

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

4 February 2018

Transmitted by email:

U.S.A.

Dear Bahá'í Friend,

The Universal House of Justice has received your email letter dated 2 October 2017 in which you share your experiences and concerns regarding the American Bahá'í community and the issue of racism, including the thoughts you expressed in your letter dated 26 February 2017 to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, a copy of which you appended to your email. We have been asked to convey the following.

The House of Justice appreciates your thoughtful comments and admires your unflagging efforts over many years to address the challenge of racism in your nation, particularly at a time of its overt resurgence in a manner that would justifiably give rise to despair even in the stoutest heart. However discouraging the present events, however outrageous the injustices laid bare, however intractable the problem appears, such fresh evidences of this pernicious blight on American society can come as no surprise to those friends well informed of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's dire warnings as well as Shoghi Effendi's trenchant analysis anticipating the ultimate eradication of this evil tendency from the lives and the hearts of their fellow citizens. How much more must people endure in the years ahead? The current polarization in American society makes constructive dialogue and action ever more elusive. Even those fair-minded individuals who long to free themselves and their society from this problem—surely a vast portion of the nation—are paralyzed and divided by their divergent views, unable to create the unity necessary to advance along the path of constructive change.

It is in this context that the friends must understand their sacred obligation and the possibilities that lie before them. As you have observed, since the time of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's visit to the United States Bahá'ís have, whether individually or collectively, by themselves or in collaboration with others, been continually involved in diverse efforts to address prejudice and racism and build bonds and practices of racial accord. Such efforts, though sincere and even sacrificial, have yet to be raised to a level of systematic endeavor necessary for profound and lasting social change. Enclosed for your consideration is a copy of a letter written on behalf of the House of Justice to an individual believer concerning how the framework for action of the Plan offers precisely the vision and practical means by which Bahá'ís can, as their efforts are pursued in a learning mode, fulfill the high expectations the Guardian held for the American believers to help uproot the foundations of racism in your country. An extract is also provided from another letter which, in response to questions about climate change, offers guidance about how Bahá'ís can effectively participate in discourses about pressing social concerns.

Among the important lessons garnered over the past two decades is that, by focusing on insights derived from the most advanced and successful activities rather than by focusing on shortcomings and weaknesses, the community can come to understand what constitutes effective action and learn to disseminate the knowledge gained. Another lesson is how to approach the development of human resources in a manner that can efficiently multiply efforts and empower those who were previously left on the margins, or were otherwise unengaged, to become protagonists of a process of community building and social change. Therefore, it is not necessary at this time to propagate in the community a separate program centered on addressing racial prejudice before progress is possible, nor is there a need to remove one by one all the obstacles you describe before dynamic efforts can be established in a single community or neighborhood that can, once proven to be effective, be widely replicated. Consider, for example, the development of the junior youth spiritual empowerment program. Years ago, it was a mere concept; today it reaches hundreds of thousands and is having a profound impact on the villages, neighborhoods, islands, and schools where it is being vigorously implemented. This capacity for social transformation, increasingly being realized in the most advanced clusters, encompasses not just the work of community building but also the engagement of the believers, both in the discourses of society in all accessible social spaces as well as in projects of social and economic development.

The 25 February 2017 letter of your National Assembly written following consultations held at the Bahá'í World Centre is not intended simply to express a renewed concern with the challenges of race in your society and certainly not to introduce a new set of activities. It is a commitment to a path of systematic action and learning, involving community building, social action, and participation in the discourses of society, from which the community will never withdraw until the problems of race are completely resolved, no matter how long and difficult the path may be. Already your National Assembly is aware of the strivings of thousands of friends who, like yourself, are engaged in initiatives of varying scope and effectiveness along these lines; through systematization and learning there is every confidence that, as each year goes by, we will understand the issues involved more deeply, act more effectively, and enlarge the circle of those with whom we are engaged.

The House of Justice hopes that those friends in the United States who resolve to renew their commitment to uprooting racism and laying the basis for a society that reflects interracial harmony can draw insight and inspiration from the unwavering resolve of the Bahá'ís in Iran. The messages written to the friends there in recent years, most of which have been translated into English and are publicly available, are instructive in this regard. For almost two centuries, and particularly the last four decades of relentless oppression, the Bahá'ís in Iran have remained forward-looking, dynamic, vibrant, and committed to serving Iranian society. They have refused to allow apprehension and anxiety to take hold or let any calamity perturb their hearts. They have drawn on the highest reservoirs of solidarity and collaboration and responded to oppression with constructive resilience, eschewing despair, surrender, resentment, and hate and transcending mere survival, to transform conditions of ignorance and prejudice and win the respect and collaboration of their fair-minded countrymen. Those believers in the United States who have labored so persistently to promote race unity, especially the African American friends, should appreciate in their own efforts over the years the same expression of constructive resilience, born of their great love for Bahá'u'lláh, and see in the recent turmoil opportunity rather than obstacle. They cannot, as you know, respond to the current reality in the manner consuming most of their fellow citizens; they must, by word and by deed, elevate the existing conversation and set in motion constructive approaches that will prove ever more

effective over time. Shoghi Effendi has explained that such problems as are now being witnessed are inevitable as the process of disintegration advances. “All humanity”, a letter written on his behalf observes, “is disturbed and suffering and confused; we cannot expect to not be disturbed and not to suffer—but we don’t have to be confused.” The way forward has never been clearer, particularly with the new initiative of your National Assembly to organize these matters within the proven framework for action guiding the Bahá’í world’s systematic endeavors.

Rest assured of the supplications of the House of Justice in the Holy Shrines that you and your family may be guided and sustained by the unfailing providence of the Blessed Beauty in all your efforts on behalf of His Cause.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

Enclosures

cc: National Assembly of the United States (with enclosures)