True God. Indeed, such occupations are most potent instruments and clear proofs for the manifestation of the evidences of one's piety, of one's trustworthiness and of the virtues of the All-Merciful Lord.

Translated extract from a Tablet of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

50.

Human education signifies civilization and progress— that is to say, government, administration, charitable works, trades, arts and handicrafts, sciences, great inventions and discoveries and elaborate institutions, which are the activities essential to man as distinguished from the animal. Divine education is that of the Kingdom of God: it consists in acquiring divine perfections, and this is true education; for in this state man becomes the focus of divine blessings, the manifestation of the words, "Let Us make man in Our image, and after Our likeness." This is the goal of the world of humanity.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, SAQ, p. 8

51.

The attainment of any object is conditioned upon knowledge, volition and action. Unless these three conditions are forthcoming there is no execution or accomplishment.

'Abdu'l-Bahá FWU, p. 101

52.

He [Bahá'u'lláh] has declared that in the estimation of God there is no distinction of sex. The one whose heart is most pure, whose deeds and service in the Cause of God are greater and nobler, is most acceptable before the divine threshold— whether male or female... there must be no difference in the education of male and female in order that womankind may develop equal capacity and importance with man in the social and economic equation. Then the world will attain unity and harmony. In past ages humanity has been defective and inefficient because it has been incomplete. War and its ravages have blighted the world; the education of woman will be a mighty step toward its abolition and ending, for she will use her whole influence against war. Woman rears the child and educates the youth to maturity. She will refuse to give her sons for sacrifice upon the field of battle. In truth, she will be the greatest factor in establishing universal peace and international arbitration. Assuredly, woman will abolish warfare among mankind. Inasmuch as human society consists of two parts, the male and female, each the complement of the other, the happiness and stability of humanity cannot be assured unless both are perfected. Therefore, the standard and status of man and woman must become equalized.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, PUP, p. 108

53.

Bahá'u'lláh set forth principles of guidance and teaching for economic readjustment. Regulations were revealed by Him which ensure the welfare of the commonwealth. As the rich man enjoys his life surrounded by ease and luxuries so the poor man must, likewise, have a home and be provided with sustenance and comforts commensurate with his needs. This readjustment of the social economy is of the greatest importance inasmuch as it ensures the stability of the world of

humanity; and until it is effected, happiness and prosperity are impossible.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, PUP, pp. 181-182

54.

The fundamentals of the whole economic condition are divine in nature and are associated with the world of the heart and spirit. This is fully explained in the Bahá’í teaching, and without knowledge of its principles no improvement in the economic state can be realized. The Bahá’ís will bring about this improvement and betterment but not through sedition and appeal to physical force— not through warfare, but welfare. Hearts must be so cemented together, love must become so dominant that the rich shall most willingly extend assistance to the poor and take steps to establish these economic adjustments permanently. If it is accomplished in this way, it will be most praiseworthy because then it will be for the sake of God and in the pathway of His service.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, PUP, pp. 238-239

55.

Briefly, every nation has a day known as a holiday which they celebrate with joy. In the sacred laws of God, in every cycle and dispensation, there are blessed feasts, holidays and workless days. On such days all kinds of occupations, commerce, industry, agriculture etc., are not allowed. Every work is unlawful. All must enjoy a good time, gather together, hold general meetings, become as one assembly, so that the national oneness, unity and harmony may become personified in all eyes. As it is a blessed day it should not be neglected or without results by making it a day limited to the fruits of mere pleasure. During such blessed days institutions should be founded that may be of permanent benefit and value to the people so that in current conversation and in history it may become widely known that such a good work was inaugurated on such a feast day. Therefore, the intelligent must search and investigate reality to find out what important affair, what philanthropic institutions are most needed and what foundations should be laid for the community on that particular day, so that they may be established. For example, if they find that the community needs morality, then they may lay down the foundation of good morals on that day. If the community be in need of spreading sciences and widening the circle of knowledge, on that day they should proceed in that direction, that is to say, direct the thoughts of all the people to that philanthropic cause. If, however, the community is in need of widening the circle of commerce or industry or agriculture they should start the means so that the desired aim may be attained. If the community needs protection, proper support and care of orphans, they should act upon the welfare of the orphans, etc. Such undertakings that are beneficial to the poor, the weak and the helpless should be pursued in order that, on that day, through the unity of all and through great meetings, results may be obtained, the glory and blessings of that day may be declared and manifest...

In all the cycles of the prophets the philanthropic affairs were confined to their respective peoples only— with the exception of small matters, such as charity, which was permissible to extend to others. But in this wonderful dispensation, philanthropic affairs are for all humanity, without any exception, because it is the manifestation of the mercifulness of God. Therefore, every universal matter— that is, one that belongs to all the world of humanity— is divine; and every matter that is sectarian and special is not universal in character— that is, it is limited. Therefore, my hope is that the friends of God, every one of them, may become as the mercy of God to all mankind.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Star of the West, Vol. 9, No. 1, 8-9 (March 1918)

56.

We must therefore rise to serve the members of the human race and educate first the individuals, so that the nations, which are composed of individuals, and the governments, which belong to these nations, may both be converted and guided, and that through this agency the unity of mankind may be established and its prosperity and success realized.

Shoghi Effendi, from a previously untranslated Tablet, January 1923

57.

Regarding your question concerning helping the poor: The Bahá’ís should not go so far as to refrain from extending charity to the needy, if they are able and willing to do so. However, in this, as in many other things, they should exert moderation. The greatest gift that we can give to the poor and the down-trodden is to aid to build up the divine institutions inaugurated in this day by Bahá’u’lláh, as these institutions, and this World Order when established, will eliminate the causes of poverty and the injustices which afflict the poor. We should, therefore, do both, support our Bahá’í Fund, and also be kind and generous to the needy.

From a letter dated 11 March 1942, written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer

58.

“Regard the world as the human body,” wrote Bahá’u’lláh to Queen Victoria. We can surely regard the Bahá’í world, the army of God, in the same way. In the human body, every cell, every organ, every nerve has its part to play. When all do so the body is healthy, vigorous, radiant, ready for every call made upon it. No cell, however humble, lives apart from the body, whether in serving it or receiving from it. This is true of the body of mankind in which God “has endowed each humble being with ability and talent” and is supremely true of the body of the Bahá’í world community, for this body is already an organism, united in its aspirations, unified in its methods, seeking assistance and confirmation from the same Source, and illumined with the conscious knowledge of its unity. Therefore, in this organic, divinely guided, blessed, and illumined body the participation of every believer is of the utmost importance, and is a source of power and vitality as yet unknown to us. For extensive and deep as has been the sharing in the glorious work of the Cause, who would claim that every single believer has succeeded in finding his or her fullest satisfaction in the life of the Cause? The Bahá’í world community, growing like a healthy new body, develops new cells, new organs, new functions and powers as it presses on to its maturity, when every soul, living for the Cause of God, will receive from that Cause, health, assurance, and the overflowing bounties of Bahá’u’lláh, which are diffused through His divinely ordained Order...

The real secret of universal participation lies in the Master’s oft expressed wish that the friends should love each other, constantly encourage each other, work together, be as one soul in one body, and in so doing become a true, organic, healthy body animated and illumined by the spirit. In such a body all will receive spiritual health and vitality from the organism itself, and the most perfect flowers and fruits will be brought forth.

Universal House of Justice, WG, p. 37-39

59.

The inordinate disparity between rich and poor, a source of acute suffering, keeps the world in a state of instability, virtually on the brink of war. Few societies have dealt effectively with this situation. The solution calls for the combined application of spiritual, moral and practical approaches. A fresh look at the problem is required, entailing consultation with experts from a wide spectrum of disciplines, devoid of economic and ideological polemics, and involving the people directly affected in the decisions that must urgently be made. It is an issue that is bound up not only with the necessity for eliminating extremes of wealth and poverty but also with those spiritual verities the understanding of which can produce a new universal attitude. Fostering such an attitude is itself a major part of the solution.

Universal House of Justice, *The Promise of World Peace*, pp. 10-11

60.

There are spiritual principles, or what some call human values, by which solutions can be found for every social problem. Any well-intentioned group can in a general sense devise practical solutions to its problems, but good intentions and practical knowledge are usually not enough. The essential merit of spiritual principle is that it not only presents a perspective which harmonizes with that which is immanent in human nature, it also induces an attitude, a dynamic, a will, an aspiration, which facilitate the discovery and implementation of practical measures. Leaders of governments and all in authority would be well served in their efforts to solve problems if they would first seek to identify the principles involved and then be guided by them.

Universal House of Justice, *The Promise of World Peace*, p. 13

B. Rectitude of Conduct

61.

O Kamal! The heights which, through the most gracious favor of God, mortal man can attain, in this Day, are as yet unrevealed to his sight. The world of being hath never had, nor doth it yet possess the capacity for such a revelation...

All men have been created to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization. The Almighty beareth Me witness: To act like the beasts of the field is unworthy of man. Those virtues that befit his dignity are forbearance, mercy, compassion and loving-kindness towards all the peoples and kindreds of the earth. Say: O friends! Drink your fill from this crystal stream that floweth through the heavenly grace of Him Who is the Lord of Names. Let others partake of its waters in My name, that the leaders of men in every land may fully recognize the purpose for which the Eternal Truth hath been revealed, and the reason for which they themselves have been created.

Bahá'u'lláh, *G*, pp. 214-5

62.

Be most loving one to another. Burn away, wholly for the sake of the Well-Beloved, the veil of self with the flame of the undying Fire, and with faces joyous and beaming with light, associate with your neighbor...

The Word of God hath set the heart of the world afire; how regrettable if ye fail to be enkindled with its flame! Please God, ye will regard this blessed night as the night of unity, will knit your souls together, and resolve to adorn yourselves with the ornament of a goodly and praiseworthy character. Let your principal concern be to rescue the fallen from the slough of impending extinction, and to help him embrace the ancient Faith of God. Your behavior towards your neighbor should be such as to manifest clearly the signs of the one true God, for ye are the first among men to be re-created by His Spirit, the first to adore and bow the knee before Him, the first to circle round His throne of glory.

Bahá'u'lláh, G, pp. 316-7

63.

It behoveth the people of Bahá to render the Lord victorious through the power of their utterance and to admonish the people by their goodly deeds and character, inasmuch as deeds exert greater influence than words.

Bahá'u'lláh, TB, p.57

64.

Humility exalteth man to the heaven of glory and power, whilst pride abaseth him to the depths of wretchedness and degradation.

Bahá'u'lláh, TB, p. 64

65.

This is the most great, the most joyful tidings imparted by the Pen of this Wronged One to mankind. Wherefore fear ye, O My well-beloved ones? Who is it that can dismay you? A touch of moisture sufficeth to dissolve the hardened clay out of which this perverse generation is molded. The mere act of your gathering together is enough to scatter the forces of these vain and worthless people.

Bahá'u'lláh, TB, pp. 84-85

66.

O people of Justice! Be as brilliant as the light and as splendid as the fire that blazed in the Burning Bush. The brightness of the fire of your love will no doubt fuse and unify the contending peoples and kindreds of the earth, whilst the fierceness of the flame of enmity and hatred cannot but result in strife and ruin.

Bahá'u'lláh, TB, p. 88

67.

The companions of God are, in this day, the lump that must leaven the peoples of the world. They must show forth such trustworthiness, such truthfulness and perseverance, such deeds and character, that all mankind may profit by their example.

Bahá'u'lláh, ADJ, p. 23

68.

The betterment of the world can be accomplished through pure and goodly deeds, through commendable and seemly conduct.

Bahá'u'lláh, ADJ, p.24-5

69.

Thus, through the restoring waters of pure intention and unselfish effort, the earth of human potentialities will blossom with its own latent excellence and flower into praiseworthy qualities...

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, SDC, p. 4

70.

...if a soul is endowed with the attributes of true faith and characterized with spiritual qualities he will become to all mankind an emblem of the outstretched mercies of God. For the attributes of the people of faith are justice and fair-mindedness; forbearance and compassion and generosity; consideration for others; candor, trustworthiness, and loyalty; love and loving-kindness; devotion and determination and humanity. If therefore an individual is truly righteous, he will avail himself of all those means which will attract the hearts of men, and through the attributes of God he will draw them to the straight path of faith and cause them to drink from the river of everlasting life.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, SDC, pp. 55-56

71.

It is certain that the greatest of instrumentalities for achieving the advancement and the glory of man, the supreme agency for the enlightenment and the redemption of the world, is love and fellowship and unity among all the members of the human race. Nothing can be effected in the world, not even conceivably, without unity and agreement, and the perfect means for engendering fellowship and union is true religion. "Hadst Thou spent all the riches of the earth, Thou couldst not have united their hearts; but God hath united them..."

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, SDC, pp. 73-74

72.

Sincerity is the foundation-stone of faith. That is, a religious individual must disregard his personal desires and seek in whatever way he can wholeheartedly to serve the public interests; and it is impossible for a human being to turn aside from his own selfish advantages and sacrifice his own good for the good of the community except through true religious faith.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá SDC, p. 96

73.

If a small number of people gather lovingly together, with absolute purity and sanctity, with their hearts free of the world, experiencing the emotions of the Kingdom and the powerful magnetic

forces of the Divine, and being at one in their happy fellowship, that gathering will exert its influence over all the earth. The nature of that band of people, the words they speak, the deeds they do, will unleash the bestowals of Heaven, and provide a foretaste of eternal bliss. The hosts of the Company on high will defend them, and the angels of the Abhá Paradise, in continuous succession, will come down to their aid.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, SWAB, p. 81

74.

In short, whatsoever thing is arranged in harmony and with love and purity of motive, its result is light, and should the least trace of estrangement prevail the result shall be darkness upon darkness.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, SWAB, p. 88

75.

Note ye how easily, where unity existeth in a given family, the affairs of that family are conducted; what progress the members of that family make, how they prosper in the world. Their concerns are in order, they enjoy comfort and tranquillity, they are secure, their position is assured, they come to be envied by all. Such a family but addeth to its stature and its lasting honour, as day succeedeth day. And if we widen out the sphere of unity a little to include the inhabitants of a village who seek to be loving and united, who associate with and are kind to one another, what great advances they will be seen to make, how secure and protected they will be. Then let us widen out the sphere a little more, let us take the inhabitants of a city, all of them together: if they establish the strongest bonds of unity among themselves, how far they will progress, even in a brief period and what power they will exert. And if the sphere of unity be still further widened out, that is, if the inhabitants of a whole country develop peaceable hearts, and if with all their hearts and souls they yearn to co-operate with one another and to live in unity, and if they become kind and loving to one another, that country will achieve undying joy and lasting glory. Peace will it have, and plenty, and vast wealth.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, SWAB, p. 279

76.

O ye beloved of God! Know ye, verily, that the happiness of mankind lieth in the unity and the harmony of the human race, and that spiritual and material developments are conditioned upon love and amity among all men.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, SWAB, p. 286

77.

The most vital duty, in this day, is to purify your characters, to correct your manners and improve your conduct. The beloved of the Merciful must show forth such character and conduct among His creatures, that the fragrance of their holiness may be shed upon the whole world, and may quicken the dead, in as much as the purpose of the Manifestation of God and the dawning of the limitless lights of the Invisible is to educate the souls of men, and refine the character of every living man...

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, ADJ, p. 26

78.

It is to unity that the Guardian has been continually calling the friends. For where a united will exists, nothing can effectively oppose and hamper the forces of constructive development.

From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian, CLSA, p. 16

79.

Your community is, undoubtedly, developing and it is hoped that it will come to play an increasingly important role in the Administration of the Faith throughout the American Continent. You should not attach much importance to your numerical strength, but should always try to foster among you the spirit of unity, of co-operation and of selfless service. For these alone constitute the true standard according to which your activities should be judged and estimated.

From a letter dated 10 August 1933 written on behalf of the Guardian to a Local Spiritual Assembly

80.

Bahá’u’lláh has brought a new system and new laws and standards of personal as well as social conduct into the world. Although outside agencies have been to a certain extent illumined by the radiance of His Message and doctrines, and are exerting efforts to bring the world into that orbit of universal peace and harmony He has set for it, these outside forces cannot achieve what only the followers of His Faith can. The believers must not take their eyes off their own immediate tasks of patiently consolidating their administrative institutions, building up new Assemblies... and laboring to perfect the Bahá’í pattern of life, for these are things that no other group of people in the world can do or will do, and they alone are able to provide the spiritual foundation and example on which the larger world schemes must ultimately rest. At the same time every effort should be made to broadcast the Teachings at this time, and correlate them to the plight of humanity and the plans for its future...

From a letter dated 29 March 1945 written on behalf of the Guardian to a National Spiritual Assembly

81.

Our task is to build the Order of Bahá’u’lláh. Undeflected by the desperate expedients of those who seek to subdue the storm convulsing human life by political, economic, social or educational programs, let us, with single-minded devotion and concentrating all our efforts on our objective, raise His Divine System and sheltered within its impregnable stronghold, safe from the darts of doubtfulness, demonstrate the Bahá’í way of life. Wherever a Bahá’í community exists, whether large or small, let it be distinguished for its abiding sense of security and faith, its high standard of rectitude, its complete freedom from all forms of prejudice, the spirit of love among its members and for the closely knit fabric of its social life. The acute distinction between this and present day society will inevitably arouse the interest of the more enlightened, and as the world’s gloom deepens, the light of Bahá’í life will shine brighter and brighter until its brilliance must eventually attract the disillusioned masses and cause them to enter the haven of the Covenant of Bahá’u’lláh. Who alone can bring them peace and justice and an ordered life.

Universal House of Justice, MUHJ, p. 12

82.

The Bahá'í community must demonstrate in ever-increasing measure its ability to redeem the disorderliness, the lack of cohesion, the permissiveness, the godlessness of modern society; the laws, the religious obligations, the observances of Bahá'í life, Bahá'í moral principles and standards of dignity, decency and reverence, must become deeply implanted in Bahá'í consciousness and increasingly inform and characterize this community...

Universal House of Justice, MUHJ, p. 90

83.

But in our concern for such immediate obvious calls upon our succor we must not allow ourselves to forget the continuing, appalling burden of suffering under which millions of human beings are always groaning— a burden which they have borne for century upon century and which it is the mission of Bahá'u'lláh to lift at last. The principal cause of this suffering, which one can witness wherever one turns, is the corruption of human morals and the prevalence of prejudice, suspicion, hatred, untrustworthiness, selfishness and tyranny among men. It is not merely material well-being that people need. What they desperately need is to know how to live their lives— they need to know who they are, to what purpose they exist, and how they should act towards one another; and, once they know the answers to these questions they need to be helped to gradually apply these answers to everyday behavior. It is to the solution of this basic problem of mankind that the greater part of all our energy and resources should be directed. There are mighty agencies in this world, governments, foundations, institutions of many kinds with tremendous financial resources which are working to improve the material lot of human beings. Anything we Bahá'ís could add to such resources in the way of special funds or contributions would be a negligible drop in the ocean. However, alone among men we have the Divinely-given remedy for the real ills of mankind; no one else is doing or can do this most important work, and if we divert our energy and our funds into fields in which others are already doing more than we can hope to do, we shall be delaying the diffusion of the Divine Message which is the most important task of all.

Because of such an attitude, as also because of our refusal to become involved in politics, Bahá'ís are often accused of holding aloof from the “real problems” of their fellow-men. But when we hear this accusation let us not forget that those who make it are usually idealistic materialists to whom material good is the only “real” good, whereas we know that the working of the material world is merely a reflection of spiritual conditions and until the spiritual conditions can be changed there can be no lasting change for the better in material affairs.

From a letter dated 19 November 1974 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly

84.

Undoubtedly, it is within your power to contribute significantly to shaping the societies of the coming century; youth can move the world.

Universal House of Justice, letter to the Bahá'í youth of the World, 3 January, 1984

85.

A Bahá'í community which is consistent in its fundamental life-giving, life-sustaining activities will at its heart be serene and confident; it will resonate with spiritual dynamism, will exert irresistible influence, will set a new course in social evolution, enabling it to win the respect and eventually the allegiance of admirers and critics alike. These profound possibilities reside in the will of the individual to take initiative, to act in accordance with the guidance offered by Bahá'í institutions, and to maintain such action regardless of the myriad distractions posed by the disintegration of a society adrift in a sea of materialism.

Universal House of Justice, letter to a National Spiritual Assembly, Ridván 1984

C. The Practice of the Art of Consultation

86.

Discussions must all be confined to spiritual matters that pertain to the training of souls, the instruction of children, the relief of the poor, the help of the feeble throughout all classes in the world, kindness to all peoples, the diffusion of the fragrances of God and the exultation of His Holy Word. Should they endeavor to fulfill these conditions the Grace of the Holy Spirit shall be vouchsafed unto them, and that assembly shall become the center of the Divine blessings, the hosts of Divine confirmation shall come to their aid, and they shall day by day receive a new effusion of Spirit.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, BA, pp. 22-23

87.

These Spiritual Assemblies are shining lamps and heavenly gardens, from which the fragrances of holiness are diffused over all regions, and the lights of knowledge are shed abroad over all created things. From them the spirit of life streameth in every direction. They, indeed, are the potent sources of the progress of man, at all times and under all conditions.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, GPB, p.332

88.

To promote knowledge is thus an inescapable duty imposed on every one of the friends of God. It is incumbent upon that Spiritual Assembly, that assemblage of God, to exert every effort to educate the children, so that from infancy they will be trained in Bahá'í conduct and the ways of God, and will, even as young plants, thrive and flourish in the soft-flowing waters that are the counsels and admonitions of the Blessed Beauty.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, SWAB, p. 126

89.

If this Society (Persian-American Educational Society) acts with independence and exerts itself in bringing about relations between the East and the West, it will become the foundation of the oneness of the world of humanity. Firmness is essential, for if small affairs can not be

accomplished without firmness and steadfastness, how much more are these qualities needed for the undertaking of great matters! The friends of God must encourage each other to be firm and steadfast, to reason and consult with each other so that day by day this Society will progress.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Star of the West*, Vol. 1, No. 5, p. 4 (June 1910)

90.

Few will fail to recognize that the Spirit breathed by Bahá’u’lláh upon the world, and which is manifesting itself with varying degrees of intensity through the efforts consciously displayed by His avowed supporters and indirectly through certain humanitarian organizations, can never permeate and exercise an abiding influence upon mankind unless and until it incarnates itself in a visible Order, which would bear His name, wholly identify itself with His principles, and function in conformity with His laws...

For Bahá’u’lláh... has... laid down a set of Laws, established definite institutions, and provided for the essentials of a Divine Economy. These are destined to be a pattern for future society, a supreme instrument for the establishment of the Most Great Peace, and the one agency for the unification of the world, and the proclamation of the reign of righteousness and justice upon the earth.

Shoghi Effendi, *WOB*, p. 19

91.

Dear friends! Feeble though our Faith may now appear in the eyes of men, who either denounce it as an offshoot of Islám, or contemptuously ignore it as one more of those obscure sects that abound in the West, this priceless gem of Divine Revelation, now still in its embryonic state, shall evolve within the shell of His law, and shall forge ahead, undivided and unimpaired, till it embraces the whole of mankind. Only those who have already recognized the supreme station of Bahá’u’lláh, only those whose hearts have been touched by His love, and have become familiar with the potency of His spirit, can adequately appreciate the value of this Divine Economy— His inestimable gift to mankind.

Shoghi Effendi, *WOB*, p. 23-24

92.

The onrushing forces so miraculously released through the agency of two independent and swiftly successive Manifestations are now under our very eyes and through the care of the chosen stewards of a far-flung Faith being gradually mustered and disciplined. They are slowly crystallizing into institutions that will come to be regarded as the hall-mark and glory of the age we are called upon to establish and by our deeds immortalize. For upon our present-day efforts, and above all upon the extent to which we strive to remodel our lives after the pattern of sublime heroism associated with those gone before us, must depend the efficacy of the instruments we now fashion— instruments that must erect the structure of that blissful Commonwealth which must signalize the Golden Age of our Faith.

Shoghi Effendi, *WOB*, p. 98

93.

Conscious of their high calling, confident in the society-building power which their Faith possesses, they press forward, undeterred and undismayed, in their efforts to fashion and perfect the necessary instruments wherein the embryonic World Order of Bahá'u'lláh can mature and develop. It is this building process, slow and unobtrusive, to which the life of the world-wide Bahá'í Community is wholly consecrated, that constitutes the one hope of a stricken society. For this process is actuated by the generating influence of God's changeless Purpose, and is evolving within the framework of the Administrative Order of His Faith.

Shoghi Effendi, WOB, p.195

94.

The matter of Teaching, its direction, its ways and means, its extension, its consolidation, essential as they are to the interests of the Cause, constitute by no means the only issue which should receive the full attention of these Assemblies. A careful study of Bahá'u'lláh's and 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Tablets will reveal that other duties, no less vital to the interests of the Cause, devolve upon the elected representatives of the friends in every locality.

It is incumbent upon them to be vigilant and cautious, discreet and watchful, and protect at all times the Temple of the Cause from the dart of the mischief-maker and the onslaught of the enemy.

They must endeavor to promote amity and concord amongst the friends, efface every lingering trace of distrust, coolness and estrangement from every heart, and secure in its stead an active and whole-hearted co-operation for the service of the Cause.

They must do their utmost to extend at all times the helping hand to the poor, the sick, the disabled, the orphan, the widow, irrespective of color, caste and creed.

They must promote by every means in their power the material as well as the spiritual enlightenment of youth, the means for the education of children, institute, whenever possible, Bahá'í educational institutions, organize and supervise their work and provide the best means for their progress and development... They must undertake the arrangement of the regular meetings of the friends, the feasts and the anniversaries, as well as the special gatherings designed to serve and promote the social, intellectual, and spiritual interests of their fellow-men.

Shoghi Effendi, BA, p. 37-38

95.

And as the progress and execution of spiritual activities is dependent and conditioned upon material means, it is of absolute necessity that immediately after the establishment of local as well as national Spiritual Assemblies, a Bahá'í Fund be established, to be placed under the exclusive control of the Spiritual Assembly. All donations and contributions should be offered to the Treasurer of the Assembly, for the express purpose of promoting the interests of the Cause, throughout that locality or country. It is the sacred obligation of every conscientious and faithful servant of Bahá'u'lláh, who desires to see His Cause advance, to contribute freely and generously for the increase of that Fund. The members of the Spiritual Assembly will at their own discretion expend it to promote the Teaching Campaign, to help the needy, to establish educational Bahá'í institutions, to extend in every way possible their sphere of service.

Shoghi Effendi, BA, pp. 41-42

96.

That I feel is chiefly the reason why such stress has been laid in the past upon the necessity for consultation on the part of individual believers with their elected national representatives in the matter of initiating plans of action above and beyond the plans which the deliberations of the National Spiritual Assembly have already evolved...Nothing short of the spirit of earnest and sustained consultation with those whom we have prayerfully and on our own accord placed in the forefront of those who are the custodians of the priceless heritage bequeathed by Bahá'u'lláh nothing less than persistent and strenuous warfare against our own instincts and natural inclinations, and heroic self-sacrifice in subordinating our own likings to the imperative requirements of the Cause of God, can insure our undivided loyalty to so sacred a principle— a principle that will for all time safeguard our beloved Cause from the allurements and the trivialities of the world without, and of the pitfalls of the self within.

Shoghi Effendi, BA, 140-141

97.

Among the sacred obligations devolving upon the Spiritual Assemblies is the promotion of learning, the establishing of schools and creation of the necessary academic equipment and facilities for every boy and girl.

Every child without exception must from his earliest years make a thorough study of the art of reading and writing, and according to his own tastes and inclinations and the degree of his capacity and powers, devote extreme diligence to the acquisition of learning, beneficial arts and skills, various languages, speech and contemporary technology.

To assist the children of the poor in the attainment of these accomplishments, and particularly in learning the basic subjects, is incumbent upon the members of the Spiritual Assemblies, and is accounted as one of the obligations laid upon the conscience of the trustees of God in every land.

“He that bringeth up his son or the son of another, it is as though he hath brought up a son of Mine; upon him rest My Glory, My loving-kindness, My Mercy, that have compassed the world.”

From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian, CBE, p. 58

98.

Administrative efficiency and order should always be accompanied by an equal degree of love, of devotion and of spiritual development. Both of them are essential and to attempt to dissociate one from the other is to deaden the body of the Cause. In these days, when the Faith is still in its infancy, great care must be taken lest mere administrative routine stifles the spirit which must feed the body of the Administration itself. That spirit is its propelling force and the motivating power of its very life.

But as already emphasized, both the spirit and the form are essential to the safe and speedy development of the Administration. To maintain full balance between them is the main and unique responsibility of the administrators of the Cause.

From a letter dated 10 December 1933 written on behalf of the Guardian to a National Spiritual Assembly

99.

The friends must never mistake the Bahá'í administration for an end in itself. It is merely the instrument of the spirit of the Faith. This Cause is a Cause which God has revealed to humanity as a whole. It is designed to benefit the entire human race, and the only way it can do this is to reform the community life of mankind, as well as seeking to regenerate the individual. The Bahá'í administration is only the first shaping of what in future will come to be the social life and laws of community living. As yet the believers are only first beginning to grasp and practice it properly. So we must have patience if at times it seems a little self conscious and rigid in its workings. It is because we are learning something very difficult but very wonderful— how to live together as a community of Bahá'ís, according to the glorious teachings.

From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian, CLSA, p. 28-29

100.

Just as the individual believers are bound to support and sustain their spiritual assembly, for the preservation of the unity of the Faith and the strengthening of its as yet embryonic World Order, so must the local assemblies obey and sustain their national representatives. The closer the co-operation between the local and national assemblies, the greater will be the power and radiance which can and must stream forth from these institutions to the suffering ranks of humanity.

From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian, CLSA, p. 27-28

101.

He hopes you will devote as much of your spare time as possible to the work of the Cause, especially in impressing upon the believers the importance of the Administration and helping them to really understand its purpose and all it can achieve once they get it to function properly. In other words it is a perfect form which must be animated by the spirit of the Cause. It is the ideal instrument to make spiritual laws function properly in the material affairs of this world.

From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer, 16 June 1945

102.

Among the more salient objectives to be attained by the Local Spiritual Assembly in its process of development to full maturity are to act as a loving shepherd to the Bahá'í flock, promote unity and concord among the friends, direct the teaching work, protect the Cause of God, arrange for Feasts, Anniversaries and regular meetings of the community, familiarize the Bahá'ís with its plans, invite the community to offer its recommendations, promote the welfare of youth and children, and participate, as circumstances permit, in humanitarian activities. In its relationship to the individual believer, the Assembly should continuously invite and encourage him to study the Faith, to deliver its glorious message, to live in accordance with its teachings, to contribute freely and regularly to the Fund, to participate in community activities, and to seek refuge in the Assembly for advice and help, when needed.

Universal House of Justice, from a letter dated 30 July 1972 to a National Spiritual Assembly

103.

The divinely ordained institution of the Local Spiritual Assembly operates at the first levels of human society and is the basic administrative unit of Bahá'u'lláh's World Order. It is concerned with individuals and families whom it must constantly encourage to unite in a distinctive Bahá'í society, vitalized and guarded by the laws, ordinances and principles of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation. It protects the Cause of God; it acts as the loving shepherd of the Bahá'í flock.

Strengthening and development of Local Spiritual Assemblies is a vital objective... Success in this one goal will greatly enrich the quality of Bahá'í life, will heighten the capacity of the Faith to deal with entry by troops which is even now taking place and, above all, will demonstrate the solidarity and ever-growing distinctiveness of the Bahá'í community, thereby attracting more and more thoughtful souls to the Faith and offering a refuge to the leaderless and hapless millions of the spiritually bankrupt, moribund present order...

Such a firmly-founded, busy and happy community life as is envisioned when Local Spiritual Assemblies are truly effective, will provide a firm home foundation from which the friends may derive courage and strength and loving support in bearing the Divine message to their fellow-men and conforming their lives to its benevolent rule.

Universal House of Justice, Letter to the Bahá'ís of the World, dated Naw-Rúz 1974

104.

We are confident that the institution of the Boards of Counselors will lend its vital support and, through the Counselors' own contacts with the friends, through their auxiliary Boards and their assistants, will nourish the roots of each local community, enrich and cultivate the soil of knowledge of the teachings and irrigate it with the living waters of love for Bahá'u'lláh, Thus will the saplings grow into mighty trees, and the trees bear their golden fruit.

Universal House of Justice, From a letter dated 25 May 1975 to all National Spiritual Assemblies

105.

There are, at the present time, many villages in India, the Philippines, Africa, Latin America, etc., where the Bahá'ís form a majority or even the entire population of the village. One of the goals of the Five year Plan, as you will recall, is to develop the characteristics of Bahá'í community life, and it is, above all, to such villages that the goal is directed. The Local Spiritual Assemblies of such villages must gradually widen the scope of their activities, not only to develop every aspect of the spiritual life of the believers within their jurisdiction, but also, through Bahá'í consultation, and through such Bahá'í principles as harmony between science and religion, the importance of education, and work as a form of worship, to promote the standards of agriculture and other skills in the life of the people. For this they will need the assistance of Bahá'í experts from other lands. This is a major undertaking, and is being started gradually wherever and whenever possible.

From a letter dated 27 July 1976 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer

106.

At the present time in most countries, compulsory education and state school systems are widespread and meet the general need for material education, so the resources of the Faith in that field have to be concentrated on the spiritual and moral education of our children and on providing primary and tutorial schools in mass-teaching areas where illiteracy is still the rule...

The proper education of children is of vital importance to the progress of mankind, and the heart and essential foundation of all education is spiritual and moral training...

The Universal House of Justice, Messages 1963 to 1986, p. 338

107.

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 vigour 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...

Universal House of Justice, Letter to the Bahá'ís of the World, Naw-Rúz 1979

108.

Suggestions for projects for development are welcome from whatever source they spring but ideally they should emanate from the local communities and receive support of the Local and National Assemblies; it should not be necessary to send people to countries to solicit projects. However, if a community has the desire to plan a special project, it is free to call upon people with experience to assist in the planning, design and implementation of the scheme.

Universal House of Justice, to the International Teaching Center, 1 November 1983

109.

The message of the House of Justice dated 20 October 1983 has clearly set out the concepts, defined the objectives and outlined the guiding principles for the selection and implementation of Bahá'í development projects, programs or activities. The vast majority of Bahá'í projects will be primarily generated at the grass roots, and, initially as required, will receive help from Bahá'í sources, in terms of finances and manpower. The projects will, as you have surmised, be non-profit making, concerned mainly with activities closely related to education, health and hygiene, agriculture and simple community development activities. It is hoped that all these types of projects will reflect the strength of the spiritual principles enshrined in the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh.

It is important that our undertakings be modest in their scope at the present time. Then, as we gain in confidence and experience and as our resources increase, our work will encompass expanded objectives, and the friends will explore new areas of social and economic activity.

From a letter dated 22 December 1983 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an

individual believer

110.

The suggestions (concerning possible development projects) are now referred to you so that you may initiate consultation at the grass roots level of the local Bahá'í communities, involving Local Spiritual Assemblies of that area. In addition to projecting Counsellor ...'s broad ideas, you should seek the suggestions of the believers regarding local needs and initiatives. Your Assembly is also asked to consider the practicability of such projects and conduct a survey of the localities, indicating which of these would be able to host the projects. Among the criteria of capacity would be the following:

1. Strength of the community and its ability to benefit from projects spiritually as well as materially, including the beneficial effects of collective action upon the community and its participants.
2. Willingness of the local believers to participate, collaborate and support the projects.
3. Degree and dimension of the local contributions to the projects in terms of manpower (labor), materials and resources.
4. Presence of able people to manage the human resources and direct the energies of the friends, including strong liaison between volunteers (international and national) and local believers.

From a letter dated 9 November 1983 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly

111.

There are two principles which the House of Justice feels are fundamental to the generality of such projects of social and economic development, although, of course, there will be exceptions. The first is that they must be built on a substructure of existing, sufficiently strong local Bahá'í communities. The second is that the long-term conduct of the project should aim at self-sufficiency and not be dependent upon continuing financial support from outside.

The first principle implies that the projects of social and economic development now to be undertaken are a natural stage of the growth of the Bahá'í community and are needed by the community itself although they will, of course, benefit a much wider segment of society...

The second principle must take into account that any project started by the Cause should be designed to grow soundly and steadily, and not to collapse from attrition. In other words, external assistance and funds, Bahá'í and non-Bahá'í, may be used for capital acquisitions, to make surveys, to initiate activities, to bring in expertise, but the aim should be for each project to be able to continue and to develop on the strength of local Bahá'í labor, funds and enthusiasm even if all external aid should be cut off.

From a letter dated 8 May 1984, written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly

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Bahá'í Social And Economic Development: Prospects for the Future

16 September 1993

**A statement approved by the Universal House of Justice
for use in orienting and guiding the work of
Bahá'í social and economic development throughout the world**

The Direction of Bahá'í SED

1.

In its message of 20 October 1983 to the Bahá'í world, the Universal House of Justice called for the incorporation of social and economic development processes into the regular pursuits of the community of the Greatest Name. During the past ten years, many communities have responded to this call and a considerable number of projects— mostly in education but also several in health, agriculture and community development— are now being actively pursued. A few of these projects have achieved the stature of development organizations with reasonably complex programmatic structures and significant spheres of influence. Beyond the successes of this collection of projects and organizations, however, the most valuable outcome of the devoted efforts of the believers in this field has been the accumulated knowledge on how to operationalize a distinctively Bahá'í approach to social and economic development. The October 1983 message set out some of the most noteworthy elements of this approach, among which are the following:

2.

- The oneness of mankind, which is at once the operating principle and ultimate goal of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation, implies the achievement of a dynamic coherence between the spiritual and practical requirements of life on earth.

3.

- The challenge of engaging in social and economic development evokes the resourcefulness, flexibility and cohesiveness of the many communities composing the Bahá'í world.

4.

- The first steps to be taken must necessarily begin in the Bahá'í community itself, with the friends endeavoring, through their application of spiritual principles, their rectitude of conduct, and the practice of the art of consultation, to uplift themselves and thus become self-sufficient and self-reliant.

5.

- Progress in the development field will depend largely on natural stirrings at the grass roots, and should receive its driving force from those sources rather than from an imposition of plans and programs from the top.

6.

- All, irrespective of circumstances or resources, are endowed with the capacity to respond in some measure to this challenge, for all can participate in the joint enterprise of applying more systematically the principles of the Faith to raising the quality of human life.

7.

- Activities in the development field should be viewed as a reinforcement of the teaching work, as a greater manifestation of faith in action.

8.

- The wholehearted involvement of the friends in these activities will ensure a deeper consolidation of the community at all levels.

9.

- The key to success is unity in spirit and in action.

10.

The experience gained during the past ten years is now sufficiently broad to allow the Bahá'í community to systematically expand the number and range of its social and economic development activities in the years to come. In this respect, a number of ideas merit careful consideration.

Degrees of complexity

11.

In general, social and economic development projects at the grass roots best begin with a relatively simple set of actions. The friends should be allowed to gain experience from, and increase the range of, their activities naturally, without undue pressure from opinions that are often based solely on theoretical considerations. A tutorial school, for example, can in principle become a center for activities such as health education, family counseling and reforestation, but in most cases, it is advisable for it to start simply as a school focusing all its resources on the children it proposes to serve. Insistence on initial simplicity of action at the local level does not, of course, contradict the inherent complexity of the development process itself. In fact, to raise local action to a reasonable level of effectiveness it is necessary to gradually develop corresponding structures in the micro-region, the region, and the nation itself capable of dealing with increasing degrees of theoretical and administrative complexity. Otherwise social and economic development runs the danger of being reduced to a set of laudable activities lacking the coherence and integration which are indispensable for consistent progress.

Capacity building

12.

It has often been said that development is not a product to be delivered by the “developed” to the “underdeveloped”. Rather, it is a process the main protagonists of which have to be the people themselves. The greatest concern of Bahá’í projects has to be the development of the friends’ capacity to make decisions about their spiritual and material progress and then to implement them. In an ideal project, while concrete action is directed towards visible improvement of some aspect of life, success is measured by the impact these actions have on the capacity of the community and its institutions to address development issues at increasingly higher levels of complexity and effectiveness.

13.

In this context, the relationship between development and delivery of services needs to be examined. For Bahá’ís, of course, service is a basic principle of human existence; every act, every personal or community project, is to be carried out in the spirit of service. It is impossible to imagine a Bahá’í social and economic development project that does not operate on the principle of service. Nonetheless, the delivery of services should not be viewed as the main purpose of Bahá’í development undertakings. Approaches to development centered on the donation of goods and services, so characteristic of traditional religious charity and the programs of the welfare state, are known to have debilitating effects and often lead to paralysis. In the villages of the world, the Bahá’í community should become the spearhead of spiritual, social and economic transformation. A village does not develop merely because it receives simple services in primary health and sanitation, in primary education or in agricultural extension structured around credit and technological packages.

Learning

14.

Central to the capacity of a Bahá’í community to lead a process of transformation is the ability of its members and institutions to apply the Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh to various aspects of life and thereby establish consistent patterns of change. In fact, learning to apply the Teachings to achieve progress could be taken as the very definition of Bahá’í social and economic development. Such learning has to occur locally, regionally, nationally and internationally and become the axis around which our development efforts are organized at all levels.

15.

Learning in this sense is not limited to study and evaluation. It comes about in combination with action. The believers must regularly engage in consultation, action, reflection— all in the light of the guidance inherent in the Teachings of the Faith. Such a learning process can occur in a very simple manner at the village and local level, but with greater sophistication by national agencies and institutions. At the international level, it calls for a higher degree of conceptualization, one that takes account of the broader processes of global transformation as described in the Writings and serves to adjust the overall direction of development activities in each country accordingly.

Development of human resources

16.

Learning and the building of capacity are closely linked to the development of human resources. That development ideas and projects are not imposed from above, and that institutions are to respond to aspirations and initiatives at the grass roots, are established characteristics of Bahá’í development. However, the vigilant application of these principles does not imply that no initiative can be taken from the top. Proven and well-conceived programs and approaches to

development can be promoted nationally or internationally, primarily through training. Training methods would, of course, have to foster participation and be carried out with a humble attitude towards learning. Otherwise, training tends to produce a cadre of individuals who are slaves to a given way of doing things.

17.

Moreover, the need for development of human resources is not limited to the direct participants in the actual projects. Thousands of Bahá'í youth in colleges and universities throughout the world, as well as an increasing number of professionals working in fields related to social and economic development, should be encouraged to participate in a worldwide learning process designed to grow in size and range. Indeed, Bahá'í development projects may be seen as sites where training is provided for an increasing number of individuals from both materially poor and wealthy nations and from various sectors of society.

Influencing society

18.

Irrespective of whether or not an individual who has benefited from a period of collaboration with a development project finally becomes directly involved in such projects, the ability to apply the Teachings of Bahá'ú'lláh to the affairs of society—learned in action—constitutes a valuable asset for his or her future efforts to serve and influence society. Development projects in themselves offer great opportunities to the friends to become involved in the life of society in ways that far transcend efforts to improve the lot of a few people. Openness to collaboration with people of capacity and leaders of thought concerned with issues of progress, and willingness and ability to invite them to participate in applying the Teachings to specific problems, have to be created at all levels, if we are to fully exploit this dimension of our development endeavors.

Integration

19.

Certain lessons that have been learned in the larger society need to be incorporated into Bahá'í thinking about social and economic development. Paramount among these is the inescapable need for integration. Experience has shown that fragmented activities in various fields such as health, education, agriculture, or industrial development do not lead to sustainable development. The knowledge that should be brought to bear on development problems of the communities of the world does not fit in a single discipline. Effective development unequivocally calls for coordinated interdisciplinary and multi-sectorial action.

20.

The idea of integral development may seem to contradict the principle enunciated above that grass roots action must begin simply and in a way that can be managed by the community itself. However, this apparent contradiction disappears if local action is seen as a means for building capacity. In this case it does not matter with which activity the development of a community actually begins; complexity will arise naturally in an organic way. What is to be avoided is the artificial fragmentation created by separate programs set in motion in a given population by professionals in specific disciplines, each ignoring the knowledge and experience of other groups, each competing for resources and for the constant attention of the people they are to serve.

21.

For Bahá'í programs integration poses an additional challenge. Within the Bahá'í framework, material progress cannot be separated from spiritual development. Social and economic

development endeavors have to be carried out in the more general context of the expansion and consolidation of the Faith. When this does not occur, when the various institutions that serve the local community are not well aware of each others' efforts and do not consult on the nature and the range of their activities, development projects become difficult to manage. Divorced from the basic processes of the expansion and consolidation of the Faith, Bahá'í social and economic development cannot prosper and is prone to failure.

22.

In our zeal to pursue social and economic development in the context of expansion and consolidation we should avoid a pitfall that leads to the dissipation of energy and confusion: impressed by the interconnectedness of all the factors that lead to community development, one may be tempted to define social and economic development as a synonym for the development of the Bahá'í community. According to such a definition, all efforts to develop the community, including the establishment of the Nineteen Day Feast, the holding of classes for the spiritual education of children, and the strengthening of Local and National Assemblies and their agencies, would have to be regarded as social and economic development projects. Such a broad definition overlooks the fact that the growth of the Bahá'í community is the result of a number of interacting processes, each directed by various institutions of the Administrative Order and their agencies in collaboration with one another. Social and economic development is only one component and must play a particular role in the growth process.

The Office of Social And Economic Development

23.

The observations made in the previous section suggest the gradual establishment in each national community of channels through which institutions, agencies and organizations can serve the needs of the friends in their efforts to apply the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh to achieve material progress for themselves and their people. What flows through these channels is primarily learning, although the extending of financial support and the offering of guidance to solve problems that arise naturally through community action are also important.

24.

The Office of Social and Economic Development (OSED) in Haifa assists the Universal House of Justice in the promotion and coordination of Bahá'í social and economic development worldwide. The primary purpose of OSED is to facilitate learning about development by fostering and supporting action, reflection on action, study, consultation, the gathering and systematization of experience, conceptualization, and training— all carried out in the light of the Teachings of the Faith. Ensuring that material resources become increasingly available to Bahá'í development efforts, coordinating the international flow of such resources and administering some of the funds intended for projects are also important functions of OSED.

25.

Individuals and institutions frequently seek advice from OSED on how to design, implement and promote social and economic development projects. Based on the knowledge generated through the analysis of substantive reports and the documentation of systematic advances in the Bahá'í experience of development, OSED is able to offer these individuals and institutions guidance and share with them the results of the learning occurring in the Bahá'í community.

26.

As projects grow in size and complexity, whether they are under the direct aegis of National Spiritual Assemblies or administered by Bahá'í-inspired organizations enjoying the guidance and support of the institutions of the Faith, OSED's relationship with them often becomes more

involved and demanding. In order to interact effectively with major Bahá'í programs and organizations, OSED invites individuals, experienced in the field of development, to collaborate with it, each in promoting the progress of one particular organization. In his or her role as a collaborator, such an individual assumes a number of responsibilities on behalf of OSED. Chief among these is to help the organization establish a clear vision of itself, its role and its purpose, a vision which will be periodically reexamined, modified and restated in keeping with the progress of the Faith in the region. According to this evolving vision, well-defined strategies are to be devised and regularly adjusted. On the basis of these strategies, projects are created along diverse lines of action and appropriate proposals are developed and properly presented to various agencies, both within and outside the country, for financing or other assistance. The designated collaborator also assists in developing a flexible organizational structure, one free of contradictions, with clear channels for decision-making, appropriate instruments for implementation, and adequate methods for evaluation. All of these tasks are, of course, to be carried out under the guidance of the National Spiritual Assembly and in consultation with the Counsellors, whose vital roles in this respect have been set forth in the 20 October 1983 message from the Universal House of Justice.

27.

It is hoped that by facilitating direct contact among its collaborators, OSED will be able to develop an informal network through which experiences can be shared and learning can occur in a natural way. The existence of such a network of individuals, a number of whom will have their own contacts with funding sources, will significantly broaden the basis for the interaction of the Bahá'í community with donor agencies. These individuals will also help put university students and professionals interested in social and economic development in contact with Bahá'í programs so that, over time, an increasing number of these programs and organizations offer training through internships of various durations.

28.

In addition to offering collaborative support to major programs and organizations, it is expected that OSED will itself promote, on an international scale, certain approaches and methodologies to development that have proven to be effective. For example, during the past few years a highly effective approach to literacy has emerged. A worldwide campaign is envisioned in which, in country after country, a group of selected individuals are familiarized with the underlying concepts of the approach and are asked to adapt its methods and prepare materials for use in their own country. Subsequently, these same individuals can train others to act as facilitators of literacy classes, so that classes can be established in hundreds of localities throughout the country. Likewise, in primary health care, excellent experience has been gained in recent years. This experience can now be analyzed, the appropriate methods and materials can be defined, and again, in country after country, the training of health workers can be vigorously pursued.

Major Areas of Action

29.

The major areas of action OSED is to pursue in the coming years include education, literacy, primary health care, and sustainable rural development. As mentioned above, literacy and primary health care are to be addressed by focusing on regional training campaigns. As for integral rural development, this is a field in which systematic Bahá'í experience is scarce. However, there is a great deal of valuable experience outside the Faith, and with the help of certain Bahá'í individuals who are known and accepted in the field, it is possible to gather the necessary knowledge, analyze it and make a beginning in this essential area of development.

What is called for is not a complex development scheme but a path of action of increasing complexity that can lead to the establishment of programs of integral, sustainable development at the level of the micro-region.

30.

There can be no doubt that education will continue to be the greatest concern of Bahá'í social and economic development endeavors throughout the world in the foreseeable future. Three interrelated areas— Bahá'í schools, special programs for junior youth and moral education— merit special attention.

31.

Experience has shown that there are at least three challenges Bahá'í schools must face in various stages of their development. The first has to do with the functioning of the school— the organization of its physical space, the selection of an acceptable program, and the erection of a working academic and administrative structure. This has proven to be a formidable task for most schools and has required an inordinate amount of time and energy. With the experience gained over the past decade, however, it is now possible to develop a set of guidelines to help Bahá'í schools, whether privately owned or belonging to the institutions, to meet this challenge with greater ease.

32.

A second challenge is related to the process by which the Bahá'í character of the school becomes manifest. This is usually addressed in terms of the atmosphere of the school, relationships among people and extra-curricular activities. An hour or two of courses, vaguely described as moral education, are also offered at this stage. It is interesting to note that even with small changes in a few components of the educational process, Bahá'í schools become known for their standards of excellence and enjoy considerable esteem in the communities within which they operate.

33.

A third challenge, scarcely addressed until now, concerns the development of Bahá'í-inspired curricula. The approach to such a development has to be uniquely suited to the conditions and opportunities of the worldwide Bahá'í community. It is unreasonable to expect that Bahá'í education will be invented by a group of individuals immersed in academia, no matter how profound their knowledge of the Faith and of education. The gradual development of contents and methods of Bahá'í education will most probably occur as the result of the diverse activities of an increasing number of educators working in varied cultural and ecological settings throughout the world. Systematic research and high quality academic study are called for, not as isolated activities, but as components, albeit important ones, of a process in which the design of curricula is closely connected with educational practice and systematization of educational experience. The role of OSED in fostering such a process is crucial. Any effort to ignore it by introducing, for example, the concept of a universal core curriculum at too early a stage would be counterproductive.

34.

Significant as Bahá'í schools are, to concentrate all our energies on their development does not constitute a sound strategy. As the educational systems of the world collapse, the demands of educational establishments— beginning with villages, towns, and municipalities and soon reaching entire countries— for new content and for teacher training will rise dramatically. With the same effort that is spent to build and maintain one Bahá'í school, hundreds of teachers belonging to official systems can be trained how to include in their daily activities several educational elements inspired by the Faith. In two areas— namely, moral education and the preparation of youth and junior youth for future life— the opportunities for Bahá'í influence are almost unlimited.



The Evolution of Institutional Capacity for Social and Economic Development

Prepared by
the Office of Social and Economic Development
28 August 1994

1. Bahá'í social and economic development focuses on increasing the capacity of the friends to make decisions about the spiritual and material progress of their communities and then implement them. While such development activities provide services that lead to a visible improvement in some aspect of life, their ultimate success is measured by the degree to which they enhance the ability to address issues of development at increasingly higher levels of complexity and effectiveness. This applies not only to individuals and communities but also to institutions. As development efforts grow, organizational structures should evolve to meet new challenges and opportunities.
2. The role of Bahá'í institutions in this process of social and economic development begins at its earliest stages. Local projects are initiated and administered directly by Local Spiritual Assemblies. A National Spiritual Assembly may appoint a national social and economic development committee, which, in the context of its work to stimulate grassroots efforts, also initiates a few projects. An education committee may start a tutorial school, or an institute process may expand by including training sessions in agriculture or health. In each of these cases, the institution or agency involved gains experience and provides guidance necessary to ensure the project's success. This is the first level of institutional support for social and economic development.
3. Over time projects become more complex. As development efforts evolve, local and national communities need to increase their institutional capacity to deal with them. In examining Bahá'í social and economic development projects around the world, the Office of Social and Economic Development has identified two types of organizational arrangements which are noteworthy. Both enhance institutional capacity and either increase the maturity of existing agencies or encourage the establishment of new ones capable of guiding development processes.
4. The first organizational pattern has emerged from the evolution of Bahá'í institutes for the development of human resources, on the one hand, and of Bahá'í schools for the formal education of children, on the other. Initially, in an effort to meet the demands of expansion and consolidation, national communities conduct deepening classes or organize weekend "institutes" for new believers. From among these somewhat random activities there emerge some with a more systematic form as regular training sessions are scheduled and series of courses on specific topics are developed. Eventually, one or more of these may lead to the creation of a permanent institute

that serves either the entire country or one of its regions in the development of human resources. At this level of operation, the programs of the institute include a number of courses that build on one another to help enrich the spiritual life of the participants and enable them to perform specific acts of service such as engaging in teaching activities, giving deepening courses, teaching children's classes, and activating Bahá'í community life. Acts of service related to social and economic development, such as literacy, health and agriculture, may also be included. Training is not only provided at a central location, but teachers associated with the institute also travel to localities throughout the region or country and organize appropriate training activities.

5.

In the early stage of its development, the permanent institute is often managed by a committee of the National Spiritual Assembly. However, as institute activities and programs become more complex, a National Spiritual Assembly may find it useful to give its institute an administrative structure that enjoys more continuity and autonomy by creating a board of directors to be in charge of it. The National Assembly formulates the vision, articulates the needs, establishes general parameters of action, and then allows the board to have a degree of independence to plan and to see that the work of the institute is carried out. The National Assembly provides support; the institute keeps the Assembly regularly informed of its activities. In this way, the Assembly and its committees do not become overburdened with the planning and monitoring of the institute's programs.

6.

This structure of the permanent institute increases capacity to engage in social and economic development projects of reasonable size and complexity. The heart of the institute's programs continues to be the development of human resources. Yet in order for human resource development not to be isolated from the practice of community development, the institute itself may be required to become involved in the management of actual projects. For the institute to have relevance to the Bahá'í community, it must, in all cases, carry out its projects in collaboration with the responsible administrative institutions.

7.

The same organizational arrangement has emerged in national communities when a school for the formal education of children is established. In order to move beyond rudimentary forms of schools, institutional capacity is needed to deal with the development of specific curricula, the acquisition and maintenance of adequate facilities, the management of qualified staff, and the administration of educational processes. Again, the National Assembly may appoint a board to oversee the affairs of the school with a reasonable degree of independence.

8.

A second type of organizational arrangement emerging for the enhancement of institutional capacity relates to the creation of Bahá'í-inspired agencies by groups of believers who share a common vision of service. Such an agency can be established as a non-governmental, non-profit organization for social and economic development. Regarding initiatives of this kind, a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice states:

9.

As a national community grows, the activities undertaken by its members also increase in number and diversity. Some of these activities will be initiated and administered by the Bahá'í institutions. Others will fall in the realm of private initiative. When an initiative is in the form of a private business venture undertaken by an individual or a group, the institutions of the Faith have little reason to interfere with its daily affairs. In general, only if difficulties arise among the friends involved in such an enterprise, if their activities could damage the good name of the Faith, or if they misrepresent their relationship to the Faith, would a Local or National Spiritual Assembly intervene. Bahá'í institutions should, of course, welcome any effort by such private

ventures to apply the Teachings to their operations and to use their position in society to further the interests of the Faith. Spiritual Assemblies would do well to offer them guidance as requested or as circumstances require, and to help them develop their potential for the advancement of the Cause....

10.

The private initiatives of believers need not, however, be limited to business ventures. The laws of most societies allow for the establishment of non-profit organizations which, while private, are subject to special regulations and enjoy certain privileges. Customarily a board of trustees is responsible for all the affairs of such an organization and must ensure that its income is spent for the purpose stipulated in its by-laws. This board also oversees the functioning of the projects of the organization and the work of those who are in charge of them. An increasing number of believers around the world are taking advantage of this possibility and creating organizations dedicated to the application of Bahá'u'lláh's Teachings to the analysis and resolution of important social and economic issues. The House of Justice looks with keen interest on this growing phenomenon in the Bahá'í world. It only cautions the friends that in establishing such organizations they should exercise care not to become a burden on the institutions or unduly divert the contributions of the believers from the essential and primary tasks of supporting the Funds of the Faith and the activities of the institutions. It also expects them to conduct their affairs according to Bahá'í moral and ethical principles.

11.

A question that often arises in relation to private organizations dedicated to social and economic development is whether they are “Bahá'í” or not. Such a question cannot be answered by a simple “yes” or “no”. Clearly, the fact that they have their own management structures puts them in a different category from projects and organizations administered by Bahá'í institutions. In that sense they are not “Bahá'í” enterprises. In another sense, to the extent that they are owned and directed by Bahá'ís and strive to apply the Teachings and serve the purposes of the Cause, they may indeed be regarded as “Bahá'í”. It is important to avoid the impression that participating in the projects of these organizations does not constitute legitimate service to the Cause. Otherwise sincere and devoted believers will be discouraged from engaging in activities that are “Bahá'í” in nature.

12.

In creating agencies dedicated to social and economic development administered independently as Bahá'í-inspired organizations, the friends need to be concerned with the preparation of at least two types of documents.

13.

One document, the by-laws, establishes the legal status of the organization. While suited to the specific legal requirements of a country, by-laws generally contain a statement of basic principles, the purpose or aims of the organization, the general methods by which the organization will accomplish its purpose, and the means to perpetuate the governing body. Since by-laws are basically created to achieve legal recognition, they may or may not directly associate the organization with the Bahá'í Faith and its Teachings, depending on existing circumstances.

14.

In the case of organizations under the aegis of a National Spiritual Assembly, if it is found necessary for them to have a separate legal status, a similar document is needed. In these cases, it would be desirable for an agreement to be made between the National Assembly and the board stating that, while having the legal right to replace its own members according to its by-laws, the board will present its candidates to the Assembly for approval before doing so.

15.

The second document with which the friends need to be concerned in both cases is a statement of

purpose and philosophy, one that describes the principles and mission of the organization. Such a document needs to be written in the early stages of an organization's establishment. The statement of purpose and philosophy, which is specifically for sharing with the public or with other institutions, makes explicit references to the Bahá'í principles on which the organization is founded. Examples of such documents are attached, representing the Badí' Foundation from Macau, Health for Humanity from the United States, and the Ruhi Institute from Colombia.

The Badí' Foundation

General Purpose

16.

Humanity is in a state of ferment as it advances towards a new and higher order of social evolution in a rapidly uniting world. In order to attain the goal of a new social order which guarantees justice and well-being for all, it will be necessary to develop new institutions, procedures, and relationships, and to acquire new concepts and attitudes. The Badí' Foundation has been created to contribute, however modestly, to this evolution. It hopes to increase awareness of processes of change, to discover effective and appropriate strategies that will facilitate transition to a new society, and to participate in activities which promote the well-being of peoples. Special emphasis is being placed on service to the Chinese people.

Conceptual Framework

17.

The founders of the Badí' Foundation have been inspired by their conviction that the principles, concepts, and counsels contained in the writings of the Bahá'í Faith provide humanity with an invaluable source of wisdom in its search for a true path of development. Accordingly, they have adopted a set of basic premises which may be summarized as follows.

18.

The purpose of development is the well-being of the people. The concept of well-being is understood in its broadest sense to refer to material, intellectual, social, and spiritual fulfillment. It is clear that man, while possessing certain characteristics in common with animals, also has a higher, or spiritual, nature. This higher nature encompasses such human qualities as the capacity for selflessness, compassion, sacrifice, dedication, loyalty, and service to others. It distinguishes man from animals, and it must be fully developed in order for man to dominate and control his lower tendencies toward self-centeredness, individualism, greed, overindulgence, violence, and falsity. Man's true wealth resides in those qualities, capabilities, and actions that emanate from his spiritual nature and that represent the sources of social and cultural progress.

19.

It is clear that all facets of human well-being are interrelated. As important as material well-being may be, it cannot be achieved while such negative qualities as self-centeredness and individualism are dominant. On the other hand, positive qualities cannot be fully developed unless due consideration is also given to the material welfare of the society. Moreover, man's individual development cannot be fostered in isolation from the institutions and structures of the social environment. In fact, it is solely through commitment to the enrichment and progress of society and the welfare of other human beings that an individual can achieve personal development. Effective social and individual progress requires, in addition to commitment, a

unified vision of the individual and the society, as well as knowledge of their relationships and governing principles. With such commitment, vision and knowledge, people can set in motion social processes that address the material and spiritual aspects of life in an integral way. Together, such processes impel development. Development, therefore, can never be a product that is created outside of a region or a people and then delivered to them. It is a process that can only be envisioned in the context of the participation of people and their institutions, who must consciously tread their own path of individual and social progress.

20.

The definition of participation in social and economic development has evolved through the years from the mere voicing of needs by beneficiaries to include other aspects such as the contribution of labor in economic production, and involvement in planning and evaluation. A more complete approach to participation must also include measures to enable people to sustain and direct their own process of change. This enabling process, for the Badi' Foundation, is linked to the strong conviction that every human being possesses infinite potentialities. The challenge is to find paths of action that will translate this potential into reality and create possibilities for people to contribute to viable plans of development. While recognizing the vast potentials of man, it is necessary to avoid falling into idyllic romanticization or an uncritical faith in man's intuition and unschooled opinions. A candle cannot express its potential unaided; alone, it cannot light itself. Only an appropriate educational process, which integrates the intellectual, spiritual, and social aspects of human culture, can develop and direct man's potentialities for service to the family, the community, and society at large. As these potentialities are liberated, institutions and instruments must be perfected or created to provide channels and means by which each individual contribution can be received and combined with the total collective effort of carrying forward an ever-advancing civilization.

21.

In light of these considerations, it becomes clear that development cannot be a process of imitating the so-called "developed countries". Indeed, in these countries, the excessive emphasis placed on the material aspects of life has led to the accelerated disintegration of moral values, and to the decline of such cherished legacies as respect for authority, strong family structures and the integrity of human bonds in general. Such development, which has proven to be possible for only a minority of the world's people, is undesirable and unworthy of emulation.

22.

The Badi' Foundation, then, aspires to participate in programs that try to follow new paths of development. These programs, it is hoped, will evolve in the context of a search for a scientifically and technologically advanced society in which educational, economic, administrative, and cultural structures are centered on the integral nature of man and not merely on his material aspirations. Development will therefore be assessed in terms of the increasing capacities of both the people and their institutions to address the spiritual and material needs and aspirations of the populations they serve.

The Development of Human Resources

23.

The Badi' Foundation is a small institution; its effectiveness must come from its adherence to the principles and concepts that are appropriate for the stage of social evolution in which mankind now finds itself. Its efforts are greatly enriched by the experiences of similar organizations in other parts of the world with which it has contact, especially South America, India, and Africa. It believes it can make useful contributions by focusing on the creation and application of strategies

for the development of human resources, as well as the accompanying methods and contents for appropriate educational programs. Enlightened, motivated, dedicated, and well-trained individuals are precisely the resources that are most needed by communities and institutions in their efforts to create a society which guarantees the well-being of all its citizens.

24.

Although the development of human resources implies both research and practical involvement in the actual processes of social and economic development, the Badi' Foundation will be careful not to assume responsibility for the implementation of large-scale development projects that are the domain of larger institutions, nor will it devote its energies to research as a purely intellectual pursuit; rather, it will utilize the resources it generates in efforts that will enhance the capacities of individuals and institutions having the knowledge and attitudes necessary for the continual advancement of society.

25.

While restricting itself to actions which emphasize the development of human resources necessary for social progress, the Badi' Foundation will not limit its activities to a few specialized fields, but will consider projects which address many aspects of life, society and culture. This decision stems from the conviction that the needs and aspirations of any group of people are interrelated and must be addressed in an integral way.

26.

The Badi' Foundation has profound faith in the nobility of the human being and the vastness of human potential. This faith implies for the foundation that programs should not be limited to training people in a few skills or transmitting mere information; beyond these they should be centered in the development of attitudes and capabilities. By attitudes is meant the underlying values and moral concerns that direct the manner and methods with which the individual responds to specific situations. Capabilities transcend skills. They include the mastery of principles and concepts that permit the creative application of talents for the enhancement of culture and society.

27.

The individual is not an isolated element, but rather an integral part of the institutions and organizations which surround him and form his social environment. His capabilities, attitudes, skills, and knowledge must be acquired and formed in the context of his participation in and contribution to the continuing development of the social structures that conduce to the well-being of all. This development of the individual is enhanced when the responsibilities of establishing goals, strategies, and methods are shared with participating populations and their institutions. This emphasis on the sharing of responsibility implies that the Badi' Foundation can only determine the goals and methods of a project through a process of interaction with people from among the populations and institutions with which it cooperates. At the outset of a project the foundation will not enter with blueprints or predetermined goals. Projects will be developed through a consultative procedure which involves a profound and continuous exchange of ideas and opinions. Frequently a project will take the form of assisting groups and institutions to develop, express, and realize their own initiatives.

28.

The implementation of a development project is an organic process which depends upon existing capabilities and talents; the process, itself, should be designed in such a way as to carry institutions and individuals to new levels of achievement. The imposition of projects that interfere with such an organic process always has a demoralizing effect on the participants. Therefore, the Badi' Foundation will bear in mind that, generally, projects which arise from the consciousness and the will of the people, and which enhance their capabilities, will proceed according to their own rhythm which can be enhanced and fostered but not accelerated beyond

natural limits.

29.

The Badí' Foundation considers all forms of contention, destructive criticism, violence, and conflict as additional afflictions heaped upon an already overburdened and tormented humanity. Approaches that emphasize conflict are counterproductive to the goal of achieving increasing levels of well-being, tranquillity, and unity that are prerequisites for the flowering of a new civilization. Therefore, all activities will be carefully and conscientiously examined to ensure that they do not contribute either to conflict or disunity.

30.

In light of the foregoing considerations, it is possible to establish certain criteria for the identification and development of projects consistent with the goals and aims of the Badí' Foundation. Such projects will be chosen according to the extent to which:

31.

- they are in accord with the principles of the Bahá'í Faith and with the unity of the human race as the principal requirement for the creation of a new world civilization

32.

- spring from the aspirations of the participating populations and institutions

33.

- consider the existing capacities of the participating populations and institutions, and assist them to increase their capabilities

34.

- concentrate primarily on the liberation of human potential through educational processes

35.

- seek greater degrees of self-reliance and interdependency, and avoid relations of dependency

36.

- provide for the permanent and systematic exchange of ideas and opinions among all participants

37.

- consider not only the material aspect of life but also the social and spiritual components

38.

- recognize the interrelation of social structures and the individual, and work simultaneously for the development of the individual and the improvement of the social environment

39.

- utilize the fruits of advanced science and technology, and operate in accordance with the highest standards of human and cultural values and wisdom

40.

- are conducive to the best interests of society, and not to the vested interests of a few individuals or groups

41.

- do not entail responsibility for the implementation of large-scale development plans, but do enhance the capability of peoples and institutions to participate in such plans

42.

- contribute to the strengthening of unity and harmony and avoid any relationship with divisive forces or movements

43.

- promote cooperation and mutual assistance, and do not engender a competitive spirit

43.

Health For Humanity: Statement of Philosophy

44.

Health for Humanity is a not-for-profit charitable corporation, created to enable all interested professionals to offer their services for the promotion of community health throughout the world. Through this organization they can assist, albeit in a small way, the emergence of health for all humanity and thereby promote the oneness of mankind and world-encompassing peace.

45.

The founders of Health for Humanity are inspired by the vision of the organic oneness of humankind presented in the Bahá'í Faith. It is evident that the problems confronting humankind are no longer merely regional. The crises people encounter in this age, whether economic, environmental, political, social, or spiritual, are global in nature and require a vision and solutions that are world-embracing in scope. As humanity adopts the organic unity toward which it is inevitably struggling, new perspectives, attitudes, and institutions will emerge— the principles of which are in harmony with this evolutionary process. As nations and peoples develop new relationships of interdependence, institutions with global consciousness, which also value the unique contribution of each individual, can make possible a peaceful passage through this tumultuous time. Emerging global unity occurs amid two simultaneous processes: the disintegration of obsolete institutions which have supported a fragmented world view, and the growth of new institutions in harmony with mankind's social evolution toward a new unified stage of maturity.

46.

Since Health for Humanity seeks to be at the forefront of this unifying process, it has embraced four central principles which guide its internal organization and the projects it undertakes:

Nobility of Humanity

47.

Humankind has the capacity for great feats of heroism and self-sacrifice. At the same time, it has

baser tendencies toward materialism, greed, and violence. For humanity's nobility to emerge, its qualities of trustworthiness, compassion, selflessness, dedication, loyalty, sacrifice, and service need to be nurtured and gain ascendancy over its selfish, baser impulses.

48.

Every individual and every culture has the capacity for manifesting this inherent nobility. It is crucial, therefore, to facilitate the unique contribution each part can make to the whole— in particular, the development and empowerment of women. The rich diversity of humankind is precisely what gives the emerging unity its spectacular beauty and power.

Group Consultation

49.

The realization of one's nobility is an empowering experience. It leads to the recognition that answers to the problems confronting humanity are available within each individual. One vehicle through which those answers are discovered is group consultation, a process of frank and open discussion, conducted within a supportive atmosphere of common, agreed-upon goals.

50.

Given the diversity of cultures and their unique circumstances, it is clear that addressing health problems requires a tailored approach in each locale. No single solution can be applied to all situations. It is essential that the identification of needs and the development of programs to address those needs be derived from group consultation at the local level. The most appropriate decisions will be the result of diverse participants analyzing the situation in an atmosphere of receptivity and mutual respect, then ardently searching for a meeting of minds regarding a solution. In such an atmosphere, differing— even conflicting— points of view can be harmonized.

51.

The role of Health for Humanity is not to impose preconceived ideas of health development on local communities. Rather, it is to facilitate problem solving, to organize resources and expertise, to assist the local emergence of capability, and to advise on the introduction of technology appropriate to the culture and economy of the region. In this way, a relationship characterized by interdependence and dignity develops. Such intense involvement of local professionals in decision making encourages their development, commitment, and participation in ongoing programs.

52.

The spirit of true consultation requires the same cooperative approach with other aid agencies and government offices. As a result, Health for Humanity will avoid any activities that are divisive or politically partisan in nature.

Unified Service

53.

Humanity's inherent noble nature emerges with actions taken in service to humanity. Once the particular needs of a locality have been identified and solutions devised, Health for Humanity may provide the services of its members in direct health care delivery, education and training, health administration, and the application of appropriate technology. The organization serves as a resource for services delivered in accordance with locally determined objectives. These actions, which arise as a result of consultation and are carried out in a spirit of service, are, by themselves, creative processes that can lead to dramatic progress. They permit both the local community and

Health for Humanity volunteers to derive lasting benefit from this dynamic exchange.

Comprehensive Health

54.

True health extends beyond physical well-being. For an individual and a community to be healthy, emotional, intellectual, spiritual, and physical well-being are all required. For this reason, the projects sponsored by Health for Humanity will tend to be multidisciplinary in approach. The participation of a wide variety of professionals who can assist in the development of the general health of the community is essential.

55.

Together, these four fundamental principles— affirming the inherent nobility of humankind, solving problems through group consultation, taking unified action in a spirit of service, and nurturing comprehensive health (which, in turn, affirms humankind's nobility)— constitute a dynamic continuum, each step reinforcing the next. As understanding of these fundamental principles evolves, we will grow in our ability to address developmental challenges facing our global family. It is ultimately this growth for all involved that is the lasting benefit of this undertaking.

The Ruhi Institute: Statement of Purpose and Methods

56.

The Ruhi Institute is an educational institution, operating under the guidance of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Colombia, which dedicates its efforts to the development of human resources for the spiritual, social, and cultural development of the Colombian people. Although its center is in the town of Puerto Tejada in the department of Cauca, its area of influence includes the majority of the rural areas of Colombia and is being gradually extended to several other countries in Latin America.

57.

Like any other institution involved in the process of education for development, the Ruhi Institute has formulated its strategies within a special framework and a philosophy of social change, development and education. In this case, that understanding has emerged from a consistent effort to apply Bahá'í principles to the analysis of social conditions.

• • •

58.

The Bahá'í Faith sees the present state of human affairs as a natural stage in an organic process which will finally lead to the unity of the human race within one social order. Humanity as a whole has gone through evolutionary stages similar to those experienced by an individual; having passed through infancy and childhood, it is now experiencing the difficult culminating moments of a turbulent adolescence. The present state of confusion, doubt, and belligerence is simply to be understood as the condition of an adolescent who strongly desires growth and maturity, but is still attached to childish attitudes and customs. Yet the moment is ripe for this adolescent to take a final step and enter the constructive and dynamic but balanced state of maturity and adulthood.

• • •

59.

In analyzing the rapid changes occurring in the world today, Bahá'ís identify two parallel processes operating at all levels— village, town, nation, and global society. On the one hand, it is clear that human society is suffering from a process of disintegration that manifests itself in wars, terrorism, chaos, physical and psychological insecurity, and a widespread condition of material poverty. On the other hand, forces of integration are moving individuals and groups toward the adoption of new values, new forms of organization, and appropriate structures that can lay the foundation for the establishment of a new social order. The Ruhi Institute defines its basic aim as that of becoming a channel for the spiritual forces of our time to be applied to the lives of the masses of humanity, empowering them to contribute to the establishment of a new world civilization.

• • •

60.

In its efforts to understand and contribute to a process of social change, the Ruhi Institute tries to avoid two sets of theories that have dominated the discourse on development and change for too many decades. On the one hand, it disagrees with concepts of social change that are entirely individualistic in their outlook, which analyze society only in terms of the psychological make-up, the skills, and the behavior of the individual, and which assume that social structures somehow will change by themselves once the individual is saved or correctly trained through religious conversion or secular education. On the other hand, it also rejects theories that consider the human being entirely as a product of society, and claim that no improvement is possible unless social structures, especially those related to political and economic power, are changed first. There are too many examples of participation by the “righteous” and the “highly trained” in the structures of oppression to allow any objective observer of social processes to accept proposals of change based entirely on the redemption of the individual without direct attention to social forces and structures. At the same time, history has already shown the evils of systems that deny individual freedom and derive their moral and social codes from a perception of the necessity of change in the structures of power, a change their proponents believe should be achieved at any cost.

61.

The Ruhi Institute tries to understand the process of the transformation of human society in terms of a far more complex set of interactions between two parallel developments: the transformation of the individual, and the deliberate creation of the structures of a new society. Moreover, just as it does not view the human being as a mere product of interactions with nature and society, it does not identify structural change only with political and economic processes. Rather, it sees the necessity of change in all structures— mental, cultural, scientific and technological, educational, economic and social— including a complete change in the very concepts of political leadership and power. It is understood that individuals, all of whom possess a more or less developed spiritual nature, may be illumined by divine teachings, even under the influence of the most oppressive social forces. These individuals, then, by no means perfected, try to walk the path of social transformation, a path which, nevertheless, is not one of individual salvation but one which implies a constant effort to create and strengthen the institutions of a new social order. These new institutions, even when designed perfectly, may not function perfectly at first, but they do make it possible for an increasing number of human beings to walk further along the path of spiritual growth and transformation. This continuous interaction, between the parallel processes of the spiritualization of the individual and the establishment of new social structures, describes the

only dependable path of social change, one that avoids both complacency and violence and does not perpetuate the cycles of oppression and illusory freedom that humanity has experienced in the past. According to this vision of social change, the Ruhi Institute directs its present efforts to develop human resources within a set of activities that conduce to spiritual and intellectual growth, but are carried out in the context of each individual's contribution to the establishment of new structures— for now, mostly, in villages and rural regions.

• • •

62.

Yet another important element of the conceptual framework of the Ruhi Institute is the concept of participation. Although by now most programs concerned with development and change accept the importance of participation by the local community in its own path of development and most try to avoid imposing their own projects and ideas, there usually is little clarity and agreement as to the nature, the form, and the extent of this participation. The Ruhi Institute, following the ideas presented in the previous paragraphs, asserts that effective participation which will not easily degenerate into political manipulation requires a systematic learning process within each community and region so that the community itself experiments with new ideas, new methods, and new technologies and procedures, rather than being the object of the social experimentation of others. Thus, one of the first steps in establishing participatory development processes in a region is to promote intensive participation by an increasing number of individuals in learning, in a constant effort to apply knowledge to improve the conditions of community life and to create and strengthen the institutions of a new world order.

• • •

63.

Guided by universal participation, both as a principle and as a goal, the Ruhi Institute tries to design and carry out educational activities that combine classroom learning and personal study with acts of service in the community. Each educational activity is to be, in itself, an enabling experience which helps participants develop further the qualities, attitudes, capabilities, and skills of a new type of social actor whose energies are entirely directed towards promoting the well-being of the community, and whose actions are inspired by the vision of a new world civilization which will embody in all its structures and processes the fundamental principle of the unity of the human race.

• • •

64.

At the Ruhi Institute, the design and implementation of educational activities are always guided by a profound conviction in the basic nobility of the human being. The Bahá'í Writings state:

65.

Man is the Supreme Talisman. Lack of a proper education hath, however, deprived him of that which he doth inherently possess. Through a word proceeding out of the mouth of God he was called into being; by one word more he was guided to recognize the Source of his education; by yet another word his station and destiny were safeguarded. The Great Being saith: Regard man as a mine rich in gems of inestimable value. Education can, alone, cause it to reveal its treasures, and enable mankind to benefit therefrom.

66.

Education, then, is not simply seen as the acquisition of knowledge and the development of skills,

but also in terms of the development of vast and powerful potentialities inherent in the very nature of every human being. Again, the development of these potentialities and talents, which is considered a God-given right and responsibility of the individual, attains fruition when it is pursued in the spirit of service to humanity and in the context of creating a new world civilization.

67.

Each participant in the programs of the Ruhi Institute acts as a student in certain educational activities, and as a tutor in others. The institute, then, uses the term “collaborator” to refer to all who take part in its programs. Based on the conditions and the needs of the population served by the institute, courses are designed along a series of “paths of service” which a collaborator follows according to personal interests and capacities. At the beginning of each path of service collaborators mostly learn and develop new concepts and skills. Later on, they participate in courses that prepare them to act as tutors of the earlier courses, thus creating a unique and dynamic environment for the development of human resources



Unlocking The Power of Action

**A Compilation Prepared by
the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice
September 1994**

“Should anyone arise for the triumph of our Cause, him will God render victorious though tens of thousands of enemies be leagued against him. And if his love for me wax stronger, God will establish his ascendancy over all the powers of earth and heaven,”

Bahá’u’lláh

“Know ye not why the created you all from the same dust? That no one should exalt himself over- the other. “

Bahá’u’lláh

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A. Individual Initiative and Bahá'í Administration

From a letter dated 19 May 1994 from the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly

A-1.

...the importance of the Bahá'í administration is its value in serving as a facilitator of the emergence and maintenance of community life in a wholly new mode, and in catering to the requirements of the spiritual relationships which flow from love and unity among the friends. This touches upon a distinguishing characteristic of Bahá'í life which such spiritual relationships foster, namely, the spirit of servitude to God, expressed in service to the Cause, to the friends and to humanity as a whole. The attitude of the individual as a servant, an attitude preeminently exemplified in the life and person of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, is a dynamic that permeates the activities of the Faith; it acquires collective, transformative force in the normal functioning of a community. In this regard, the institutions of the Faith stand as channels for the promotion of this salient characteristic. It is in this framework that the concepts of rulership and leadership, authority and power are properly understood and actualized.

A-2.

The appearance of a united, firmly based and self-sustaining community must be a major goal of a Spiritual Assembly. Composed of a membership reflecting a diversity of personalities, talents, abilities and interests, such a community requires a level of internal interaction between the Assembly and the body of the believers based on a commonly recognized commitment to service, and in which a sense of partnership based on appreciation of each other's distinctive sphere of action is fully recognized and unfailingly upheld, and no semblance of a dichotomy between the two appears. In such a community leadership is that expression of service by which the Spiritual Assembly invites and encourages the use of the manifold talents and abilities with which the community is endowed, and stimulates and guides the diverse elements of the community towards goals and strategies by which the effects of a coherent force for progress can be realized.

A-3.

The maintenance of a climate of love and unity depends largely upon the feeling among the individuals composing the community that the Assembly is a part of themselves, that their operative interactions with that divinely ordained body allow them a fair latitude for initiative and that the quality of their relationships with both the institution and their fellow believers encourages a spirit of enterprise invigorated by an awareness of the revolutionizing purpose of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation, by a consciousness of the high privilege of their being associated with efforts to realize that purpose, and by a consequent, ever-present sense of joy. In such a climate, the community is transformed from being the mere sum of its parts to assuming a wholly new personality as an entity in which its members blend without losing their individual uniqueness. The possibilities for manifesting such a transformation exist most immediately at the local level, but it is a major responsibility of the National Assembly to nurture the conditions in which they may flourish.

A-4.

The authority to direct the affairs of the Faith locally, nationally, and internationally, is divinely conferred on elected institutions. However, the power to accomplish the tasks of the community resides primarily in the mass of the believers. The authority of the institutions is an irrevocable necessity for the progress of humanity; its exercise is an art to be mastered. The power of action in the believers is unlocked at the level of individual initiative and surges at the level of collective volition. In its potential, this mass power, this mix of individual potentialities, exists in a

malleable form susceptible to the multiple reactions of individuals to the sundry influences at work in the world. To realize its highest purpose, this power needs to express itself through orderly avenues of activity. Even though individuals may strive to be guided in their actions by their personal understanding of the Divine Texts, and much can be accomplished thereby, such actions, untempered by the overall direction provided by authorized institutions, are incapable of attaining the thrust necessary for the unencumbered advancement of civilization.

A-5.

Individual initiative is a pre-eminent aspect of this power; it is therefore a major responsibility of the institutions to safeguard and stimulate it. Similarly, it is important for the individuals to recognize and accept that the institutions must act as a guiding and moderating influence on the march of civilizations. In this sense, the divine requirement that individuals obey the decisions of their Assemblies can clearly be seen as being indispensable to the progress of society. Indeed, individuals must not be abandoned entirely to their own devices with respect to the welfare of society as a whole, neither should they be stifled by the assumption of a dictatorial posture by members of the institutions.

A-6.

The successful exercise of authority in the Bahá'í community implies the recognition of separate but mutually reinforcing rights and responsibilities between the institutions and the friends in general, a recognition that in turn welcomes the need for cooperation between these two interactive forces of society. As was stated in advice given by Shoghi Effendi: "The individuals and assemblies must learn to cooperate, and to cooperate intelligently, if they desire to adequately discharge their duties and obligations towards the Faith. And no such cooperation is possible without mutual confidence and trust."...

A-7.

As to your worry about over-controlling the friends: by appreciating the nature of the power of action which they possess, you will be able to gauge how best to guide and direct them. A wide latitude for action must be allowed them, which means that a large margin for mistakes must also be allowed. Your National Assembly and the Local Assemblies must not react automatically to every mistake, but distinguish between those that are self-correcting with the passage of time and do no particular harm to the community and those which require Assembly intervention. Related to this is the tendency of the friends to criticize each other at the slightest provocation, whereas the Teachings call upon them to encourage each other. Such tendencies are of course motivated by a deep love for the Faith, a desire to see it free of any flaw. But human beings are not perfect. The Local Assemblies and the friends must be helped through your example and through loving counsel to refrain from such a pattern of criticism, which stunts the growth and development of the community. You should also be fearful of laying down too many rules and regulations. The Cause is not so fragile that a degree of mistakes cannot be tolerated. When you feel that certain actions may become trends with harmful consequences, you may, instead of making a new rule, discuss the matter with the Counsellors, enlisting their support in educating the friends in a manner that will improve their understanding and their conduct.

A-8.

A new burst of energy would accrue to the operation of the Three Year Plan if the friends, both individually and collectively, could feel a greater sense of freedom to engage in a wide range of activities originating with themselves. Even if you are doing nothing deliberately to discourage such freedom, their accumulated impression of institutional disapproval, however derived, and their fear of criticism are, to a considerable extent, inhibiting their exercise of initiative. At this exact time in history when the peoples of the world are weighed

A-9.

down with soul-crushing difficulties and the shadow of despair threatens to eclipse the light of

hope, there must be revived among the individual believers a sense of mission, a feeling of empowerment to minister to the urgent need of humanity for guidance and thus to win victories for the Faith in their own sphere of life. The community as a whole should be involved in efforts to resolve such issues. A single answer would, of course, be inadequate, there being so many diverse elements and interests in the community. These matters require not only your own independent consultation but consultation with the Counsellors as well. Although Spiritual Assemblies are good at specifying goals, they have not yet mastered the art of making use of the talents of individuals and rousing the mass of the friends to action in fulfillment of such goals. Removing this deficiency would be a mark of the maturation of these institutions...

A-10.

Now is the time for the friends to seize new opportunities to extend the range and influence of the Faith, to reach a new level of action in expanding the community and fortifying its foundations. It is indeed time for audacious action undeterred by a fear of mistakes, fired by the urgency of ministering to the pressing needs of humanity.

B. Exploration Of Themes

I. "...the spirit of servitude to God" The Importance of Individual Initiative

From The Writings Of Bahá'u'lláh

1.

Arise ye, under all conditions, to render service to the Cause, for God will assuredly assist you through the power of His sovereignty which overshadoweth the worlds.

The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, para. 74

2.

This is not a Cause which may be made a plaything for your idle fancies, nor is it a field for the foolish and faint of heart. By God, this is the arena of insight and detachment, of vision and upliftment, where none may spur on their chargers save the valiant horsemen of the Merciful, who have severed all attachment to the world of being. These, truly, are they that render God victorious on earth, and are the dawning places of His sovereign might amidst mankind.

The Kitáb-i-Aqdas para. 178

3.

Gird up the loins of thine endeavour, that haply thou mayest guide thy neighbour to the law of God, the Most Merciful. Such an act, verily, excelleth all other acts in the sight of God, the All-Possessing, the Most High. Such must be thy steadfastness in the Cause of God, that no earthly thing whatsoever will have the power to deter thee from thy duty. Though the powers of earth be leagued against thee, though all men dispute with thee, thou must remain unshaken.

Be unrestrained as the wind, while carrying the Message of Him Who hath caused the Dawn of Divine Guidance to break. Consider, how the wind, faithful to that which God hath ordained, bloweth upon all the regions of the earth, be they inhabited or desolate. Neither the sight of desolation, nor the evidences of prosperity, can either pain or please it. It bloweth in every direction, as bidden by its Creator. So

should be every one that claimeth to be a lover of the one true God. It behoveth him to fix his gaze upon the fundamentals of His Faith, and to labour diligently for its propagation.

Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh page 339

4.

This servant appealeth to every diligent and enterprising soul to exert his utmost endeavour and arise to rehabilitate the conditions in all regions and to quicken the dead with the living waters of wisdom and utterance, by virtue of the love he cherisheth for God, the One, the Peerless, the Almighty, the Beneficent.

Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas p. 172

From The Writings Of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

5.

... it is incumbent upon... all the friends and loved ones, one and all to bestir themselves and arise with heart and soul and in one accord, to diffuse the sweet savours of God, to teach His Cause and to promote His Faith. It behooveth them not to rest for a moment, neither to seek repose. They must disperse themselves in every land, pass by every clime and travel throughout all regions...

In these days, the most important of all things is the guidance of the nations and peoples of the world. Teaching the Cause is of utmost importance for it is the head corner-stone of the foundation itself. This wronged servant has spent his days and nights in promoting the Cause and urging the peoples to service. He rested not a moment, till the fame of the Cause of God was noised abroad in the world and the celestial strains from the Abhá Kingdom roused the East and the West. The beloved of God must also follow the same example. This is the secret of faithfulness, this is the requirement of servitude to the Threshold of Bahá.

The disciples of Christ forgot themselves and all earthly things, forsook all their cares and belongings, purged themselves of self and passion, and with absolute detachment scattered far and wide and engaged in calling the peoples of the world to the Divine Guidance, till at last they made the world another world, illumined the surface of the earth, and even to their last hour proved self-sacrificing in the pathway of that Beloved One of God. Finally in various lands they suffered glorious martyrdom. Let them that are men of action follow in their footsteps!

Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, pp. 10-11

6.

The teaching work should under all conditions be actively pursued by the believers because divine confirmations are dependent upon it. Should a Bahá'í refrain from being fully, vigorously and wholeheartedly involved in the teaching work he will undoubtedly be deprived of the blessings of the Abhá Kingdom. Even so, this activity should be tempered with wisdom - - not that wisdom which requireth one to be silent and forgetful of such an obligation, but rather that which requireth one to display divine tolerance, love, kindness, patience, a goodly character, and holy deeds. In brief, encourage the friends individually to teach the Cause of God and draw their attention to this meaning of wisdom mentioned in the Writings, which is itself the essence of teaching the Faith - - but all this to be done with the greatest tolerance, so that heavenly assistance and divine confirmation may aid the friends.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 268

7.

Wherefore, O ye friends of God, redouble your efforts, strain every nerve, till ye triumph in your servitude to the Ancient Beauty, the Manifest Light, and become the cause of spreading far and wide the rays of the Day-Star of Truth...

Expend your every breath of life in this great Cause and dedicate all your days to the service of Bahá'í so that in the end, safe from loss and deprivation, ye will inherit the heaped-up treasures of the realms above. For the days of a man are full of peril and he cannot rely on so much as a moment more of life...

Wherefore, rest ye neither day nor night and seek no ease. Tell ye the secrets of servitude, follow the pathway of service, till ye attain the promised succour that cometh from the realms of God.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 271

From Letters Written By And On Behalf Of Shoghi Effendi

8.

To teach the Cause of God, to proclaim its truths, to defend its interests, to demonstrate, by words as well as by deeds, its indispensability, its potency, and universality, should at no time be regarded as the exclusive concern or sole privilege of Bahá'í administrative institutions, be they Assemblies, or committees. All must participate, however humble their origin, however limited their experience, however restricted their means, however deficient their education, however pressing their cares and preoccupations, however unfavourable the environment in which they live.

The Advent of Divine Justice p. 45

9.

It is the bounden duty of every American believer... to initiate, promote, and consolidate, within the limits fixed by the administrative principles of the Faith, any activity he or she deems fit to undertake for the furtherance of the Plan... Let him not wait for any directions, or expect any special encouragement, from the elected representatives of his community, nor be deterred by any obstacles which his relatives, or fellow-citizens may be inclined to place in his path, nor mind the censure of his critics or enemies.

The Advent of Divine Justice, p. 50

10.

This challenge, so severe and insistent, and yet so glorious, faces no doubt primarily the individual believer on whom, in the last resort, depends the fate of the entire community. He it is who constitutes the warp and woof on which the quality and pattern of the whole fabric must depend. He it is who acts as one of the countless links in the mighty chain that now girdles the globe. He it is who serves as one of the multitude of bricks which support the structure and insure the stability of the administrative edifice now being raised in every part of the world. Without his support, at once whole-hearted, continuous and generous, every measure adopted, and every plan formulated, by the Body which acts as the national representative of the community to which he belongs, is foredoomed to failure. The World Centre of the Faith itself is paralysed if such a support on the part of the rank and file of the community is denied it. The Author of the Divine Plan Himself is impeded in His purpose if the proper instruments for the execution of His design are lacking. The sustaining strength of Bahá'u'lláh Himself, the Founder of the Faith, will be withheld from every and each individual who fails in the long run to arise and play his part.

11.

The Guardian feels that, if the friends would meditate a little more objectively upon both their relationship to the Cause and the vast non-Bahá'í public they hope to influence, they would see things more clearly... [T]he condition that the world is in is bringing many issues to a head. It would be perhaps impossible to find a nation or people not in a state of crisis today. The materialism, the lack of true religion and consequent baser forces in human nature which are being released, have brought the whole world to the brink of probably the greatest crisis it has ever faced or will have to face. The Bahá'ís are part of the world. They too feel the great pressures which are brought to bear upon all people today, whoever and wherever they may be. On the other hand, the Divine Plan, which is the direct method of working toward the establishment of peace and world order, has perforce reached an important and challenging point in its unfoldment; because of the desperate needs of the world, the Bahá'ís find themselves, even though so limited in numbers, in financial strength and in prestige, called upon to fulfill a great responsibility... Each one must evaluate what his own response can be and should be; nobody can do this for him... He fully realizes that the demands made upon the Bahá'ís are great, and that they often feel inadequate, tired and perhaps frightened in the face of the tasks that confront them. This is only natural. On the other hand, they must realize that the power of God can and will assist them; and that because they are privileged to have accepted the Manifestation of God for this Day, this very act has placed upon them a great moral responsibility toward their fellow-men.

19 July 1956, written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to a National Spiritual Assembly

From Letters Of The Universal House Of Justice

12.

What is needed now is the awakening of all believers to the immediacy of the challenge so that each may assume his share of the responsibility for taking the Teachings to all humanity. Universal participation... must be pressed toward attainment in every continent, country and island of the globe. Every Bahá'í however humble or inarticulate, must become intent on fulfilling his role as a bearer of the Divine Message. Indeed, how can a true believer remain silent while around us men cry out in anguish for truth, love and unity to descend upon this world?

Messages from the Universal House of Justice 1968-1973 p. 34

13.

Every individual believer— man, woman, youth and child— is summoned to this field of action; for it is on the initiative, the resolute will of the individual to teach and to serve, that the success of the entire community depends. Well-grounded in the mighty Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh sustained by daily prayer and reading of the Holy Word, strengthened by a continual striving to obtain a deeper understanding of the divine Teachings, illumined by a constant endeavour to relate these Teachings to current issues, nourished by observance of the laws and principles of His wondrous World Order, every individual can attain increasing measures of success in teaching. In sum, the ultimate triumph of the Cause is assured by that “one thing and only one thing” so poignantly emphasized by Shoghi Effendi, namely, “the extent to which our own inner life and private character mirror forth in their manifold aspects the splendour of those eternal principles proclaimed by Bahá'u'lláh.

Ridvan 1988 to the Bahá'ís of the World

14.

Our appeal for immediate, redoubled and sustained action on all aspects of the Plan is addressed primarily to the individual believer of every locality, who possesses within himself or herself the measures of initiative that ensure the success of any global Bahá'í enterprise, and “on whom, in the last resort,” as our beloved Guardian plainly stated, “depends the fate of the entire community”.

Ridvan 1993 to the Bahá'ís of the World

II. “... a sense of partnership” The Individual and the Spiritual Assembly

From The Writings Of Bahá'u'lláh

15.

In all things it is necessary to consult... The intent of what hath been revealed from the Pen of the Most High is that consultation may be fully carried out among the friends, inasmuch as it is and will always be a cause of awareness and of awakening and a source of good and well-being.

Consultation: A Compilation, extract 5

From The Writings Of `Abdu'l-Bahá

16.

It is incumbent upon everyone not to take any step without consulting the Spiritual Assembly, and they must assuredly obey with heart and soul its bidding and be submissive unto it, that things may be properly ordered and well arranged. Otherwise every person will act independently and after his own judgment, will follow his own desire, and do harm to the Cause.

Cited in Bahá'í Administration Selected Messages 1922-1932, p. 21

From Letters Written By And On Behalf Of Shoghi Effendi

17.

Theirs [the members of the National Spiritual Assembly] is the duty, while retaining the sacred and exclusive right of final decision in their hands, to invite discussion, provide information, ventilate grievances, welcome advice from even the most humble and insignificant members of the Bahá'í family, expose their motives, set forth their plans, justify their actions, revise if necessary their verdict, foster the spirit of individual initiative and enterprise, and fortify the sense of interdependence and co-partnership, of understanding and mutual confidence between them on one hand and all Local Assemblies and individual believers on the other.

Bahá'í Administration Selected Messages 1922-1932, pp. 143-144

18.

The principle of consultation, which constitutes one of the basic laws of the Administration, should be applied to all Bahá'í activities which affect the collective interests of the Faith, for it is through co-operation and continued exchange of thoughts and views that the Cause can best

safeguard and foster its interests. Individual initiative, personal ability and resourcefulness, though indispensable, are, unless supported and enriched by the collective experiences and wisdom of the group, utterly incapable of achieving such a tremendous task.”

30 August 1933, written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer

19.

There is no task more urgently necessary than the assurance of perfect harmony and fellowship among the friends, especially between the Local Assemblies and individual believers. The Local Assemblies should inspire confidence in the individual believers, and these in their turn should express their readiness to fully abide by the decisions and directions of the Local Assembly. The two must learn to co-operate, and to realize that only through such a co-operation can the institutions of the Cause effectively and permanently function. While obedience to the Local Assembly should be unqualified and whole-hearted, yet that body should enforce its decisions in such a way as to avoid giving the impression that it is animated by dictatorial motives. The spirit of the Cause is one of mutual co-operation, and not that of a dictatorship.

28 October 1935, written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer

20.

Let every participator in the continent-wide campaign... bear in mind the necessity of keeping in close and constant touch with those responsible agencies designed to direct, coordinate, and facilitate the teaching activities of the entire community.

The Advent of Divine Justice p. 52

From Letters Of The Universal House Of Justice

21.

Unity of mankind is the pivotal principle of His Revelation; Bahá'í communities must therefore become renowned for their demonstration of this unity. In a world becoming daily more divided by factionalism and group interests, the Bahá'í community must be distinguished by the concord and harmony of its relationships. The coming of age of the human race must be foreshadowed by the mature, responsible understanding of human problems and the wise administration of their affairs by these same Bahá'í communities.

The practice and development of such Bahá'í characteristics are the responsibility alike of individual Bahá'ís and administrative institutions...

Naw-Rúz 1974 to the Bahá'ís of the World

22.

The proper functioning of these institutions [Local Spiritual Assemblies] depends largely on the efforts of their members to familiarize themselves with their duties and to adhere scrupulously to principle in their personal behaviour and in the conduct of their official responsibilities. Of relevant importance, too, are their resolve to remove all traces of estrangement and sectarian tendencies from their midst, their ability to win the affection and support of the friends under their care and to involve as many individuals as possible in the work of the Cause. By their constantly aiming at improving their performance, the communities they guide will reflect a pattern of life that will be a credit to the Faith and will, as a welcome consequence, rekindle hope among the increasingly disillusioned members of society.

III “the power of action” The Role of the Institutions of the Faith

From The Writings Of Bahá'u'lláh

23.

The Lord hath ordained that in every city a House of Justice be established wherein shall gather counsellors to the number of Bahá'í... They should consider themselves as entering the Court of the presence of God, the Exalted, the Most High, and as beholding Him Who is the Unseen. It behoveth them to be the trusted ones of the Merciful among men and to regard themselves as the guardians appointed of God for all that dwell on earth. It is incumbent upon them to take counsel together and to have regard for the interests of the servants of God, for His sake, even as they regard their own interests, and to choose that which is meet and seemly.

The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, para. 30

From The Writings Of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

24.

These Spiritual Assemblies are shining lamps and heavenly gardens, from which the fragrances of holiness are diffused over all regions, and the lights of knowledge are shed abroad over all created things. From them the spirit of life streameth in every direction. They, indeed, are the potent sources of the progress of man, at all times and under all conditions.

Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, 38, p. 80

From Letters Written By And On Behalf Of Shoghi Effendi

25.

It is the duty and privilege of the National and Local Assemblies... to initiate and conduct, with their knowledge and consent, any undertaking that would serve to enhance the work which they have set themselves to achieve... they should, by every means in their power, stimulate the spirit of enterprise among the believers in order to further the teaching as well as the administrative work of the Cause. They should endeavour by personal contact and written appeals to imbue the body of the faithful with a deep sense of personal responsibility, and urge every believer, whether high or low, poor or wealthy, to conceive, formulate, and execute such measures and projects as would redound, in the eyes of their representatives, to the power and the fair name of this sacred Cause.

Bahá'í Administration, p. 128

26.

The work of the Assembly should be to capitalize the energy and devotion that exists among the friends and guide them along proper channels, whereby good work would be accomplished and no harm be done to the Cause. The first quality for leadership, both among individuals and Assemblies, is the capacity to use the energy and competence that exists in the rank and file of its followers.

30 August 1930, written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to a National Spiritual Assembly

27.

The National Spiritual Assembly, and all the national committees as well, should welcome all suggestions of this sort which individual believers feel prompted to make in order to open new ways and adopt fresh methods for the spread and the consolidation of the Cause.

4 June 1934, written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an Individual believer

28.

When the National Spiritual Assembly provides competent and quick service, in its own work and that of its Committees, it will see a far greater manifestation of enthusiasm and enterprise on the part of the believers.

28 March 1945, written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to a National Spiritual Assembly

29.

Your Committee must encourage all the believers to teach, and try and constantly devise new and stimulating suggestions to offer to the friends of ways in which they can help— for the Guardian knows that all the friends are keenly concerned over the state of society, and anxious, every one of them, to take an active part in counteracting the wave of materialism, bitterness and selfishness which is sweeping over the whole world.

30 December 1945, written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to a National Teaching Committee

30.

...he considers that National Assemblies must strongly guard against this marked tendency of laying down new rules and regulations all the time, which he considers unnecessary and injurious. In the end it will dampen the zeal and quench the spontaneity of the believers, and give the impression that the Bahá'í Faith is crystallizing into set forms. Principles there must be, but they must be applied with wisdom to each case that arises, not every case covered, before it arises, by a codified set of rules. This is the whole spirit of Bahá'u'lláh's system: rigid conformity to great essential laws, elasticity, and even a certain necessary element of diversity, in secondary matters.

18 May 1948, written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to a National Spiritual Assembly

31.

The difficulties, and the evidences of immaturity, which you mention in your letter... seem to be an inevitable phase in the growth of our Administration, which is so much more perfect that the believers called upon to create it! There are bound to be many misunderstandings, and some small abuses, in erecting a system which is so different from the ways men are used to. But we must not attach undue importance to these things, but look upon them as a mother looks upon the mistakes of her children, realizing that with maturity will come the capacity to handle situations better and with more sound judgment.

23 October 1949, written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer

32.

He hopes your Assembly will devote special, constant attention to encouraging the friends in their teaching work, and facilitate their tasks. As the new National Assemblies are being formed, he feels it incumbent upon him to issue a word of warning to avoid rules and regulations and tying

the believers' work up in red tape. Over-administration can be even worse for the Faith at this time than under-administration. The believers are, for the most part, young in the Cause, and if they make mistakes it is not half as important as if their spirit is crushed by being told all the time — do this and don't do that! The new National Body should be like a loving parent, watching over and helping its children, and not like a stern judge, waiting for an opportunity to display his judicial powers...

The friends should be helped to overcome their problems, deepen in the Faith, and increase their unity and their love for each other. In this way you will find that your work goes ahead speedily, and that the National Body is like the beating of a healthy heart in the midst of the Community, pumping spiritual love, energy and encouragement out to all the members.

30 June 1957, written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to a National Spiritual Assembly

33.

He urges your Assembly, as it embarks upon its great work, to refrain from introducing rules and regulations which serve no useful purpose at this time when the communities are small and undeveloped, and will only stifle the spirit of the friends and confuse them. Like a wise and loving parent the Assembly should conduct the affairs of the Bahá'ís constantly and patiently, encouraging them and instilling enthusiasm for the work to be done.

29 July 1957, written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to a National Spiritual Assembly

From Letters Of The Universal House Of Justice

34.

It is at this local level of Bahá'í community life, the very foundation of the administrative structure of the Faith, that we so often find lack of adequate strength and efficiency. It is at this same level that our beloved Guardian urged Auxiliary Board Members to establish contact with Local Spiritual Assemblies, groups, isolated centres and the individual believers, and through periodic and systematic visits to localities as well as by correspondence help in promoting the interests of the Plan, assist in the efficient and prompt execution of the goals, watch over the security of the Faith, stimulate and strengthen the teaching and pioneer work, impress upon the friends the importance of individual effort, initiative and sacrifice, and encourage them to participate in Bahá'í activities and be unified under all circumstances.

17 November 1971 to the Continental Boards of Counsellors, in The Local Spiritual Assembly, extract 11

35.

The divinely ordained institution of the Local Spiritual Assembly operates at the first levels of human society and is the basic administrative unit of Bahá'u'lláh's World Order. It is concerned with individuals and families whom it must constantly encourage to unite in a distinctive Bahá'í society, vitalized and guarded by the laws, ordinances and principles of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation. It protects the Cause of God; it acts as the loving shepherd of the Bahá'í flock.

Naw-Ruz 1974 to the Bahá'ís of the World

36.

Bahá'í women and girls must be encouraged to take part in the social, spiritual and administrative activities of their communities. Bahá'í youth, now rendering exemplary and devoted service in the forefront of the army of life, must be encouraged, even while equipping themselves for future

service, to devise and execute their own teaching plans among their contemporaries.

Ridván 1984 to the Bahá'ís of the World

37.

An expansion of thought and action in certain aspects of our work would enhance our possibilities for success in meeting our... commitments. Since change, ever more rapid change, is a constant characteristic of life at this time, and since our growth, size and external relations demand much of us, our community must be ready to adapt. In a sense this means that the community must become more adept at accommodating a wide range of actions without losing concentration on the primary objectives of teaching, namely, expansion and consolidation. A unity in diversity of actions is called for, a condition in which different individuals will concentrate on different activities, appreciating the salutary effect of the aggregate on the growth and development of the Faith, because each person cannot do everything and all persons cannot do the same thing. This understanding is important to the maturity which, by the many demands being made upon it, the community is being forced to attain.

Ridvan 1990 to the Bahá'ís of the World

38.

Training of the friends and their striving, through serious individual study, to acquire knowledge of the Faith, to apply its principles and administer its affairs, are indispensable to developing the human resources necessary to the progress of the Cause. But knowledge alone is not adequate; it is vital that training be given in a manner that inspires love and devotion, fosters firmness in the Covenant, prompts the individual to active participation in the work of the Cause and to taking sound initiatives in the promotion of its interests. Special efforts to attract people of capacity to the Faith will also go far towards providing the human resources so greatly needed at this time.

Ridvan 1993 to the Bahá'ís of the World

39.

The human resources of the Cause are being augmented in two ways. People of capacity are being moved to embrace the Faith, reinforcing the ranks of those who are already serving. In the year ahead these two complementary processes— attracting people of capacity and increasing our own abilities— must be further advanced, stimulating individual action and the harmonious development of a wide range of activities for the promotion of the Faith.

As the potentialities of the individual believers unfold, so the local and national Bahá'í institutions are gaining ability to foster the quality of the life of their communities and to conceive and implement imaginative programmes...

The evolution of local and national Bahá'í institutions has made possible an increased measure of decentralization in the administration of the work. For this beneficial process to expand, however, the crucial prerequisite in most countries is the speedy improvement of the functioning of Local Spiritual Assemblies. This calls for the close attention of every believer. These local Bahá'í institutions, ordained in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas itself, constitute a reservoir of strength and guidance which will amplify the effectiveness of the work of the Cause as they mature.

Ridvan 1994 to the Bahá'ís of the World

IV. "... a climate of love and unity" The Role of the Bahá'í Community

From The Writings Of Bahá'u'lláh

40.

With the utmost unity, and in a spirit of perfect fellowship, exert yourselves, that ye may be enabled to achieve that which beseemeth this Day of God. Verily I say, strife and dissension, and whatsoever the mind of man abhorreth are entirely unworthy of his station. Centre your energies in the propagation of the Faith of God.

Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh p. 196

41.

It is Our wish and desire that every one of you may become a source of all goodness unto men, and an example of uprightness to mankind. Beware lest ye prefer yourselves above your neighbours. Fix your gaze upon Him Who is the Temple of God amongst men... If any differences arise amongst you, behold Me standing before your face, and overlook the faults of one another for My name's sake and as a token of your love for My manifest and resplendent Cause. We love to see you at all times consorting in amity and concord within the paradise of My good-pleasure, and to inhale from your acts the fragrance of friendliness and unity, of loving-kindness and fellowship.

Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh p. 315

42.

They that are endued with sincerity and faithfulness should associate with all the peoples and kindreds of the earth with joy and radiance, inasmuch as consorting with people hath promoted and will continue to promote unity and concord, which in turn are conducive to the maintenance of order in the world and to the regeneration of nations. Blessed are such as hold fast to the cord of kindliness and tender mercy and are free from animosity and hatred.

Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, p. 36

43.

O ye beloved of the Lord! Commit not that which defileth the limpid stream of love or destroyeth the sweet fragrance of friendship. By the righteousness of the Lord! Ye were created to show love one to another and not perversity and rancour. Take pride not in love for yourselves but in love for your fellow-creatures. Glory not in love for your country, but in love for all mankind. Let your eye be chaste, your hand faithful, your tongue truthful and your heart enlightened. Abase not the station of the learned in Bahá and belittle not the rank of such rulers as administer justice amidst you. Set your reliance on the army of justice, put on the armour of wisdom, let your adorning be forgiveness and mercy and that which cheereth the hearts of the well-favoured of God.

Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas pp. 138-139

From The Writings Of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

44.

Strive ye by day and night to cultivate your unity to the fullest degree. Let your thoughts dwell on

your own spiritual development, and close your eyes to the deficiencies of other souls. Act ye in such wise, showing forth pure and goodly deeds, and modesty and humility, that ye will cause others to be awakened.

Never is it the wish of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, to see any being hurt, nor will He make anyone to grieve; for man can receive no greater gift than this, that he rejoice another ‘s heart. I beg of God that ye will be bringers of joy, even as are the angels in Heaven.

Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, pp. 203-204

45.

O beloved of the Lord! If any soul speak ill of an absent one, the only result will clearly be this: he will dampen the zeal of the friends and tend to make them indifferent. For backbiting is divisive, it is the leading cause among the friends of a disposition to withdraw. If any individual should speak ill of one who is absent, it is incumbent on his hearers, in a spiritual and friendly manner, to stop him, and say in effect: would this detraction serve any useful purpose? Would it please the Blessed Beauty, contribute to the lasting honour of the friends, promote the holy Faith, support the Covenant, or be of any possible benefit to any soul? No, never! On the contrary, it would make the dust to settle so thickly on the heart that the ears would hear no more, and the eyes would no longer behold the light of truth.

If, however, a person setteth about speaking well of another, opening his lips to praise another, he will touch an answering chord in his hearers and they will be stirred up by the breathings of God. Their hearts and souls will rejoice to know that, God be thanked, here is a soul in the Faith who is a focus of human perfections, a very embodiment of the bounties of the Lord, one whose tongue is eloquent, and whose face shineth, in whatever gathering he may be, one who hath victory upon his brow, and who is a being sustained by the sweet savours of God.

Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, pp. 230-231

From Letters Written By And On Behalf Of Shoghi Effendi

46.

Not by merely imitating the excesses and laxity of the extravagant age they live in; not by the idle neglect of the sacred responsibilities it is their privilege to shoulder; not by the silent compromise of the principles dearly cherished by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, not by their fear or unpopularity or their dread of censure can they hope to rouse society from its spiritual lethargy, and serve as a model to a civilization the foundations of which the corrosion of prejudice has well-nigh undermined. By the sublimity of their principles, the warmth of their love, the spotless purity of their character, and the depth of their devoutness and piety, let them demonstrate to their fellow-countrymen the ennobling reality of a power that shall weld a disrupted world.

We can prove ourselves worthy of our Cause only if in our individual conduct and corporate life we sedulously imitate the example of our beloved Master, Whom the terrors of tyranny, the storms of incessant abuse, the oppressiveness of humiliation, never caused to deviate a hair’s breadth from the revealed Law of Bahá’u’lláh.

Bahá’í Administration: Selected Messages 1922-1932, pp. 131-132

47.

Shoghi Effendi would like you also to make all your effort to increase among the friends the spirit of unity and of co-operation and to encourage the young believers to come into closer contact with the older generation of friends; so that through this harmonious co-operation the

Cause may be given a further chance to develop and expand. The Faith needs both the experiences and the wisdom of age as well as the enthusiasm and the energy of youth. When all these qualities are harmoniously combined great results will be achieved.

8 August 1933, written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer

48.

The believers must be tolerant of each other's weaknesses and mistakes, and ever ready to forgive and forget the past because inharmony— whatever the cause— is sure to prevent the community from growing.

26 September 1943, written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer

49.

All the Bahá'ís new and old alike, should devote themselves as much as possible to teaching the Faith; they should also realize that the atmosphere of true love and unity which they manifest within the Bahá'í Community will directly affect the public, and be the greatest magnet for attracting people to the Faith and confirming them.

4 April 1947, written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to a Local Spiritual Assembly

50.

One of the greatest problems in the Cause is the relation of the believers to each other; for their immaturity (shared with the rest of humanity) and imperfections retard the work, create complications, and discourage each other. And yet we must put up with these things and try and combat them through love, patience, and forgiveness individually and proper administrative action collectively.

26 March 1948, written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer

51.

When criticism and harsh words arise within a Bahá'í community, there is no remedy except to put the past behind one, and persuade all concerned to turn over a new leaf, and for the sake of God and His Faith refrain from mentioning the subjects which have led to misunderstanding and inharmony. The more the friends argue back and forth and maintain, each side, that their point of view is the right one, the worse the whole situation becomes.

When we see the condition the world is in today, we must surely forget these utterly insignificant internal disturbances, and rush, unitedly, to the rescue of humanity. You should urge your fellow-Bahá'ís to take this point of view, and to support you in a strong effort to suppress every critical thought and every harsh word, in order to let the spirit of Bahá'u'lláh flow into the entire community, and unite it in His love and in His service.

16 February 1951, written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer

From Letters Of The Universal House Of Justice

52.

Wherever a Bahá'í community exists, whether large or small, let it be distinguished for its abiding sense of security and faith, its high standard of rectitude, its complete freedom from all forms of prejudice, the spirit of love among its members and for the closely knit fabric of its social life. The acute distinction between this and present day society will inevitably arouse the

interest of the more enlightened, and as the world's gloom deepens the light of Bahá'í life will shine brighter and brighter until its brilliance must eventually attract the disillusioned masses and cause them to enter the haven of the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh Who alone can bring them peace and justice and an ordered life.

Messages from the Universal House of Justice: 1968-1973, p. 12

53.

...the friends should love each other, constantly encourage each other, work together, be as one soul in one body, and in so doing become a true, organic, healthy body animated and illumined by the spirit. In such a body all will receive spiritual health and vitality from the organism itself, and the most perfect flowers and fruits will be brought forth.

Wellspring of Guidance, p. 39

54.

...[the Bahá'í community] is a single social organism, representative of the diversity of the human family, conducting its affairs through a system of commonly accepted consultative principles, and cherishing equally all the great outpourings of divine guidance in human history. Its existence is yet another convincing proof of the practicality of its Founder's vision of a united world, another evidence that humanity can live as one global society, equal to whatever challenges its coming of age may entail. If the Bahá'í experience can contribute in whatever measure to reinforcing hope in the unity of the human race, we are happy to offer it as a model for study.

October 1985 to the peoples of the world, in *The Promise of World Peace*

A Clarification of Some Issues Concerning Social and Economic Development in Local and National Communities

November 1999

prepared by the Office of Social and Economic Development
at the Bahá'í World Centre

1.

In September 1993, the statement "[Bahá'í Social and Economic Development: Prospects for the Future](#)" was prepared at the Bahá'í World Centre and approved by the Universal House of Justice. It contained an analysis of past experience and delineated a course for future action. It also specified that the work of the Office of Social and Economic Development should be organized around its "primary purpose" to "facilitate learning about development by fostering

and supporting action, reflection on action, study, consultation, the gathering and systematization of experience, conceptualization, and training— all carried out in light of the Teachings of the Faith.”

2.

The following year, in 1994, our Office prepared the document “[The Evolution of Institutional Capacity for Social and Economic Development](#)”, which describes two noteworthy types of organizational structures that have emerged in the Bahá’í world for advancing the development process in a country or region. Of particular interest in that document is the guidance quoted from the Universal House of Justice which clarifies the nature of Bahá’í and Bahá’í-inspired endeavors. Since then a number of questions have arisen, and this document briefly addresses the issues raised.

Degrees of Complexity in Bahá’í Development Activities

3.

One of the principles discussed in the document “[Prospects for the Future](#)” is related to the degrees of complexity of Bahá’í endeavors in social and economic development. There it is explained that projects at the grassroots are most effective when they begin with a relatively simple set of actions and are allowed to grow in size and complexity over time. This is indeed the pattern that can be observed in most communities in the Bahá’í world today. While it is difficult to categorize the very diverse actions currently undertaken by Bahá’ís in the area of development, at least three broad levels of activity can be identified:

4.

Activities of Fixed Duration: Most Bahá’í social and economic development efforts are fairly simple activities of fixed duration in which Bahá’ís in villages and towns around the world address the problems and challenges faced by their localities through the application of spiritual principles. These activities either originate in the Bahá’í communities themselves or represent responses to invitations from other organizations. It is estimated that in 1998-99 there were some 1,500 endeavors of this kind, including tree-planting and clean-up projects, health camps, workshops and seminars on such themes as race unity and the advancement of women, and short-term training courses.

5.

Sustained Projects: A second category of Bahá’í social and economic development efforts consists of approximately 290 ongoing projects. The vast majority are academic schools, while others focus on areas such as literacy, basic health care, immunization, substance abuse, child care, agriculture, the environment, or microenterprise. Some of these projects are administered by nascent development organizations which have the potential to grow in complexity and in their range of influence.

6.

Organizations with Capacity to Undertake Complex Action: Certain Bahá’í development efforts have achieved the stature of development organizations with relatively complex programmatic structures and significant spheres of influence. They systematically train human resources and manage a number of lines of action to address problems of local communities and regions in a coordinated, interdisciplinary manner. Also included in this category are several institutions— especially large schools— which, although focusing only on one field, have the potential to make a significant impact. In this category there are currently 43 such organizations, located in all continents of the globe.

7.

Through the general encouragement of National Assemblies and their committees, on the one hand, and the Counsellors and the Auxiliary Board members, on the other, the number of grassroots activities of fixed duration increases, providing communities with valuable experience commensurate with their needs and resources. Some of the activities in this first category may be one-day events, while others may last weeks or months.

8.

Sustained projects may either emerge from activities in the first category or be initiated as such by Assemblies, groups, or individual believers. The agencies administering these projects receive guidance from the National Spiritual Assemblies in whose jurisdiction they operate. The Counsellors frequently single out projects in this second category for special attention as part of their overall strategy to promote the organic growth of the community in a country or region.

9.

Some of the entities that sustain projects over an extended period of time evolve in complexity as they learn from experience, develop human resources, and integrate into their work activities from various fields of endeavor. As they do so, they begin to take on the characteristics of nongovernmental development organizations, and their capacity to contribute to the advancement of the populations they serve increases. The existence of such an organization in a country fosters the growth and multiplication of efforts in the other two categories. As mentioned in the document "[The Evolution of Institutional Capacity for Social and Economic Development](#)", these organizations usually take one of two forms: either a training institute, established by the National Spiritual Assembly, or a Bahá'í-inspired agency. Every national community, if it is to play its part in building a global civilization, needs to gradually acquire the capacity for complex action in the development field.

Training Institutes and Social and Economic Development

10.

In the messages delineating the provisions of the Four Year Plan, launched at Ridván 1996, the Universal House of Justice described the role of the institute in developing the human resources needed for the expansion and consolidation of the Faith. Although these messages did not address the relationship between training institutes and social and economic development, communications to specific National Assemblies contain explicit guidance on this matter. For example, a letter dated 19 August 1997 written on behalf of the House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Zambia regarding its national institute reads:

11.

The House of Justice finds highly desirable the present structure in Zambia in which the various aspects of human resource development, related both to the expansion and consolidation of the Faith and to projects of social and economic development in areas such as education, health and literacy, are all under one organization, namely, the William Masetlha Foundation.

12.

And in a letter dated 24 September 1996 written on its behalf to the National Spiritual Assembly of Zaire the following is found:

13.

It is understood that the institute will be an agency for the development of human resources for activities of expansion and consolidation, as well as for projects of social and economic development, in both North and South Kivu. In this latter context, it could also gradually take on the administration of the development projects in both areas. The institute can establish a clear-cut organizational structure that has various departments and sections, each of which is dedicated

to one of its programs— a health program, a literacy program, and so on— as well as those for training human resources for expansion and consolidation.

14.

By broadening the scope of its operations to include development, the training institute is able to undertake complex action within a region and exert meaningful influence on its entire population. In this process it assesses the needs of the people of the region it serves and becomes well familiar with the conditions of the population in areas such as literacy, health and education. In response to the needs identified, it gradually designs courses, for example, to train literacy facilitators, primary health care workers, or primary school teachers. In time it may go further to mobilize these human resources through systematic projects to tackle specific problems, for instance, a literacy project in a cluster of villages.

The Relationship Between Teaching The Faith and Social and Economic Development

15.

Some of the questions that have been repeatedly asked have to do with the relationship between teaching and social and economic development: Are social and economic development efforts distracting us from the primary work of advancing the process of entry by troops? Is development simply another word for indirect teaching, carried out for the sole purpose of attracting people to the Cause? Are activities for the consolidation of local communities— such as Bahá'í children's classes— to be considered development endeavors?

16.

In its October 1983 message, the Universal House of Justice referred to Bahá'í social and economic development as an “enlarged dimension of the consolidation process.” The 1993 document “[Prospects for the Future](#)” describes the relationship between development and certain activities related to the consolidation of Bahá'í communities:

17.

In our zeal to pursue social and economic development in the context of expansion and consolidation we should avoid a pitfall that leads to the dissipation of energy and confusion: impressed by the inter-connectedness of all the factors that lead to community development, one may be tempted to define social and economic development as a synonym for the development of the Bahá'í community. According to such a definition, all efforts to develop the community, including the establishment of the Nineteen Day Feast, the holding of classes for the spiritual education of children, and the strengthening of Local and National Assemblies and their agencies, would have to be regarded as social and economic development projects. Such a broad definition overlooks the fact that the growth of the Bahá'í community is the result of a number of interacting processes, each directed by various institutions of the Administrative Order and their agencies in collaboration with one another. Social and economic development is only one component and must play a particular role in the growth process.

18.

The general relationship between teaching and social and economic development has been clarified in a memorandum dated 27 April 1998 to our Office from the Universal House of Justice:

19.

The relationship between teaching and social and economic development needs to be considered both in terms of certain fundamental principles and in the context of the processes which characterize the growth of the Bahá'í community. You are well aware of the relevant principles,

which include the following: Bahá'ís should give the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh liberally and unconditionally to humanity so that people may apply them to pressing social issues and uplift themselves materially and spiritually; in their dealings with society at large, the friends should be upright and avoid any trace of deception; social and economic development projects should not be used as an inducement to conversion; and funds from nonBahá'ís should not be utilized for strictly Bahá'í purposes. None of these diminishes the importance of the sacred obligation to teach the Cause. Teaching should remain the dominating passion of the life of every individual believer, and growth a major concern of the Bahá'í community.

20.

As the Bahá'í community has moved from one stage to the next, the range of activities that it has been able to undertake has increased. Its growth has been organic in nature and has implied gradual differentiation in functions. When the Bahá'í community was small in size, all of its interactions with society at large easily fitted together under the designation of direct and indirect teaching. But, over time, new dimensions of work appeared— involvement in civil society, highly organized diplomatic work, social action, and so on— each with its own aims, methods and resources. In a certain sense, it is possible to refer to all of these activities as teaching, since their ultimate purpose is the diffusion of the divine fragrances, the offering of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation to humankind, and service to society. But, in practice, it seems more fruitful to treat them as distinct but complementary lines of action. For example, simply designating certain social and economic development endeavors indirect teaching may cause confusion in at least two ways: On the one hand, it may give the impression that development activities should have as their primary and immediate objective the recruitment of new believers, which is, of course, not the case. On the other, it may suggest to some friends that they are fulfilling their obligation to teach merely by participating in social action.

21.

Social and economic development is an important area of activity in and of itself. Its justification should not be sought in its ability to produce enrollments; it complements teaching and also contributes to it. Naturally, when endeavors in the development field are successful, they increase the public's interest in the Faith and create new teaching opportunities for the Bahá'í community, opportunities which the friends should seize upon through their expansion and consolidation activities.

Participation In Development Efforts

22.

As the Bahá'í community becomes more involved in the affairs of society, enthusiasm is generated for Bahá'í social and economic development activities. Particularly, believers with some background in development-related fields often express their desire to assist projects as volunteers or consultants. Unfortunately, given the embryonic nature of current efforts, the capacity of projects to take advantage of such offers of service is limited. In a memorandum dated 11 March 1997 to our Office, the Universal House of Justice has written:

23.

The worldwide Bahá'í community, as an organic whole, transcends divisions prevalent in society today, such as “North” and “South”, “developed” and “underdeveloped”. Social and economic development efforts are undertaken by Bahá'ís, irrespective of the degree of material prosperity achieved by their nations, as they strive to apply the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh to the gradual process of building a new civilization. Every follower of Bahá'u'lláh is a member of this worldwide community and can rightfully offer to contribute to a specific endeavor in any country.

As the friends gain experience in social and economic development, and as they advance in their studies of various branches of learning or in their professional fields, individuals arise in every continent who have expertise in some aspect of development work and who wish to offer their services to projects at home or abroad. If their energies are not channelled effectively, and they are not given a realistic picture of Bahá'í development efforts, these friends will later become frustrated when they realize that the capacity of Bahá'í projects overseas to utilize their talents and services is limited.

24.

For this reason, it is important that conferences, seminars and promotional materials not reinforce an image of “development projects” as understood by society at large. Bahá'í efforts in this field generally take the form of grassroots initiatives carried out by small groups of believers in the towns and villages where they reside. As these initiatives are nurtured, some grow into more substantial programs with permanent administrative structures. Yet very few can be compared with the kind of complex projects promoted and funded by government agencies and large nongovernmental organizations.

25.

The effective use of the talents of individuals with particular expertise also demands vigilance in ensuring that the initiative of some, usually those with access to more resources, does not end up suffocating the initiatives of others. The Administrative Order is structured in a way that fosters initiative and safeguards the right of people to be meaningfully involved in the development of their own communities. Accordingly the activities of the friends in each country fall under the guidance of the institutions of the Faith in that country....

26.

In general, the determining factor in matching offers of service and assistance to projects should be the capacity of the projects to receive help and not the amount of resources available. It is quite possible that the talents of the friends, especially those in North America, exceed the capacity of the development projects elsewhere to receive assistance at this stage in the growth of the Faith. In this connection, the two-pronged approach you are pursuing seems most appropriate. While striving to help increase the capacity of projects worldwide, you are at the same time encouraging individual believers from more materially prosperous countries to become involved in Bahá'í projects at home. You should also continue encouraging them to participate in worthy endeavors outside the Faith in order to influence their professional fields and infuse them with the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh. They should be assured that this is, in and of itself, a tremendous service to the Cause and not feel that they are serving the Faith only if they dedicate themselves directly to Bahá'í projects.

Role of The Office of Social and Economic Development

27.

From the above discussion, it should be clear that Bahá'í social and economic development is not centrally organized and controlled. Projects belong to the believers and their communities on national and local levels, whether organized under the aegis of Bahá'í institutions or by Bahá'í-inspired agencies. These efforts emerge from the organic evolution of communities and are subject to the opportunities and limitations imposed by their current needs, resources and capacities.

28.

The role of the Office of Social and Economic Development is, the Universal House of justice explains, to provide “support and guidance” to Bahá'is engaged in development activity by

“coordinating the flow of human and financial resources to projects” and to nurture them by “providing general advice, technical and otherwise, in response to the questions that naturally arise in carrying out such endeavors.” More importantly, the Office acts “as a channel for learning about development, facilitating the exchange of information and materials and the sharing of lessons learned among those working under similar conditions.”

Junior Youth Spiritual Empowerment Campaign

Office of Social and Economic Development
Bahá'í World Centre

August 2002

Introduction

1. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, states that knowledge is the key to the progress of civilization. “It is inconceivable that any nation should achieve prosperity and success unless this paramount, this fundamental concern is carried forward.” At the same time, He observes that “the mass of the population is uninformed as to these vital agencies which would constitute an immediate remedy for society’s chronic ills” and that “because of their inadequate schooling, most of the population lack even the vocabulary to explain what they want.”
2. Bahá’u’lláh Himself emphasizes the power of expression. “Human utterance is an essence which aspireth to exert its influence and needeth moderation.” And He adds: Utterance must needs possess penetrating power. For if bereft of this quality it would fail to exert influence. And this penetrating influence dependeth on the spirit being pure and the heart stainless. Likewise it needeth moderation, without which the hearer would be unable to bear it, rather he would manifest opposition from the very outset. And moderation will be obtained by blending utterance with the tokens of divine wisdom which are recorded in the sacred Books and Tablets. Thus when the essence of one’s utterance is endowed with these two requisites it will prove highly effective and will be the prime factor in transforming the souls of men.
3. Above all other words is the Word of God. It is “the king of words and its pervasive influence is incalculable.” Through the Word of God the Manifestation recreates the human heart and mind and, thereby, sets in motion a process leading to a new civilization. The Universal House of Justice has explained, in a letter to all National Spiritual Assemblies, the importance of endowing each individual with capacity to interact with and respond to the Word of God. The Holy Word has been extolled by the Prophets of God as the medium of celestial power and the wellspring of all spiritual, social and material progress. Access to it, constant study of it and daily use of it in our individual lives are vital to the inner personal transformation towards which we strive and whose ultimate outer manifestation will be the emergence of that divine civilization

which is the promise of the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh.

4.

After analyzing the results of a series of pilot projects, the Office of Social and Economic Development has defined the parameters of a program aimed at the spiritual empowerment of junior youth. The program seeks to endow young people between the ages of 12 and 15 with the capabilities needed to effectively use “the word” as an instrument of their own transformation and the transformation of their society. It is intended not only for Bahá'ís, opening for them the opportunity to read and study the Word of God, but also for junior youth in general, whose engagement with Bahá'í-inspired themes will enable them to contribute more effectively to the progress of their communities, their nations, and the world.

5.

The present document outlines the parameters of the program, which, it is envisioned, will take different forms according to the reality of the country where it is implemented. It is the hope of the Office of Social and Economic Development that, as the program is established in country after country, a global campaign for the spiritual empowerment of junior youth, on whom the future so intimately depends, will emerge.

Background for a Campaign for Junior Youth

6.

The proposed campaign for junior youth is shaped by two interrelated experiences. The first is the experience that was gained from large-scale expansion in the Bahá'í world over more than three decades. From among the segments of any given population that embraced the Faith, invariably the junior youth responded with a high degree of energy and enthusiasm to consolidation activities. “Strategies to advance the process of entry by troops cannot ignore children and junior youth,” the Universal House of Justice explained in a message dated 26 November 1999, “if the victories won in one generation are not to be lost with the passage of time. It is imperative, then, that at this point in the process of systematization of the teaching work, definite steps be taken to ensure that the vision of the community fully embraces its younger members.” Similarly, in the Ridván 2000 message the House of Justice singles out this group for particular attention:

Among the young ones in the community are those known as junior youth, who fall between the ages of, say, 12 and 15. They represent a special group with special needs as they are somewhat in between childhood and youth when many changes are occurring within them. Creative attention must be devoted to involving them in programs of activity that will engage their interests, mold their capacities for teaching and service, and involve them in social interaction with older youth.

7.

The second body of experience that shaped the idea for a campaign comes from efforts to promote literacy in the Bahá'í world. In July 1989, the Universal House of Justice wrote to all National Spiritual Assemblies emphasizing the importance of every believer having access to the Holy Word. Reading provides “the most immediate access to the dynamic influence of the sacred Word” and is, therefore, “a fundamental right and privilege of every human being.” The House of Justice cited the example of the Iranian Bahá'í community, which, with no outside aid, created a multifaceted approach to education that resulted in a literate Bahá'í community, and called upon all national communities to take purposeful steps toward this same goal. “Systematic attention”, the House of Justice explained, needs to be given “to eventually eliminating illiteracy from the Bahá'í community.”

8. National communities responded to this call in a variety of ways. Recognizing that promoting literacy is a complex social process that requires sustained action over a considerable period of time, the Office of Social and Economic Development embarked on an endeavor to systematize the experience of these countries. The first step was the establishment of three pilot literacy projects in 1994, and four more in 1996. In February 1996, and again in November 1997, representatives from the projects gathered at the Bahá'í World Centre, together with a number of other interested persons and professionals in the field, to consult on their accomplishments. It was clear that some of the pilot efforts had achieved impressive results. What was most striking, however, was that, here again, junior youth had responded with a much higher level of enthusiasm than any other segment of the populations served.
9. The insights that emerged from these two experiences convinced the Office of Social and Economic Development that a campaign could be launched to reach on a global scale young people between the ages of 12 and 15. The analysis of successful approaches and methods in the field confirmed its conviction that literacy programs need to be designed in the broader context of enhancing the power of expression. Accordingly, it began to outline the components of a program for that purpose aimed at junior youth, which would allow the learning that had accumulated thus far to be rapidly diffused throughout the Bahá'í world. A few national communities, well positioned to take up the challenge, were asked to apply the program's elements in their countries, which served to clarify further its nature and parameters. These efforts constitute the initial stages of a campaign which will gather momentum each year as additional countries are invited to join the enterprise, spreading the program to new areas and embracing first thousands and eventually hundreds of thousands of young people.
10. It is important to underscore here that the campaign has not been designed as an instrument for teaching the Faith. Nor is the junior youth spiritual empowerment program intended to replace the classes that are conducted in every Bahá'í community for the Bahá'í education of the members of this age group. The campaign is, rather, an endeavor of the worldwide Bahá'í community in the field of social and economic development, the purpose of which is to equip young people with the words and a way of thinking that will enable them to engage in meaningful social action as they grow. Undoubtedly, many of those transformed by the program will be attracted to Bahá'u'lláh's teachings, and therefore opportunities should be provided for the junior youth to learn more about the Faith, if they choose. Additional information on the relationship between teaching the Faith and social and economic development can be found in the November 1999 document "[A Clarification of Some Issues Concerning Social and Economic Development in Local and National Communities](#)", prepared by the Office of Social and Economic Development.

General Parameters of the Program

11. What is described in the paragraphs below are the general parameters of a program for the spiritual empowerment of junior youth. When implemented in a given country, the program will assume a shape, and take on characteristics, suitable to the culture and local circumstances. In some, for instance, efforts will need to begin on a small scale and grow gradually and systematically over time. In others the institutional capacity will exist to reach thousands at the outset. Some will want to focus exclusively on the study of materials, while others will find it

more effective to incorporate a range of extracurricular activities in promotion of the arts and community service. In some, the program will extend throughout the year. In others, the circumstances of life will necessitate that it be offered in a concentrated period of several weeks once a year. Viewed from a global perspective, these diverse national endeavors will contribute to a campaign that is organic, proceeding at different rates in different places, that is sometimes a bit chaotic, but that is ever-advancing, driven by a worldwide process of learning.

Program Content

12.

Experience in the field of literacy amply demonstrates that to successfully impart the various skills related to the power of expression— reading, writing, speech— program content must be rich and meaningful. Empty passages, such as “The dog walks on the road,” bring little result. Students, whether adults or youth, respond best when themes and words have relevance to their lives, motivate them, and elicit their effective participation. In the case of junior youth, a Bahá’í-inspired program can go far in raising their consciousness to higher levels, awaking and strengthening in them the will to take charge of their own development and contribute to the progress of their communities. The materials to be used in the campaign, then, must strive to incorporate spiritual and moral themes that promote such a process of transformation. Further, the texts should include not only readings, but also exercises that address language skills, critical analysis and higher thought processes, moral values, and social action.

13.

What is being suggested is that national communities joining the campaign think of a program in terms of three levels and choose a set of core materials accordingly. The three levels would correspond roughly to the ages of 11 to 12, 12 to 13, and 13 to 14. Ideally, junior youth would enter the program at the age of 11 or 12 and progressively move through the levels year after year, completing it as they approach the age of 15, by which time, in one way or another, many of the patterns of thought that will characterize their endeavors throughout their lives will have been fixed. It is hoped that the program will have given them the first elements of a conceptual framework that will guide their future actions and enable them to play a fulfilling role in the life of humanity.

14.

Clearly, then, the selection of the core texts will be of paramount importance to the program’s success. Certain points should be borne in mind about the nature of this age group, if suitable materials are to be chosen and developed for each level. First and foremost, it should be remembered that junior youth are not children, as is evident from the previously quoted passage from the message of the Universal House of Justice. In many parts of the world, young people of this age will have already had weighty and demanding responsibilities thrust upon them. They have had their share of hardships and have acquired the ability to think deeply about issues, even though their thought processes may not be structured. When properly challenged, they have strong powers of concentration. It would be a mistake to think that they are satisfied with simply “having fun” or, worse, that serious matters need to be dressed up in the guise of games in order to arouse their interest. This is not to say that the texts would not be studied in an atmosphere of joy and happiness.

15.

The materials chosen for all three levels should be concerned with developing the capabilities of reading with good comprehension and expressing thoughts with clarity and eloquence. In addition, it is necessary to address at each level the broader question of the need for words to be

accompanied by pure deeds. It is assumed that the young people entering the program will possess some reading skills (the mechanics of reading and writing are discussed below). The materials selected for Level I ought to contain readings and exercises that further these basic skills, helping the students to reach the point where they can read with ease and begin to articulate ideas with some precision. While, out of necessity, the materials for this level will have to maintain a certain degree of simplicity, the tendency to confuse simplicity with superficiality should be avoided. It is envisioned, rather, that the themes of the readings would set the basis for the moral structures of the youth by cultivating certain attitudes and imparting essential moral concepts.

16.

For Level II, a range of texts needs to be selected that systematically builds on the foundation laid in the first level, both in terms of language proficiency and moral thought and action. In Level III the capabilities of reading with good comprehension and expressing thoughts with clarity and eloquence should be developed further and the discussion of moral reasoning broadened, making explicit some of the salient features of the conceptual framework the youth must gradually elaborate over the years to interact effectively with society.

17.

Examples of texts for all three levels are included in [the appendix](#). These will give an indication of the kind of materials that can be used in the program. Some national communities may wish to adopt these as their core texts so that they can begin without delay, but clearly they should not limit themselves to these items. Many materials will be needed at each level in order to create a rich educational environment, and it is hoped that, as the program takes root in country after country, a wide selection of Bahá'í-inspired materials for junior youth will become available.

18.

In addition to the study of the core texts, the opportunity should be given to the junior youth to practice their newfound skills. There are numerous stories and newspaper and magazine articles that will capture their interest, and the program should make generous use of these. There is also ample room for the development of other supplementary materials, designed specifically for the youth participating in the program, for example, a weekly or monthly news bulletin or comic books that tell uplifting stories. Special events in which the youth from an entire area or region come together to recite poetry, give talks, and sing songs can be organized as well.

19.

In many countries, a fundamental question regarding language will have to be addressed at the outset. It is not uncommon for two languages to be widely spoken by a given population: a tribal language or local dialect in which daily conversation occurs and the national language, usually the medium used in schools and in which reading materials are available. A decision will need to be made as to which language to use in the junior youth program. In some cases, the national language will be the obvious choice, while in others it may be necessary to work in the local language. Where the decision is not clear, various factors should be weighed. Materials presented in the local language may help to strengthen the connection between the young people and their community and culture. On the other hand, learning to read in one's national language opens the door to a wider body of knowledge that is the heritage of the human race. This is particularly true in the case of the Word of God at the present time when the range of Sacred Texts translated into local languages is so limited. One possibility would be for the students to begin with materials in the local language and to make a transition to the national language at a suitable point in the program.

Mechanics of Reading and Writing

20.

It is recognized that in some countries the educational system is weak and that, as a result, youth of this age group are not well grounded in the mechanics of reading and writing. In that case, provisions will have to be made to teach them the basic skills they will require for the successful study of the core texts. Many packages are available for this purpose, some prepared nationally and others designed by international organizations. Care should be exercised, however, that the materials chosen do not incorporate messages that are in conflict with Bahá'í principles. It is also possible, of course, to develop Bahá'í-inspired materials for teaching the mechanics of reading and writing. Several attempts to produce such materials have been made, and two examples are provided in the appendix which take different approaches.

21.

It should be noted that the content and structure of materials to teach basic literacy will vary significantly depending on the language. For example, English is usually taught using phonics or the whole-word recognition method, or some combination of the two. Spanish, and many other languages, lend themselves to instruction that concentrates on syllables. It may not be possible, therefore, simply to translate existing materials for reading mechanics from other countries. In fact there are various methods employed around the world, and any one of them could serve the needs of the program. Most studies indicate that more important than the specific method is the motivation of the students to learn.

The Delivery of Courses

22.

Institutes everywhere face the challenge of providing suitable educational programs for junior youth. So eager are they to learn and take part in study circles that it is impossible to keep them from joining the older members of their communities in the study of the institute's main sequence of courses. While some do well, most have not yet reached a level of maturity required to fully benefit from the courses. And experience shows that years later, when they have grown, many are not interested in restudying materials they have already seen so they miss the opportunity of gaining a more in-depth understanding of the subjects and sharpening their skills and abilities for service. One of the possible ways in which the junior youth spiritual empowerment program can be implemented, then, is in response to this challenge.

23.

In this approach to the delivery of courses, the program would be offered in study circles by tutors trained by the national or regional institute. Such study circles would develop their own dynamics suitable for junior youth. Activities that complement the study of the core text would need to be carefully organized, drawing on appropriate pedagogical methods to maintain the interest and canalize the energies of these young people. It is envisioned that the training required by a tutor to work effectively with this age group would constitute the first course on a specialized branch in the institute's curriculum. The materials employed in tutor training would gradually need to be developed over time through a process of consultation, action, and reflection on action.

24.

However, the junior youth program need not be limited in use to study circles, regularly held throughout the year. Experience suggests that there are other ways in which courses could be delivered, whether by the institute, a national committee, or a Bahá'í-inspired agency operating in the country. One approach would be to offer the courses during a span of six to eight weeks of

intensive study during the school holidays. Every year volunteer tutors would participate in a special training session prior to the launch of the endeavor. They would then be deployed with the aim of forming small study groups in villages and towns throughout the region or country. Just as the program is intended for all youth, whether members of the Bahá'í community or not, so too could the tutors be drawn from the wider community in order to ensure adequate coverage and to reach large numbers. Depending on the circumstances, the volunteer tutors could be asked to live in the villages where they are working, spend a few hours every day helping the junior youth to complete one level of study, and devote the rest of their time to carrying out other activities with the youth and serving the local community. In that case, they would be able to establish a special relationship with their students and return the following year to take the groups through the next level of study.

25.

It should be mentioned that the two approaches described above are not mutually exclusive. Some national communities may find it useful to offer the program in the setting of study circles all year round, as well as through intensive periods of study. Of course, when efforts begin in any given national community, the initial groups may contain students of various ages, but eventually the time will come when the youth can be separated into the three age groups mentioned earlier. Another approach, entirely different, would be to introduce the program into the formal educational system of the country. Here again, the key to success would be to provide proper training to the teachers. No doubt as the program spreads to more and more countries and the global campaign unfolds, other approaches for the delivery of courses will emerge.

[Note: See [PDF](#) for related material]