

THE BAHÁ'Í FAITH AND POLITICS

A compilation of Bahá'í texts



BAHÁ'ÍS OF THE UNITED STATES

OFFICE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS

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Introduction

“Be anxiously concerned with the needs of the age ye live in, and center your deliberations on its exigencies and requirements.”

~ Bahá'u'lláh

This compilation represents an effort to collect, in one place, many of the passages in the Bahá'í sacred writings and in statements from the head of the Bahá'í Faith that bear on political issues and questions. It is not intended to be exhaustive or authoritative, and the headings under which the passages appear are arbitrary and have been included solely for ease of reference. It is hoped that this compilation will serve as a starting point for Bahá'ís to familiarize themselves with the guidance on political issues and questions that has been provided by the Central Figures, the Guardian, and the Universal House of Justice, bearing in mind that guidance on this subject is continuing and evolving, and thus requires ongoing study.

Relationship to Government

Obedience

Forbear ye from concerning yourselves with the affairs of this world and all that pertaineth unto it, or from meddling with the activities of those who are its outward leaders.

The one true God, exalted be His glory, hath bestowed the government of the earth upon the kings. To none is given the right to act in any manner that would run counter to the considered views of them who are in authority. That which He hath reserved for Himself are the cities of men's hearts; and of these the loved ones of Him Who is the Sovereign Truth are, in this Day, as the keys. Please God they may, one and all, be enabled to unlock, through the power of the Most Great Name, the gates of these cities.

(Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 241)



In every country where any of this people reside, they must behave towards the government of that country with loyalty, honesty and truthfulness. This is that which hath been revealed at the behest of Him Who is the Ordainer, the Ancient of Days.

(Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 22)



From the beginning that hath no beginning the ensign proclaiming the words "He doeth whatsoever He willeth" hath been unfurled in all its splendor before His Manifestation. What mankind needeth in this day is obedience unto them that are in authority, and a faithful adherence to the cord of wisdom. The instruments which are essential to the immediate protection, the security and assurance of the human race have been entrusted to the hands, and lie in the grasp, of the governors of human society.

(Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleaning from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, CII, pp. 206-207)



The irrefutable command that the Blessed Perfection hath given in Tablets that the believers must obey the kings with the utmost sincerity and fidelity, and He hath forbidden them to interfere at all with political problems. He hath even prohibited the believers from discussing political affairs.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Tablets of Abdu’l-Bahá* v3, p. 497)



We must obey and be the well-wishers of the governments of the land, regard disloyalty unto a just king as disloyalty to God Himself and wishing evil to the government a transgression of the Cause of God.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, p. 8)



The Bahá'ís must not engage in political movements which lead to sedition. They must interest themselves in movements which conduce to law and order. In Persia at the present time the Bahá'ís have no part in the revolutionary upheavals which have terminated in lawlessness and rebellion. Nevertheless, a Bahá'í may hold a political office and be interested in politics of the right type. Ministers, state officials and governor-generals in Persia are Bahá'ís, and there are many other Bahá'ís holding governmental positions; but nowhere throughout the world should the followers of Bahá'u'lláh be engaged in seditious movements. For example, if there should be an uprising here in America having for its purpose the establishment of a despotic government, the Bahá'ís should not be connected with it.

The essence of the Bahá'í spirit is that, in order to establish a better social order and economic condition, there must be allegiance to the laws and principles of government. Under the laws which are to govern the world, the socialists may justly demand human rights but without resort to force and violence. The governments will enact these laws, establishing just legislation and economics in order that all humanity may enjoy a full measure of welfare and privilege; but this will always be according to legal protection and procedure. Without legislative administration, rights and demands fail, and the welfare of the commonwealth cannot be realized. Today the method of demand is the strike and resort to force, which is manifestly wrong and destructive of human foundations. Rightful privilege and demand must be set forth in laws and regulations.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 238)

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At the outset it should be made indubitably clear that the Bahá'í Cause being essentially a religious movement of a spiritual character stands above every political party or group, and thus cannot and should not act in contravention to the principles, laws, and doctrines of any government. Obedience to the regulations and orders of the state is, indeed, the sacred obligation of every true and loyal Bahá'í. Both Bahá'u'lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá have urged us all to be submissive and loyal to the political authorities of our respective countries. It follows, therefore, that our ... friends are under the sacred obligation to whole-heartedly obey the existing political regime, whatever be their personal view and criticisms of its actual working. There is nothing more contrary to the spirit of the Cause than open rebellion against the governmental authorities of a country, specially if they do not interfere in and do not oppose the inner and sacred beliefs and religious convictions of the individual.

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual, dated February 11, 1934)

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There is one more point to be emphasized in this connection. The principle of obedience to government does not place any Bahá'í under the obligation of identifying the teaching of His Faith with the political program enforced by the government. For such an identification, besides being erroneous and contrary to both the spirit as well as the form of the Bahá'í Message, would necessarily create a conflict within the conscience of every loyal believer.

For reasons which are only too obvious the Bahá'í philosophy of social and political organization cannot be fully reconciled with the political doctrines and conception that are current and much in vogue today. The wave of nationalism, so aggressive and so contagious in its effects, which has swept

not only over Europe but over a large part of mankind is, indeed, the very negation of the gospel of peace and of brotherhood proclaimed by Bahá'u'lláh. The actual trend in the political world is, indeed, far from being in the direction of the Bahá'í Teachings. The world is drawing nearer and nearer to a universal catastrophe which will mark the end of a bankrupt and of a fundamentally defective civilization.

From such considerations we can well conclude that we as Bahá'ís can in no wise identify the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh with man-made creeds and conceptions, which by their very nature are impotent to save the world from the dangers with which it is being so fiercely and so increasingly assailed.

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual dated February 11, 1934)



To all administrative regulations which the civil authorities have issued from time to time, or will issue in the future in that land, as in all other countries, the Bahá'í community, faithful to its sacred obligations towards its government, and conscious of its civic duties, has yielded, and will continue to yield implicit obedience. . . . To such orders, however, as are tantamount to a recantation of their faith by its members, or constitute an act of disloyalty to its spiritual, its basic and God-given principles and precepts, it will stubbornly refuse to bow, preferring imprisonment, deportation and all manner of persecution, including death – as already suffered by the twenty thousand martyrs that have laid down their lives in the path of its Founders – rather than follow the dictates of a temporal authority requiring it to renounce its allegiance to its cause.

(Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 372)



The attitude of the Bahá'ís must be twofold, complete obedience to the government of their country they reside in, and no interference, whatsoever in political matters or questions. What the Master's statement really means is obedience to a duly constituted Government, whatsoever that Government may be in form. We are not the ones, as individual Bahá'ís to judge our Government as just or unjust – for each believer would be sure to hold a different viewpoint, and within our own Bahá'í fold a hotbed of dissention would spring up and destroy our unity. We must build up our Bahá'í system, and leave the faulty systems of the world to go their own way. We cannot change them through becoming involved in them, on the contrary they will destroy us.

The Guardian does not think any part of this statement of his is suitable for publication in the Press. The less 'politics' is associated in any way with the name Bahá'í, the better. It should always be made clear that we are a religious non-political community working for humanitarian ends.

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to a National Teaching Committee dated July 3, 1948)



The cardinal principle which we must follow . . . is obedience to the government prevailing in any land in which we reside. We cannot, because, say, we do not personally like a totalitarian form of government, refuse to obey it when it becomes the ruling power. Nor can we join underground Movements which are a minority agitating against the prevailing government.

If a state of Revolution and complete chaos exists in a Country, so that it is impossible to say there is one government in power, then the friends must consult with their National or their Local Assembly, and be guided by what the Assembly considers the proper action to take; in other words which party might be best considered the legal governing authority.

We see, therefore, that we must do two things – shun politics like the plague, and be obedient to the government in power in the place where we reside. We cannot start judging how a particular government came into power, and therefore whether we should obey it or not. This would immediately plunge us into politics. We must obey in all cases except where a spiritual principle is involved such as denying our Faith. For these spiritual principles we must be willing to die. What we Bahá'ís must face is the fact that society is rapidly disintegrating – so rapidly that moral issues which were clear half a century ago are now hopelessly confused, and what is more, thoroughly mixed up with battling political interests. That is why the Bahá'ís must turn all their forces into the channel of building up the Bahá'í Cause and its administration. They can never change nor help the world in any other way at present. If they became involved in the issues the Governments of the world are struggling over, they will be lost. But if they build up a Bahá'í pattern they can offer it as a remedy when all else has failed.

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual, dated December 21, 1948)

Denial of Faith

To all these the followers of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh have with feelings of burning agony and heroic fortitude unanimously and unreservedly submitted, ever mindful of the guiding principles of Bahá'í conduct that in connection with their administrative activities, no matter how grievously interference with them might affect the course of the extension of the Movement, and the suspension of which does not constitute in itself a departure from the principle of loyalty to their Faith, the considered judgment and authoritative decrees issued by their responsible rulers must, if they be faithful to Bahá'u'lláh's and 'Abdu'l-Bahá's express injunctions, be thoroughly respected and loyally obeyed. In matters, however, that vitally affect the integrity and honor of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh, and are tantamount to a recantation of their faith and repudiation of their innermost belief, they are convinced, and are unhesitatingly prepared to vindicate by their life-blood the sincerity of their conviction, that no power on earth, neither the arts of the most insidious adversary nor the bloody weapons of the most tyrannical oppressor, can ever succeed in extorting from them a word or deed that might tend to stifle the voice of their conscience or tarnish the purity of their faith.

(Shoghi Effendi, *Bahá'í Administration*, p. 162)



No Bahá'í can any longer dissimulate his faith and practise the laws and ordinances of a previous Dispensation and call himself at the same time a believer. No compromise, no vacillation can any longer be tolerated. We must have the courage of our convictions and preserve the integrity of our glorious Cause.

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual, dated May 21, 1933)



For whereas the friends should obey the government under which they live, even at the risk of sacrificing all their administrative affairs and interests, they should under no circumstances suffer their inner religious beliefs and convictions to be violated and transgressed by any authority whatever. A distinction of a fundamental importance must, therefore, be made between spiritual and administrative matters. Whereas the former are sacred and inviolable and hence cannot be subject to compromise, the latter are secondary and can consequently be given up and even sacrificed for the sake of obedience to the laws and regulations of the government. Obedience to the state is so vital a principle of the Cause that should the authorities in ... decide today to prevent Bahá'ís from holding any meeting or publishing any literature they should obey.

...

But, as already pointed out, such an allegiance is confined merely to administrative matter which if checked can only retard the progress of the Faith for some time. In matters of belief, however, no compromise whatever should be allowed, even though the outcome of it be death or expulsion.

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual, dated February 11, 1934)



The Beloved Guardian has directed me to write you concerning information which he has just received of your having indicated your application for permanent residence in ..., that you were Protestants – and you did not indicate in any way that you were Bahá'ís.

The Guardian has instructed me to inform you that he is shocked and surprised to receive this news, and this action meets with his disapproval. He said that if advance information has been given that such action must not be taken under any circumstances; then there would be only one thing he could do and that would be removal of voting rights.

Certainly such action in the future would result in immediate removal of voting rights.

In Persia, even during the period of persecution, when life was in danger, and complete freedom offered to those who indicated they were Muslims and not Bahá'ís, the Guardian not only deprived anyone who did not openly declare his Faith of his voting rights, but even indicated they were Covenant breakers.

Thus you will see that it is completely inconsistent for a Bahá'í under any circumstances whatsoever, to indicate they are anything but a Bahá'í, regardless of what the result may be.

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to two believers, April 30, 1957)



Bahá'ís obey the law, Federal or state, unless submission to these laws amounts to a denial of their Faith. We live the Bahá'í life, fully and continuously, unless prevented by authorities. This implies, if it does not categorically state, that a Bahá'í is not required to make a judgment as to the precedence of federal or state law – this is for the courts to decide.

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly dated March 30, 1965)



Bahá'ís must live the Bahá'í life, fully and continuously, unless prevented by the authorities. If local, state, or federal authorities actively prohibit Bahá'í life or some aspect of it, then Bahá'ís must submit to these requirements in all cases except where a spiritual principle is involved such as a denial of faith. This, Bahá'ís cannot do under any circumstances. The lives the friends lead will prove to be the greatest teachers.

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly, dated July 23, 1964)

Patriotism

The love of one's country, instilled and stressed by the teaching of Islam, as "an element of the Faith of God," has not, through this declaration, this clarion-call of Bahá'u'lláh, been either condemned or disparaged. It should not, indeed it cannot, be construed as a repudiation, or regarded in the light of a censure, pronounced against a sane and intelligent patriotism, nor does it seek to undermine the allegiance and loyalty of any individual to his country, nor does it conflict with the legitimate aspirations, rights, and duties of any individual state or nation. All it does imply and proclaim is the insufficiency of patriotism, in view of the fundamental changes effected in the economic life of society and the interdependence of the nations, and as the consequence of the contraction of the world, through the revolution in the means of transportation and communication – conditions that did not and could not exist either in the days of Jesus Christ or of Muhammad. It calls for a wider loyalty, which should not, and indeed does not, conflict with lesser loyalties. It instills a love which, in view of its scope, must include and not exclude the love of one's own country. It lays, through this loyalty which it inspires, and this love which it infuses, the only foundation on which the concept of world citizenship can thrive, and the structure of world unification can rest. It does insist, however, on the subordination of national considerations and particularistic interests to the imperative and paramount claims of humanity as a whole, inasmuch as in a world of interdependent nations and peoples the advantage of the part is best to be reached by the advantage of the whole.

(Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day Is Come*, p. 127)



Though loyal to their respective governments, though profoundly interested in anything that affects their security and welfare, though anxious to share in whatever promotes their best interests, the Faith with which the followers of Bahá'u'lláh stand identified is one which they firmly believe God has raised high above the storms, the divisions, and controversies of the political arena. Their Faith they conceive to be essentially non-political, supra-national in character, rigidly non-partisan, and entirely dissociated from nationalistic ambitions, pursuits, and purposes. Such a Faith knows no division of class or of party. It subordinates, without hesitation or equivocation, every particularistic interest, be it personal, regional, or national, to the paramount interests of humanity, firmly convinced that in a world of inter-dependent peoples and nations the advantage of the part is best to be reached by the advantage of the whole, and that no abiding benefit can be conferred upon the component parts if the general interests of the entity itself are ignored or neglected.

(Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 198)

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The Faith which this order serves, safeguards and promotes is . . . essentially supernatural, supranational, entirely non-political, non-partisan, and diametrically opposed to any policy or school of thought that seeks to exalt any particular race, class or nation. It is free from any form of ecclesiasticism, has neither priesthood nor rituals, and is supported exclusively by voluntary contributions made by its avowed adherents. Though loyal to their respective governments, though imbued with the love of their own country, and anxious to promote at all times, its best interests, the followers of the Bahá'í Faith, nevertheless, viewing mankind as one entity, and profoundly attached to its vital interests, will not hesitate to subordinate every particular interest, be it personal, regional or national, to the over-riding interests of the generality of mankind, knowing full well that in a world of interdependent peoples and nations the advantage of the part is best to be reached by the advantage of the whole, and that no lasting result can be achieved by any of the component parts if the general interests of the entity itself are neglected.

(Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day is Come*, pp. vi-vii)

### **Bahá'í Institutions vis-à-vis Governmental Institutions**

The administrative order which lies embedded in the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh, and which the American believers have championed and are now establishing, should, under no circumstances, be identified with the principles underlying present-day democracies, nor is it identical with any purely aristocratic or autocratic form of government. The objectionable features inherent in each of these political systems are entirely avoided. It blends, as no system of human polity has as yet achieved, those salutary truths and beneficial elements which constitute the valuable contributions which each of these forms of government have made to society in the past.

(A postscript by Shoghi Effendi, from a letter written on his behalf to the National Spiritual Assemblies of the United States and Canada, dated November 18, 1933)

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Let them proclaim that in whatever country they reside, and however advanced their institutions, or profound their desire to enforce the laws, and apply the principles enunciated by Bahá'u'lláh, they will, unhesitatingly subordinate the operation of such laws and the application of such principles to the requirement and legal enactments of their respective governments. Theirs is not the purpose, while endeavoring to conduct and perfect the administrative affairs of their Faith to violate, under any circumstances the provisions of their country's constitution, much less to allow the machinery of their administration to supersede the government of their respective countries.

(From a letter of Shoghi Effendi to National Spiritual Assemblies of the United States and Canada, dated March 21, 1933)

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As the number of the Bahá'í communities in various parts of the world multiplies and their power, as a social force, becomes increasingly apparent, they will no doubt find themselves increasingly subjected to the pressure which men of authority and influence, in the political domain, will exercise in the hope of obtaining the support they require for the advancement of their aims. These communities will, moreover, feel a growing need of the good-will and the assistance of their respective governments in their efforts to widen the scope, and to consolidate the foundations, of the institutions committed to their charge. Let them beware lest, in their eagerness to further the aims of their beloved Cause, they should be led unwittingly to bargain with their Faith, to compromise with their essential principles, or to sacrifice, in return for any material advantage which their institutions may derive, the integrity of their spiritual ideals. Let them proclaim that in whatever country they reside, and however advanced their institutions, or profound their desire to enforce the laws, and apply the principles, enunciated by Bahá'u'lláh, they will, unhesitatingly, subordinate the operation of such laws and the application of such principles to the requirements and legal enactments of their respective governments. Theirs is not the purpose, while endeavoring to conduct and perfect the administrative affairs of their Faith, to violate, under any circumstances, the provisions of their country's constitution, much less to allow the machinery of their administration to supersede the government of their respective countries.

(Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 65)



The House of Justice... states that believers should take their differences to the Spiritual Assembly and abide by the decision of the Assembly. However... if Bahá'ís cannot negotiate a settlement of a dispute between them, and if the Spiritual Assembly cannot succeed in arbitrating a solution to the dispute, then there is no objection to the Bahá'ís having recourse to the civil courts. The Assembly should not hesitate to refuse to act in a case which it is satisfied is more properly a question for the law courts. However, the Assembly does not have the authority to prohibit a believer from having recourse to the civil courts if he decides to do so.

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Mexico, cited in a letter to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United Kingdom, dated February 9, 1983)



As to your query about the Local Spiritual Assembly, it is indeed a divine institution, created by Bahá'u'lláh in His Kitáb-i-Aqdas as the Local House of Justice. 'Abdu'l-Bahá has clearly set out its provenance, authority and duties and has explained the differences between it and other administrative institutions, whether of the past or the present. We refer you to the book 'Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sections 37, 38 and 40.

It is clear that while Local Spiritual Assemblies must supervise all Bahá'í matters in their areas, including arrangement for the Nineteen Day Feast, the observance of Holy Days, the caring for the spiritual welfare and Bahá'í education of the friends and children, etcetera, they and the friends themselves must at the same time be good citizens and loyal to the civil government, whether it be a Tribal Council, a Cacique or a municipal authority.

In another national community where the number of believers had increased to the point where the population of some villages had become 100% or almost 100% Bahá'í, the House of Justice upheld the above principle and stated that in each such village while they should elect the Local Spiritual Assembly, they should continue to elect the Local Council as required by the Government, and the function of those two bodies should be kept distant, even if their memberships were identical.

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Brazil, dated April 13, 1983)



In reply to your letter of September 12th the Universal House of Justice asked us to refer you to a letter on this subject written on behalf of the beloved Guardian on July 11th, 1956 to your National Spiritual Assembly:

“Regarding taking oaths, there is nothing in the Teachings on this subject. As a Bahá'í is enjoined by Bahá'u'lláh to be truthful, he would express his truthfulness, no matter what the formality of the law in any local place required of him. There can be no objection to Bahá'ís conforming to the requirements of the law court whatsoever they may be in such matters, as in no case would they constitute in any way a denial of their own beliefs as Bahá'ís.”

The above decision makes it clear that Bahá'ís may take an oath, if required, on any sacred book. The Universal House of Justice considers that it may be preferable for them to do so on a Bahá'í book, if possible.

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual of the United Kingdom, dated September 20, 1973)

## Participation in Politics

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### The Divine Physician's Remedy

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, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 213)



Their duties towards mankind in general are no less distinct and vital. Their impotence to stem the tide of onrushing calamities, their seeming helplessness in face of those cataclysmic forces that are to convulse human society, do not in the least detract from the urgency of their unique mission, nor exonerate them from those weighty responsibilities which they alone can and must assume. Humanity, heedless and impenitent, is admittedly hovering on the edge of an awful abyss, ready to precipitate itself into that titanic struggle, that crucible whose chastening fires alone can and will weld its antagonistic elements of race, class, religion and nation into one coherent system, one world commonwealth. 'The hour is approaching' is Bahá'u'lláh's own testimony, 'when the most great convulsion will have appeared.... I swear by God! The promised day is come, the day when tormenting trials will have surged above your heads, and beneath your feet, saying: "Taste ye, what your hands have wrought."' Not ours to question the almighty wisdom or fathom the inscrutable ways of Him in whose hands the ultimate destiny of an unregenerate yet potentially glorious race must lie.

Ours rather is the duty to believe that the worldwide community of the Most Great Name, and in particular, at the present time its vanguard in North America, however buffeted by the powerful currents of these troublous times, and however keen their awareness of the inevitability of the final eruption, can, if they will, rise to the level of their calling and discharge their functions, both in the period which is witnessing the confusion and breakdown of human institutions, and in the ensuing epoch during which the shattered basis of a dismembered society is to be recast, and its forces reshaped, re-directed and unified. With the age that is still unborn, with its herculean tasks and unsuspected glories, we need not concern ourselves at present. It is to the fierce struggle, the imperious duties, the distinctive contributions which the present generation of Bahá'ís are summoned to undertake and render that I feel we should, at this hour, direct our immediate and anxious attention. Though powerless to avert the impending contest the followers of Bahá'u'lláh can, by the spirit they evince and the efforts they exert help to circumscribe its range, shorten its duration, allay its hardships, proclaim its salutary consequences, and demonstrate its necessary and vital role in the shaping of human destiny. Theirs is the duty to hold, aloft and undimmed, the torch of Divine guidance, as the shades of night descend upon, and ultimately envelop the entire human race.

Theirs is the function, amidst its tumults, perils and agonies, to witness to the vision, and proclaim the approach, of that recreated society, that Christ-promised Kingdom, that World Order whose generative impulse is the spirit of none other than Bahá'u'lláh Himself, whose dominion is the entire planet, whose watchword is unity, whose animating power is the force of Justice, whose directive purpose is the reign of righteousness and truth, and whose supreme glory is the complete, the undisturbed and everlasting felicity of the whole of human kind. By the sublimity and serenity of their faith, by the steadiness and clarity of their vision, the incorruptibility of their character, the rigor of their discipline, the sanctity of their morals, and the unique example of their community life, they can and indeed must in a world polluted with its incurable corruptions, paralyzed by its haunting fears, torn by its devastating hatreds, and languishing under the weight of its appalling miseries demonstrate the validity of their claim to be regarded as the sole repository of that grace upon whose operation must depend the complete deliverance, the fundamental reorganization and the supreme felicity of all mankind.

(Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to America*, p. 28)



Humanity, whether viewed in the light of man's individual conduct or in the existing relationships between organized communities and nations, has, alas, strayed too far and suffered too great a decline to be redeemed through the unaided efforts of the best among its recognized rulers and statesmen – however disinterested their motives, however concerted their action, however unsparing in their zeal and devotion to its cause. No scheme which the calculations of the highest statesmanship may yet devise, no doctrine which the most distinguished exponents of economic theory may hope to advance, no principle which the most ardent of moralists may strive to inculcate, can provide, in the last resort, adequate foundations upon which the future of a distracted world can be built. No appeal for mutual tolerance which the worldly-wise might raise, however compelling and insistent, can calm its passions or help restore its vigor. Nor would any general scheme of mere organized international cooperation, in whatever sphere of human activity, however ingenious in conception or extensive in scope, succeed in removing the root cause of the evil that has so rudely upset the equilibrium of present-day society. Not even, I venture to assert, would the very act of devising the machinery required for the political and economic unification of the world – a principle that has been increasingly advocated in recent times – provide in itself the antidote against the poison that is steadily undermining the vigor of organized peoples and nations. What else, might we not confidently affirm, but the unreserved acceptance of the Divine Programme enunciated, with such simplicity and force as far back as sixty years ago, by Bahá'u'lláh, embodying in its essentials God's divinely appointed scheme for the unification of mankind in this age, coupled with an indomitable conviction in the unfailing efficacy of each and all of its provisions, is eventually capable of withstanding the forces of internal disintegration which, if unchecked, must needs continue to eat into the vitals of a despairing society.

(Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 33)



Let there be no mistake. The principle of the Oneness of Mankind -- the pivot round which all the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh revolve – is no mere outburst of ignorant emotionalism or an expression of



vague and pious hope. Its appeal is not to be merely identified with a reawakening of the spirit of brotherhood and good-will among men, nor does it aim solely at the fostering of harmonious cooperation among individual peoples and nations. Its implications are deeper, its claims greater than any which the Prophets of old were allowed to advance. Its message is applicable not only to the individual, but concerns itself primarily with the nature of those essential relationships that must bind all the states and nations as members of one human family. It does not constitute merely the enunciation of an ideal, but stands inseparably associated with an institution adequate to embody its truth, demonstrate its validity, and perpetuate its influence. It implies an organic change in the structure of present-day society, a change such as the world has not yet experienced. It constitutes a challenge, at once bold and universal, to outworn shibboleths of national creeds – creeds that have had their day and which must, in the ordinary course of events as shaped and controlled by Providence, give way to a new gospel, fundamentally different from, and infinitely superior to, what the world has already conceived. It calls for no less than the reconstruction and the demilitarization of the whole civilized world -- a world organically unified in all the essential aspects of its life, its political machinery, its spiritual aspiration, its trade and finance, its script and language, and yet infinite in the diversity of the national characteristics of its federated units.

It represents the consummation of human evolution -- an evolution that has had its earliest beginnings in the birth of family life, its subsequent development in the achievement of tribal solidarity, leading in turn to the constitution of the city-state, and expanding later into the institution of independent and sovereign nations.

The principle of the Oneness of Mankind, as proclaimed by Bahá'u'lláh, carries with it no more and no less than a solemn assertion that attainment to this final stage in this stupendous evolution is not only necessary but inevitable, that its realization is fast approaching, and that nothing short of a power that is born of God can succeed in establishing it.

So marvellous a conception finds its earliest manifestations in the efforts consciously exerted and the modest beginnings already achieved by the declared adherents of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh who, conscious of the sublimity of their calling and initiated into the ennobling principles of His Administration, are forging ahead to establish His Kingdom on this earth. It has its indirect manifestations in the gradual diffusion of the spirit of world solidarity which is spontaneously arising out of the welter of a disorganized society.

(Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 42-44)

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Let them beware lest they allow themselves to become the tools of unscrupulous politicians, or to be entrapped by the treacherous devices of the plotters and the perfidious among their countrymen. Let them so shape their lives and regulate their conduct that no charge of secrecy, of fraud, of bribery or of intimidation may, however ill-founded, be brought against them. Let them rise above all particularism and partisanship, above the vain disputes, the petty calculations, the transient passions that agitate the face, and engage the attention, of a changing world. It is their duty to strive to distinguish, as clearly as they possibly can, and if needed with the aid of their elected representatives, such posts and functions as are either diplomatic or political from those that are purely administrative in character, and which under no circumstances are affected by the changes and chances that political

activities and party government, in every land, must necessarily involve. Let them affirm their unyielding determination to stand, firmly and unreservedly, for the way of Bahá'u'lláh, to avoid the entanglements and bickerings inseparable from the pursuits of the politician, and to become worthy agencies of that Divine Polity which incarnates God's immutable Purpose for all men.

It should be made unmistakably clear that such an attitude implies neither the slightest indifference to the cause and interests of their own country, nor involves any insubordination on their part to the authority of recognized and established governments. Nor does it constitute a repudiation of their sacred obligation to promote, in the most effective manner, the best interests of their government and people. It indicates the desire cherished by every true and loyal follower of Bahá'u'lláh to serve, in an unselfish, unostentatious and patriotic fashion, the highest interests of the country to which he belongs, and in a way that would entail no departure from the high standards of integrity and truthfulness associated with the teachings of his Faith.

(Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 64)



Their Faith, Bahá'ís firmly believe, is moreover undenominational, non-sectarian, and wholly divorced from every ecclesiastical system, whatever its form, origin, or activities. No ecclesiastical organization, with its creeds, its traditions, its limitations, and exclusive outlook, can be said (as is the case with all existing political factions, parties, systems and programs) to conform, in all its aspects, to the cardinal tenets of Bahá'í belief. To some of the principles and ideals animating political and ecclesiastical institutions every conscientious follower of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh can, no doubt, readily subscribe. With none of these institutions, however, can he identify himself, nor can he unreservedly endorse the creeds, the principles and programs on which they are based.

How can a Faith, it should moreover be borne in mind, whose divinely-ordained institutions have been established within the jurisdiction of no less than forty different countries, the policies and interests of whose governments are continually clashing and growing more complex and confused every day – how can such a Faith, by allowing its adherents, whether individually or through its organized councils, to meddle in political activities, succeed in preserving the integrity of its teachings and in safeguarding the unity of its followers? How can it insure the vigorous, the uninterrupted and peaceful development of its expanding institutions? How can a Faith, whose ramifications have brought it into contact with mutually incompatible religious systems, sects and confessions, be in a position, if it permits its adherents to subscribe to obsolescent observances and doctrines, to claim the unconditional allegiance of those whom it is striving to incorporate into its divinely-appointed system? How can it avoid the constant friction, the misunderstandings and controversies which formal affiliation, as distinct from association, must inevitably engender? These directing and regulating principles of Bahá'í belief the upholders of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh feel bound, as their Administrative Order expands and consolidates itself, to assert and vigilantly apply. The exigencies of a slowly crystallizing Faith impose upon them a duty which they cannot shirk, a responsibility they cannot evade.

(Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 198-199)



God's purpose is none other than to usher in, in ways He alone can bring about, and the full significance of which He alone can fathom, the Great, the Golden Age of a long-divided, a long-afflicted humanity. Its present state, indeed even its immediate future, is dark, distressingly dark. Its distant future, however, is radiant, gloriously radiant – so radiant that no eye can visualize it.

(Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day is Come*, p. 116)



The world is, in truth, moving on towards its destiny. The interdependence of the peoples and nations of the earth, whatever the leaders of the divisive forces of the world may say or do, is already an accomplished fact. Its unity in the economic sphere is now understood and recognized. The welfare of the part means the welfare of the whole, and the distress of the part brings distress to the whole. The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh has, in His own words, “lent a fresh impulse and set a new direction” to this vast process now operating in the world. The fires lit by this great ordeal are the consequences of men’s failure to recognize it. They are, moreover, hastening its consummation. Adversity, prolonged, world wide, afflictive, allied to chaos and universal destruction, must needs convulse the nations, stir the conscience of the world, disillusion the masses, precipitate a radical change in the very conception of society, and coalesce ultimately the disjointed, the bleeding limbs of mankind into one body, single, organically united, and indivisible.

To the general character, the implications and features of this world commonwealth, destined to emerge, sooner or later, out of the carnage, agony, and havoc of this great world convulsion, I have already referred in my previous communications. Suffice it to say that this consummation will, by its very nature, be a gradual process, and must, as Bahá'u'lláh has Himself anticipated, lead at first to the establishment of that Lesser Peace which the nations of the earth, as yet unconscious of His Revelation and yet unwittingly enforcing the general principles which He has enunciated, will themselves establish. This momentous and historic step, involving the reconstruction of mankind, as the result of the universal recognition of its oneness and wholeness, will bring in its wake the spiritualization of the masses, consequent to the recognition of the character, and the acknowledgment of the claims, of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh – the essential condition to that ultimate fusion of all races, creeds, classes, and nations which must signalize the emergence of His New World Order.

Then will the coming of age of the entire human race be proclaimed and celebrated by all the peoples and nations of the earth. Then will the banner of the Most Great Peace be hoisted. Then will the worldwide sovereignty of Bahá'u'lláh – the Establisher of the Kingdom of the Father foretold by the Son, and anticipated by the Prophets of God before Him and after Him – be recognized, acclaimed, and firmly established. Then will a world civilization be born, flourish, and perpetuate itself, a civilization with a fullness of life such as the world has never seen nor can as yet conceive. Then will the Everlasting Covenant be fulfilled in its completeness. Then will the promise enshrined in all the Books of God be redeemed, and all the prophecies uttered by the Prophets of old come to pass, and the vision of seers and poets be realized. Then will the planet, galvanized through the universal belief of its dwellers in one God, and their allegiance to one common Revelation, mirror, within the limitations imposed upon it, the effulgent glories of the sovereignty of Bahá'u'lláh, shining in the plenitude of its splendor in the Abha Paradise, and be made the footstool of His Throne on high, and

acclaimed as the earthly heaven, capable of fulfilling that ineffable destiny fixed for it, from time immemorial, by the love and wisdom of its Creator.

Not ours, puny mortals that we are, to attempt, at so critical a stage in the long and checkered history of mankind, to arrive at a precise and satisfactory understanding of the steps which must successively lead a bleeding humanity, wretchedly oblivious of its God, and careless of Bahá'u'lláh, from its calvary to its ultimate resurrection. Not ours, the living witnesses of the all-subduing potency of His Faith, to question, for a moment, and however dark the misery that enshrouds the world, the ability of Bahá'u'lláh to forge, with the hammer of His Will, and through the fire of tribulation, upon the anvil of this travailing age, and in the particular shape His mind has envisioned, these scattered and mutually destructive fragments into which a perverse world has fallen, into one single unit, solid and indivisible, able to execute His design for the children of men.

Ours rather the duty, however confused the scene, however dismal the present outlook, however circumscribed the resources we dispose of, to labor serenely, confidently, and unremittingly to lend our share of assistance, in whichever way circumstances may enable us, to the operation of the forces which, as marshaled and directed by Bahá'u'lláh, are leading humanity out of the valley of misery and shame to the loftiest summits of power and glory.

(Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day is Come*, p. 122)



[W]e will gladly attempt to clarify some of the points which bewilder you in the relationship of Bahá'ís to politics. This is a matter of very great importance, particularly in these days when the world situation is so confused; an unwise act or statement by a Bahá'í in one country could result in a grave setback for the Faith there or elsewhere – and even loss of the lives of fellow believers.

The whole conduct of a Bahá'í in relation to the problems, sufferings and bewilderment of his fellowmen should be viewed in the light of God's purpose for mankind in this age and the processes He has set in motion for its achievement.

When Bahá'u'lláh proclaimed His Message to the world in the nineteenth century He made it abundantly clear that the first step essential for the peace and progress of mankind was its unification. As He says, "The well-being of mankind, its peace and security are unattainable unless and until its unity is firmly established." (*The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 203) To this day, however, you will find most people take the opposite point of view: they look upon unity as an ultimate almost unattainable goal and concentrate first on remedying all the other ills of mankind. If they did but know it, these other ills are but various symptoms and side effects of the basic disease – disunity.

Bahá'u'lláh has, furthermore, stated that the revivification of mankind and the curing of all its ills can be achieved only through the instrumentality of His Faith. "The vitality of men's belief in God is dying out in every land; nothing short of His wholesome medicine can ever restore it. The corrosion of ungodliness is eating into the vitals of human society; what else but the Elixir of His potent Revelation can cleanse and revive it?" (*Gleanings*, XCIX) "That which the Lord hath ordained as the sovereign remedy and mightiest instrument for the healing of all the world is the union of all its peoples in one universal Cause, one common Faith. This can in no wise be achieved except through

the power of a skilled, an all-powerful and inspired Physician. This, verily, is the truth, and all else naught but error.”

...

Because love of our fellow men and anguish at their plight are essential parts of a true Bahá'í's life, we are continually drawn to do what we can to help them. It is vitally important that we do so whenever the occasion presents itself, for our actions must say the same thing as our words – but this compassion for our fellows must not be allowed to divert our energies into channels which are ultimately doomed to failure, causing us to neglect the most important and fundamental work of all. There are hundreds of thousands of well-wishers of mankind who devote their lives to works of relief and charity, but a pitiful few to do the work which God Himself most wants done: the spiritual awakening and regeneration of mankind.

It is often through our misguided feeling that we can somehow aid our fellows better by some activity outside the Faith, that Bahá'ís are led to indulge in politics. This is a dangerous delusion. As Shoghi Effendi's secretary wrote on his behalf: “What we Bahá'ís must face is the fact that society is disintegrating so rapidly that moral issues which were clear a half century ago are now hopelessly confused and, what is more, thoroughly mixed up with battling political interests. That is why the Bahá'ís must turn all their forces into the channel of building up the Bahá'í Cause and its administration. They can neither change nor help the world in any other way at present. If they become involved in the issues the governments of the world are struggling over, they will be lost. But if they build up the Bahá'í pattern they can offer it as a remedy when all else has failed.” (Bahá'í News No. 241, March 1951, p. 14) “...We must build up our Bahá'í system, and leave the faulty systems of the world to go their way. We cannot change them through becoming involved in them; on the contrary, they will destroy us.” (Bahá'í News No. 215, January 1949, p- 1)

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual, dated December 8, 1967)

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It is not our purpose to impose Bahá'í teachings upon others by persuading the powers that be to enact laws enforcing Bahá'í principles, nor to join movements which have such legislation as their aim. The guidance that Bahá'í institutions offer to mankind does not comprise a series of specific answers to current problems, but rather the illumination of an entirely new way of life. Without this way of life the problems are insoluble; with it they will either not arise or, if they arise, can be resolved.

(From a letter written of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, dated July 21, 1968)

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[W]e 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, and also because of our refusal to become involved in politics, Bahá'ís are often accused of holding aloof from the “real problems” of their fellowmen. 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.

We should also remember that most people have no clear concept of the sort of world they wish to build, nor how to go about building it. Even those who are concerned to improve conditions are therefore reduced to combating every apparent evil that takes their attention. Willingness to fight against evils, whether in the form of conditions or embodied in evil men, has thus become for most people the touchstone by which they judge a person's moral worth. Bahá'ís, on the other hand, know the goal they are working towards and know what they must do, step by step, to attain it. Their whole energy is directed towards the building of the good, a good which has such a positive strength that in the face of it the multitude of evils – which are in essence negative – will fade away and be no more. To enter into the quixotic tournament of demolishing one by one the evils in the world is, to a Bahá'í, a vain waste of time and effort. His whole life is directed towards proclaiming the Message of Bahá'u'lláh, reviving the spiritual life of his fellowmen, uniting them in a divinely-created World Order, and then, as the Order grows in strength and influence, he will see the power of that Message transforming the whole human society and progressively solving the problems and removing the injustices which have so long bedeviled the world.

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



You ask if silence on the part of Bahá'ís will not allow chaos and human humiliation to be a permanent feature on earth, and state that shunning of politics by the Bahá'ís can but weaken the freedom fighters of the world. When viewing the conditions of our society we see a world beset by ills and groaning under the burden of suffering. This suffering, Bahá'u'lláh has Himself testified, is because the “body” of the world, “though created whole and perfect, has been afflicted, through divers causes, with grave ills and maladies,” and “its sickness waxed more severe, as it fell under the

treatment of unskilled physicians who have spurred on the steed of their worldly desires and have erred grievously.” Bahá’u’lláh’s statement in this passage concludes with the assertion that the “sovereign remedy” lies in turning and submitting to the “skilled,” the “all-powerful,” and “inspired Physician. This, verily, is the truth, and all else naught but error.

This Divine Physician has assured us in His Writings that God is All-Seeing and All-Knowing and has willed to establish in this Day and among men His everlasting Kingdom. “The whole earth,” Bahá’u’lláh has stated, “is now in a state of pregnancy. The day is approaching when it will have yielded its noblest fruits, when from it will have sprung forth the loftiest trees, the most enchanting blossoms, the most heavenly blessings.” In order to achieve this purpose God sent us the spirit and message of the New Day through two successive Manifestations both of Whom the generality of mankind have rejected, and have, alas, preferred to continue in their own blindness and perversity. Commenting on such a world spectacle, Bahá’u’lláh wrote: “Soon will the present-day order be rolled up, and a new one spread out in its stead.” “After a time,” He further wrote, “all the governments on earth will change. Oppression will envelop the world. And following a universal convulsion, the sun of justice will rise from the horizon of the unseen realm.”

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual, dated July 7, 1976)



As lawlessness spreads in the world, as governments rise and fall, as rival groups and feuding peoples struggle, each for its own advantage, the plight of the oppressed and the deprived wrings the heart of every true Bahá’í, tempting him to cry out in protest or to arise in wrath at the perpetrators of injustice. For this is a time of testing which calls to mind Bahá’u’lláh’s words, “O concourse of the heedless! I swear by God! The promised day is come, the day when tormenting trials will have surged above your heads, and beneath your feet, saying: ‘Taste ye what your hands have wrought!’”

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

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá’ís of the world, dated Naw-Rúz 136 (1979))



The piecemeal efforts of those . . . who are concerned with the many grievous ills facing humanity have had little lasting success. Their well-meaning endeavours have suffered from a lack of appreciation of the spiritual origin of these illnesses and a lack of understanding that the only lasting solution lies in acceptance of the remedies of the Divine Physician.

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual, dated March 24, 1998)

The Bahá'í Approach to Politics

Let your vision be world-embracing, rather than confined to your own self.

(Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 94)



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.

(Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 213)



O people of God! Do not busy yourselves in your own concerns; let your thoughts be fixed upon that which will rehabilitate the fortunes of mankind and sanctify the hearts and souls of men. This can best be achieved through pure and holy deeds, through a virtuous life and a goodly behaviour. Valiant acts will ensure the triumph of this Cause, and a saintly character will reinforce its power. Cleave unto righteousness, O people of Bahá! This, verily, is the commandment which this wronged One hath given unto you, and the first choice of His unrestrained Will for every one of you.

(Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p.94)



[T]he irrefutable command that the Blessed Perfection hath given in Tablets that the believers must obey the kings with the utmost sincerity and fidelity, and He hath forbidden them to interfere at all with political problems. He hath even prohibited the believers from discussing political affairs.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Tablets of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá* v3, p. 497)



O handmaid of the Lord! Speak thou no word of politics; thy task concerneth the life of the soul, for this verily leadeth to man’s joy in the world of God. Except to speak well of them, make thou no mention of the earth’s kings, and the worldly governments thereof. Rather, confine thine utterance to spreading the blissful tidings of the Kingdom of God, and demonstrating the influence of the Word of God, and the holiness of the Cause of God. Tell thou of abiding joy and spiritual delights, and godlike qualities, and of how the Sun of Truth hath risen above the earth’s horizons: tell of the blowing of the spirit of life into the body of the world.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, pp. 92-93)



The Guardian wishes me to draw the attention of the Friends through you that they should be very careful in their public addresses not to mention any political figures – either side with them or

denounce them. This is the first thing to bear in mind. Otherwise they will involve the friends in political matters, which is infinitely dangerous to the Cause.

(Shoghi Effendi, *Principles of Bahá'í Administration*, p. 32)



Loyalty (to the) World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, security of its basic institutions, both imperatively demand all its avowed supporters . . . in these days when sinister uncontrollable forces are deepening (the) cleavage sundering peoples, nations, creeds (and) classes, (to) resolve, despite (the) pressure (of) fast crystallizing public opinion, (to) abstain individually and collectively, in word (and) action, informally as well as in all official utterances and public actions, from assigning blame, taking sides, however indirectly, in recurring political crises now agitating (and) ultimately engulfing human society. Grave apprehension lest cumulative effect (of) such compromises (should) disintegrate (the) fabric, clog (the) channel of grace that sustains (the) system of God's essentially supranational, supernatural order so laboriously evolved, so recently established.

(Shoghi Effendi, *Directives from the Guardian*, p. 56 (from a cablegram))



The Bahá'í Faith as it forges ahead throughout the western world and particularly in lands where the political machinery is corrupt and political passions and prejudices are dominant among the masses, should increasingly assert and demonstrate the fact that it is non-political in character, that it stands above the party, that it is neither apathetic to national interests nor opposed to any party or faction, and that it seeks through administrative channels, rather than through diplomatic and political posts to establish, beyond the shadow of a doubt, the capacity, the sane patriotism, the integrity and high-mindedness of its avowed adherents. This is the general and vital principle; it is for the National representatives to apply it with fidelity and vigor.

(A postscript by Shoghi Effendi, from a letter written on his behalf to an individual, dated October 22, 1932)



By the principle of noninterference in political matters we should not mean that only corrupt politics and partial and sectarian politics are to be avoided, but that any pronouncement on any current system of politics connected with any government must be shunned. We should not only take sides with no political party, group or system actually in use, but we should also refuse to commit ourselves to any statement which may be interpreted as being sympathetic or antagonistic to any existing political organization or philosophy. The attitude of the Bahá'ís must be one of complete aloofness. They are neither for nor against any system of politics. Not that they are the ill-wishers of their respective governments but that due to certain administrative machinery of their Faith they prefer not to get entangled in political affairs and to be misinterpreted and misunderstood by their countrymen.

In the light of this principle it becomes clear that to contribute articles on current political affairs to any newspaper must inevitably lead the writer to express, directly or in an indirect manner, his view and his criticisms on the subject. He is, in addition, always liable to be misinterpreted and misunderstood by the politicians. The best thing to do, therefore, is simply not to write on current policies at all.

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual, dated February 8, 1934)

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There is, however, one case in which one can criticize the present social and political order without being necessarily forced to side with or oppose any existing regime. And this is the method adopted by the Guardian in his 'Goal of a new World Order'. His criticisms of the world conditions beside being very general in character are abstract; that is, instead of condemning existing institutional organizations it goes deeper and analyzes the basic ideas and conceptions which have been responsible for their establishment. This being a mere intellectual and philosophical approach to the problem of world political crisis, there is no objection if you wish to try such a method, which immediately carries you from the field of practical politics to that of political theory. But in view of the fact that no clear-cut line can be drawn between theory and practice you should be extremely careful not to make too free a use of such method.

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual, dated March 2, 1934)

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The Bahá'ís should refrain from signing petitions designed to bring pressure on the Government which may have any political character whatsoever. There are so many other people who can carry on progressive types of activity, but only the Bahá'ís can do the work of Bahá'u'lláh.

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual, dated March 19, 1946)

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He feels that, although your desire to partake actively of the dangers and miseries afflicting so many millions of people today, is natural, and a noble impulse, there can be no comparison between the value of Bahá'í work and any other form of service to humanity.

If the Bahá'ís could evaluate their work properly they would see that, whereas other forms of relief work are superficial in character, alleviating the sufferings and ills of men for a short time at best, the work they are doing is to lay the foundation of a new spiritual Order in the world founded on the Word of God, operating according to the Laws He has laid down for this age. No one else can do this work except those who have fully realized the meaning of the Message of Bahá'u'lláh, whereas almost any courageous, sincere person can engage in relief work, etc.

The believers are building a refuge for mankind. This is their supreme, sacred task, and they should devote every moment they can to this task.

(Shoghi Effendi, *Directives from the Guardian*, p. 67)

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Another of the sacred duties incumbent upon the believers is that of avoiding participation in political discussions and intrigues which have become popular nowadays. What have the people of Bahá to do with political contention and controversy? With absolute certainty they must prove to the world that Bahá'ís by virtue of their beliefs, are loyal citizens of whatever country they reside in and are far removed from the machinations of conspirators and the perpetrators of destruction and chaos. Their ideal is the happiness of all the peoples of the world and sincere and wholehearted service to them. In

administrative positions they are obedient to their governments and carry out their duties with the utmost honesty and trustworthiness. They regard no faction as superior to another and prefer no individual above another. They oppose no one, for the Divine Pen has prohibited sedition and corruption and enjoined peace and harmony upon us. For more than a century Bahá'ís have proven by their deeds that they regard servitude and service to their fellowman as being more worthy than the privileges of power which can be gained from politics. In administering their own affairs, they rely on God rather than on the influence of those in power and authority. Particularly in these days when the enemies of the Faith have afflicted the Cause in the sacred land of Iran with the darts of calumny and slander on every side, the clear Iranian friends should be vigilant, both in their contact with other Iranians abroad and with people in general, and behave in such a way as to leave no doubt as to the independence and non-alignment of the Bahá'ís and their good will to all people, whether in Iran or elsewhere. They must not give a new excuse to cause trouble to those mischief-makers who have always sought to further their own unworthy ends by making the Bahá'í community a target for their malicious accusations.

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to Iranian Bahá'ís throughout the world, dated February 10, 1980)



One of the great obstacles to progress is the tendency of Bahá'ís to be sucked into the general attitudes and disputes that surround them, to be influenced, for example, as you yourself pointed out, by the prevailing attitude to marriage so that the divorce rate becomes a problem within the Bahá'í community itself which should be an example to the rest of society in such matters. Involvement in politics and controversial questions is another aspect of the same phenomenon. In one of His Tablets Bahá'u'lláh warns the Bahá'ís: “Dispute not with any one concerning the things of this world and its affairs, for God hath abandoned them to such as have set their affection upon them. Out of the whole world He hath chosen for Himself the hearts of men – hearts which the hosts of revelation and of utterance can subdue.” (Gleanings CXXVIII) As you realize, this cannot mean that Bahá'ís must not be controversial since, in many societies, being a Bahá'í is itself a controversial matter. The central importance of this principle of avoidance of politics and controversial matters is that Bahá'ís should not allow themselves to be drawn into the disputes of the many conflicting elements of the society around them. The aim of the Bahá'ís is to reconcile, to heal divisions, to bring about tolerance and mutual respect among men, and this aim is undermined if we allow ourselves to be swept along by the ephemeral passions of others. This does not mean that Bahá'ís cannot collaborate with any non-Bahá'í movement; it does mean that good judgment is required to distinguish those activities and associations which are beneficial and constructive from those which are divisive.

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual, dated January 3, 1982)



The principle of non-involvement in politics implies that Bahá'ís do not allow themselves to be drawn into the struggles and conflicting interests which divide the many factions and groups of their fellowmen.

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated March 31, 1982)



The fundamental purpose of our Faith is unity and the establishment of Peace. This goal, which is the longing of people throughout an increasingly insecure world, can only be achieved through the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh. Since it is only the Bahá'ís who can give these Teachings to mankind, the friends must weigh carefully how they will spend their time and energy and guard against associating with activities which unduly distract them from their primary responsibility of sharing the Message of Bahá'u'lláh.

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual, dated July 4, 1982)



No additional requirements should be laid upon new members at the time of their declaration of belief. Rather, your Assembly should undertake to make the issues clear with such friends so that prospective new adherents may know beforehand of the position of the Faith in regard to political connections. When it is found that, in spite of this, a new Bahá'í still has political associations or activities, he should be lovingly and patiently educated so that he will withdraw from them. Some will be able to achieve this immediately, but others will need time to sever their connections discreetly. This can be a delicate matter and requires an awareness of each individual's particular situation and obligations. Of course, if such a believer does not respond to the Assemblies efforts to disengage him from politics, he must be warned and, if this still produces no effect, the Assembly would ultimately have to consider depriving him of his voting right.

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Dominican Republic, dated July 12, 1984)



The issue of social justice is, as you know, central to the Bahá'í Revelation.

...

Whether in sickness or health, the human family constitutes a single species, and the condition of any part of it cannot be intelligently considered in isolation from this systemic oneness. As the present state of the world illustrates all too clearly, attempts by the leadership of society to proceed otherwise is merely to exacerbate the problems.

...

In responding to the challenges, whether immediate or long term, that the Bahá'í principles of social justice entail, it is vital that none of us lose sight, even momentarily, of the goal toward which all of our efforts are bent. 'Know thou, of a truth,' Bahá'u'lláh declares, 'these great oppressions that have befallen the world are preparing it for the advent of the Most Great Justice'. However great the demands of the work in which we are engaged, and however stressful it will undoubtedly become, we can be confident that the forces released in this age of transition – this greatest crisis in the history of the human race – ultimately reinforce the efforts we make, swell the ranks of the community we are building and empower the Cause we serve to achieve every objective its Founder has decreed for it.

It would be unthinkable that, faced with the appalling suffering afflicting the great majority of the peoples of the world, those of us whose lives have been illumined by this understanding of the issues at stake should not be moved to do all in our power to promote the welfare of humanity. The example of the daily life of the Master, in responding to every least opportunity that His severely limited circumstances offered, can leave no one in doubt that teaching the Cause must go hand in hand with service to our fellow human beings. As individuals, we most effectively follow ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s example to the extent that we understand – as He so clearly did – certain parameters within which our efforts must be carried out.

...

The Guardian described the emerging consciousness of the oneness of humankind that has been unfolding for the past hundred years as being driven by the two parallel and interrelated processes of integration and disintegration. It is by working in the context of the imperatives created by the two processes identified by Shoghi Effendi that we, as individuals, can respond effectively to the promptings of our conscience.

The most obvious parameter of this context is, of course, the moral obligation to demonstrate in our lives the sense of justice that the Faith teaches. Yet another is the concern you mention to avoid involvement in any form of partisan political action. This principle should not, however be misunderstood. The programme of the Bahá’í Cause itself operates in the political realm to the extent that it is concerned with inducing changes in public policy and behavior at local, national and international levels. To this end, the community collaborates with other likeminded organizations and works closely with sympathetic governments and United Nations agencies. In doing so, its efforts are scrupulous to avoid entanglement in agendas that serve the interests of particular parties, factions, or similarly biased political forces. This standard must likewise govern the behavior of individual believers.

...

An example of what can be achieved through intelligent and principled action of this nature was the struggle that took place in the second half of the twentieth century for the achievement of racial equality in such countries as the United States and South Africa. Decades before the issue had attracted any significant measure of public or governmental support, Bahá’ís were demonstrating in the conduct of their daily lives and the life of their communities – often at great personal risk – their unreserved commitment to the Bahá’í principle of the oneness of humankind. As opportunities expanded, the range of their efforts took advantage of such openings, and as political changes began to respond to changes in popular opinion, Bahá’ís were found in the forefront of the integrating forces that emerged. The Bahá’í community in the United States today may well represent the most fully integrated body of people in that country, a distinction widely hailed by leaders of the civil rights movement. The achievement is, in large measure, the victory of many hundreds of individual believers whose actions testified, in whatever circumstances presented themselves, to an unshakeable commitment to ideals that, for them as Bahá’ís, were matters of deep spiritual conviction.

It is significant that this achievement came without in any way compromising the Bahá’í principle of non-involvement in partisan politics or otherwise detracting from the image of the Cause in the minds of the general public. In doing what they could in the situation as they found it, American and South

African believers ensured that their commitment kept them on the leading edge of a major process of social change. These efforts simultaneously deepened their understanding of the spiritual issues at stake and thus strengthened the effectiveness of their community as a force for the advancement of society.

Inevitably, recognition of the parameters within which our work must be carried out will compel us to accept impediments that are not of our own making and that we readily recognize as wrong in principle. Tragically, as the Guardian emphasized, humanity is passing through the darkest period of its collective history. Many – perhaps most – of the injustices that cause great distress to people of conscience are without practical solutions at this stage of the historical process. Even the best intentioned efforts to impose such solutions as collective security, the relief of want, or the liberation of the oppressed all too often find themselves compromised and vitiated by political circumstances that are beyond immediate correction.

Not surprisingly, the recourse of many well-intentioned people faced with the frustration of their efforts is to engage in various forms of public protest. Where reaction of this kind is motivated by the dictates of conscience, as opposed to such reasons as the mere venting of personal frustration or violence for its own sake, the results are often extremely positive, contributing in no small measure to the awakening of popular concern and to the required revision of public policy. Obviously, the effectiveness of such intervention depends on the extent to which the ‘conscience’ motivating the activity is itself enlightened and its dictates relevant to the situation. You may find helpful, in this respect, the following extract from a letter written on behalf of the House of Justice to a believer inquiring about a related subject:

The functioning of one’s conscience... depends upon one’s understanding of right and wrong; the conscience of one person may be established upon a disinterested striving after truth and justice, while that of another may rest on an unthinking predisposition to act in accordance with that pattern of standards, principles and prohibitions which is a product of his social environment. Conscience, therefore, can serve either as a bulwark of an upright character or can represent an accumulation of prejudices learned from one’s forebears or absorbed from a limited social code.

...

A Bahá’í recognizes that one aspect of his spiritual and intellectual growth is to foster the development of his conscience in the light of divine Revelation – a Revelation which, in addition to providing a wealth of spiritual and ethical principles, exhorts man ‘to free himself from idle fancy and imitation, discern with the eye of oneness His glorious handiwork, and look into all things with a searching eye.’

An obvious example arises in discussions of the process of globalization, to which your letter alludes. The immense advantages, that this long-awaited stage in the evolution of human society brings with it, demand of government and civil society comparable efforts to ensure a fair distribution of its benefits to the whole of humankind. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá sets the issue squarely before us.

Consider an individual who has amassed treasures by colonizing a country for his profit: he has obtained an incomparable fortune and has secured profits and incomes which flow like a river, while a hundred thousand unfortunate people, weak and powerless, are in need of a mouthful of

bread. There is neither equality nor benevolence. So you see that general peace and joy are destroyed, and the welfare of humanity is negated to such an extent as to make fruitless the lives of many. For fortune, honours, commerce, industry are in the hands of some industrialists, while other people are submitted to quite a series of difficulties and to limitless troubles: they have neither advantages, nor profits, nor comforts, nor peace.

The challenges posed by this issue, which today affects the whole planet, are on a scale unprecedented in human history. Addressing them will require unity of understanding about what is at stake, an understanding that can only be achieved by searching analysis, open public discussion, and an unrelenting commitment to putting into effect agreed upon systems of control. Merely to state the case is to recognize that the process involved will be long and arduous. Nevertheless, to the extent that the process gradually assumes a rational and upright character, Bahá'ís will increasingly find many ways in which they can make significant contributions.

In the light of the Teachings, therefore, Bahá'ís should feel an obligation to be actively engaged in the process of the transformation of society. The vision inherent in the Faith, together with the framework created by such parameters as those discussed above, make it possible for each believer to work out a strategy of action appropriate to his or her particular situation.

Because the questions raised in your letter focus on the role of the individual believer, the foregoing has largely confined itself to that subject. The issues need also to be seen, however, in the larger perspective of the work of the Bahá'í community in creating an alternative model of social relationships, one that is not only drawing into its embrace an ever larger number of the earth's inhabitants, but that is thus becoming empowered to influence both public opinion and government policy. These latter concerns have been major features of the Faith's work ever since the days of the Master. Under the successive guidance of the Guardian and the Universal House of Justice, and to the extent that the parallel tasks of the expansion and consolidation of the Faith itself have permitted, Bahá'í institutions have cultivated means to take an ever growing part in shaping the agenda of civil society at local, national and international levels. The effectiveness of this involvement was strikingly recognized in the prominence accorded to spokespersons of the Bahá'í International Community at United Nations Summits of the past decade such as those on the environment (Rio de Janeiro, 1992), social and economic development (Copenhagen, 1995) and the status of women (Beijing, 1995) – indeed in the central role of the Community in the collective planning work of nongovernmental organizations at the international level.

The Faith's programme in this respect is reinforced by a wide range of social and economic development projects around the world. At this stage, the relatively modest size of these undertakings is secondary to the experience being gained by a community that must educate itself in how best to help disadvantaged segments of society take charge of their own affairs and rise above the conditions that have so long oppressed them.

You may be confident that all such work, at both the international and grassroots levels already far beyond the scale that the size of the Bahá'í community itself might be assumed to make possible clarity of moral principle, deriving from Sacred Texts, together with the unity and coherence of the Faith's administrative order, not only impose on the Bahá'í community inescapable obligations in this

respect, but give it a unique advantage. The body of His followers, in the words of Bahá'u'lláh, must serve to 'leaven the peoples of the world'.

...

A related consideration is the need to be certain that our actions, even where they do not involve us in inappropriate political activity, should not be such as to reflect negatively on the Cause or harm its long-term interests. (Anguish over the suffering of children, for example, will find an appropriate expression in promoting relief efforts in one country in dire need, while entailing unacceptable risks and limitations if invested in another country whose situation is equally tragic). Wisdom further urges that Bahá'ís place great value on those activities which, apart from meeting an immediate need, are of a nature that develops, in both ourselves and our communities, capacities that increase our effectiveness as agents of social change .

In the context of such parameters, each one of us must determine the priorities that will govern his or her own efforts. The resources available at this time to any of us are painfully limited and must be invested in areas of service that will be genuinely productive. This is, admittedly, a process of experimentation and entails a degree of risk. Risk is, however, a part of life and cannot in itself be allowed to deter us from fulfilling our moral responsibilities as Bahá'ís. Rather, should we take comfort in the fact that we are acting not as isolated individuals, but as members of a committed global community whose institutions are empowered to guide our efforts and to correct whatever mistakes may ensue from sincere efforts to serve Bahá'u'lláh 's purpose for humankind.

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to an individual dated November 27, 2001)



As you are aware, it is not the practice of Bahá'í institutions or individuals to take positions on the political decisions of governments. One of the greatest obstacles to progress is the tendency of Bahá'ís to be drawn into the general attitudes and disputes that surround them. The central importance of the principle of avoidance of politics and controversial matters is that Bahá'ís should not allow themselves to be involved in the disputes of the many conflicting elements of the society around them.

The aim of the Bahá'ís is to reconcile viewpoints, to heal divisions, and to bring about tolerance and mutual respect among men, and this aim is undermined if we allow ourselves to be swept along by the ephemeral passions of others. This does not mean that Bahá'ís cannot collaborate with any non-Bahá'í movement; it does mean that good judgment is required to distinguish those activities and associations which are beneficial and constructive from those which are divisive.

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual, dated January 12, 2003)



It is not the practice of Bahá'í institutions to take a position on the political decisions of the government; therefore, the believers should not allow themselves to be pressured into making comments on political issues of the day. This does not mean that they should remain silent when questions are put to them, but they are required to refrain from taking sides and instead attempt to

give answers, drawn from the Bahá'í Writings, that provide an illuminating perspective on the underlying spiritual and social causes for the conflict and confusion besetting the world of humanity.

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of Iran, dated May 1, 2008)



You should take every opportunity to explain to your fellow citizens the fundamental principle of the Faith that strictly prohibits involvement in partisan political activity of any kind, whether local, national or international. Bahá'ís view government as a system for maintaining the welfare and orderly progress of human society, and obedience to the laws of the land is a distinguishing feature of their beliefs. Iran is dear to the Bahá'ís, who are the well-wishers of all. In whatever country they reside, including the birthplace of Bahá'u'lláh, they strive to promote the welfare of society. They are enjoined to work alongside their compatriots in fostering fellowship and unity and in establishing peace and justice. They seek to uphold their own rights, as well as the rights of others, through whatever legal means are available to them, conducting themselves at all times with honesty and integrity. They eschew conflict and dissension. They avoid contest for worldly power. Neither do they aspire to overthrow governments, nor do they participate in the schemings of others to do so. The record of the past one hundred and sixty years bears witness to this assertion.

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of Iran, dated October 31, 2008)



It is important to understand that the Bahá'í community does not seek to impose its values on others, nor does it pass judgment on others on the basis of its own moral standards. It does not see itself as one among competing social groups and organizations, each vying to establish its particular social agenda. In working for social justice Bahá'ís must inevitably distinguish between those dimensions of public issues that are in keeping with the Bahá'í Teachings, which they can actively support, and those that are not, which they would neither promote nor necessarily oppose.... Bahá'ís actively work for the establishment of world peace but, in the process, do not engage in partisan political activities directed against particular governments.

(From a letter from the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States, excerpting a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual, dated January 3, 2011)



Inseparable from the Bahá'í perspective on politics is a particular conception of history, its course and direction. Humanity, it is the firm conviction of every follower of Bahá'u'lláh, is approaching today the crowning stage in a millennia-long process which has brought it from its collective infancy to the threshold of maturity—a stage that will witness the unification of the human race. Not unlike the individual who passes through the unsettled yet promising period of adolescence, during which latent powers and capacities come to light, humankind as a whole is in the midst of an unprecedented transition. Behind so much of the turbulence and commotion of contemporary life are the fits and starts of a humanity struggling to come of age. Widely accepted practices and conventions, cherished attitudes and habits, are one by one being rendered obsolete, as the imperatives of maturity begin to assert themselves.

Bahá'ís are encouraged to see in the revolutionary changes taking place in every sphere of life the interaction of two fundamental processes. One is destructive in nature, while the other is integrative; both serve to carry humanity, each in its own way, along the path leading towards its full maturity. The operation of the former is everywhere apparent-in the vicissitudes that have afflicted time-honoured institutions, in the impotence of leaders at all levels to mend the fractures appearing in the structure of society, in the dismantling of social norms that have long held in check unseemly passions, and in the despondency and indifference exhibited not only by individuals but also by entire societies that have lost any vital sense of purpose. Though devastating in their effects, the forces of disintegration tend to sweep away barriers that block humanity's progress, opening space for the process of integration to draw diverse groups together and disclosing new opportunities for cooperation and collaboration.

Bahá'ís, of course, strive to align themselves, individually and collectively, with forces associated with the process of integration, which, they are confident, will continue to gain in strength, no matter how bleak the immediate horizons. Human affairs will be utterly reorganized, and an era of universal peace inaugurated.

Such is the view of history that underlies every endeavour pursued by the Bahá'í community.

...

This brings us, at last, to the specific question of political activity. The conviction of the Bahá'í community that humanity, having passed through earlier stages of social evolution, stands at the threshold of its collective maturity; its belief that the principle of the oneness of humankind, the hallmark of the age of maturity, implies a change in the very structure of society; its dedication to a learning process that, animated by this principle, explores the workings of a new set of relationships among the individual, the community and the institutions of society, the three protagonists in the advancement of civilization; its confidence that a revised conception of power, freed from the notion of dominance with the accompanying ideas of contest, contention, division and superiority, underlies the desired set of relationships; its commitment to a vision of a world that, benefitting from humanity's rich cultural diversity, abides no lines of separation-these all constitute essential elements of the framework that shapes the Bahá'í approach to politics set out in brief below.

Bahá'ís do not seek political power. They will not accept political posts in their respective governments, whatever the particular system in place, though they will take up positions which they deem to be purely administrative in nature. They will not affiliate themselves with political parties, become entangled in partisan issues, or participate in programmes tied to the divisive agendas of any group or faction. At the same time, Bahá'ís respect those who, out of a sincere desire to serve their countries, choose to pursue political aspirations or to engage in political activity. The approach adopted by the Bahá'í community of non-involvement in such activity is not intended as a statement expressing some fundamental objection to politics in its true sense; indeed, humanity organizes itself through its political affairs. Bahá'ís vote in civil elections, as long as they do not have to identify themselves with any party in order to do so. In this connection, they view government as a system for maintaining the welfare and orderly progress of a society, and they undertake, one and all, to observe the laws of the land in which they reside, without allowing their inner religious beliefs to be violated. Bahá'ís will not be party to any instigation to overthrow a government. Nor will they interfere in

political relations between the governments of different nations. This does not mean that they are naive about political processes in the world today and make no distinction between just and tyrannical rule. The rulers of the earth have sacred obligations to fulfil towards their people, who should be seen as the most precious treasure of any nation. Wherever they reside, Bahá'ís endeavour to uphold the standard of justice, addressing inequities directed towards themselves or towards others, but only through lawful means available to them, eschewing all forms of violent protest. Moreover, in no way does the love they hold in their hearts for humanity run counter to the sense of duty they feel to expend their energies in service to their respective countries.

The approach, or strategy if you will, with the simple set of parameters outlined in the foregoing paragraph enables the community, in a world where nations and tribes are pitted one against the other and people are divided and separated by social structures, to maintain its cohesion and integrity as a global entity and to ensure that the activities of the Bahá'ís in one country do not jeopardize the existence of those elsewhere. Guarded against competing interests of nations and political parties, the Bahá'í community is thus able to build its capacity to contribute to processes that promote peace and unity.

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of Iran, dated March 2, 2013)

Nonpartisanship

[N]o vote cast or office undertaken, by a Bahá'í should necessarily constitute acceptance, by the voter or office holder of the entire programme of any political party. No Bahá'í can be regarded as either Republican or Democrat, as such. He is above all else, the supporter of the principles enunciated by Bahá'u'lláh with which, I am firmly convinced the programme of no political party is completely harmonious.

(From a letter of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada, dated January 26, 1933)

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[N]o loyal believer should under any circumstances commit himself in any way to a political program or policy formulated and upheld by a political party for affiliation with such a party necessarily entails repudiation of some principles and teachings of the Cause, or partial recognition of some of its fundamental verities. The friends should, therefore, keep aloof from party politics. What they should mainly keep away from under all circumstances and in all its forms is partisanship.

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual, dated December 17, 1935)

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[T]his principle is no other than that which involves the non-participation by the adherents of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh, whether in their individual capacities or collectively as local or national Assemblies, in any form of activity that might be interpreted, either directly or indirectly, as an interference in the political affairs of any particular government. Whether it be in the publications which they initiate and supervise; or in their official and public deliberations; or in the posts they

occupy and the services they render; or in the communications they address to their fellow-disciples; or in their dealings with men of eminence and authority; or in their affiliations with kindred societies and organizations, it is, I am firmly convinced, their first and sacred obligation to abstain from any word or deed that might be construed as a violation of this vital principle. Theirs is the duty to demonstrate, on one hand, the nonpolitical character of their Faith, and to assert, on the other, their unqualified loyalty and obedience to whatever is the considered judgment of their respective governments.

(Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 64)



We should – every one of us – remain aloof, in heart and in mind, in words and in deeds, from the political affairs and disputes of the Nations and of Governments. We should keep ourselves away from such thoughts. We should have no political connection with any of the parties and should join no faction of these different and warring sects.

Absolute impartiality in the matter of political parties should be shown by words and by deeds, and the love of the whole humanity, whether a Government or a nation, which is the basic teaching of Bahá'u'lláh, should also be shown by words and by deeds.

...

According to the exhortations of the Supreme Pen and the confirmatory explanations of the Covenant of God Bahá'ís are in no way allowed to enter into political affairs under any pretense or excuse; since such an action brings about disastrous results and ends in hurting the Cause of God and its intimate friends.

(Shoghi Effendi, *Directives from the Guardian*, p. 56)



"We Bahá'ís are one the world-over; we are seeking to build up a new World Order, divine in origin. How can we do this if every Bahá'í is a member of a different political party – some of them diametrically opposite to each other? Where is our unity then? We would be divided, because of politics, against ourselves, and this is the opposite of our purpose. Obviously if one Bahá'í in Austria is given freedom to choose a political party and join it, however good its aims may be, another Bahá'í in Japan or America, or India has the right to do the same thing and he might belong to a party the very opposite in principle to that which the Austrian Bahá'í belongs to. Where would be the unity of the Faith then? These two spiritual brothers would be working against each other because of their political affiliations (as the Christians of Europe have been doing in so many fratricidal wars)."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to two individuals, dated June 24, 1947)



Touching the publication of articles and pamphlets bearing on the controversial and political issues of the day, I desire to remind my dearly-beloved fellow-workers that at the present stage when the Cause is still in its infancy, any minute and detailed analysis by the Friends of subjects that are in the forefront of general discussion would often be misconstrued in certain quarters and give rise to

suspicions and misunderstandings that would react unfavorably on the Cause. They would tend to create a misconception of the real object, the true mission, and the fundamental character of the Bahá'í Faith. We should, while endeavoring to uphold loyally and expound conscientiously our social and moral principles in all their essence and purity, in all their bearings upon the divers phases of human society, insure that no direct reference or particular criticism in our exposition of the fundamentals of the Faith would tend to antagonize any existing institution, or help to identify a purely spiritual movement with the base clamorings and contentions of warring sects, factions, and nations. We should strive in all our utterances to combine the discretion and noble reticence of the wise with the frankness and passionate loyalty of the ardent advocate of an inspiring Faith. While refusing to utter the word that would needlessly alienate or estrange any individual, government, or people, we should fearlessly and unhesitatingly uphold and assert in their entirety such truths the knowledge of which we believe is vitally and urgently needed for the good and betterment of mankind.

(Shoghi Effendi, *Bahá'í Administration*, p. 102)



The Army of the Cause, advancing at the bidding of the Lord, to conquer the hearts of men, can never be defeated, but its rate of advance can be slowed down by acts of un wisdom and ignorance on the part of its supporters. We are writing you this letter to help in clarifying some of the issues that have, in the past, blurred the vision of some of the believers, and caused them to commit errors of judgment which have retarded the progress of the Faith in their countries.

One of these issues, and by far the most important, is a lack of appreciation of the implications of the Bahá'í principle of noninterference in political affairs. We find that 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi have given us clear and convincing reasons why we must uphold this principle. These reasons are summarized below for the study and deepening of the friends. It is our hope that these observations will not only help the friends to intelligently and radiantly follow the holy teachings on this matter, but will help them to explain the Bahá'í attitude to those who may question its wisdom and usefulness:

The Faith of God is the sole source of salvation for mankind today. The true cause of the ills of humanity is its disunity. No matter how perfect may be the machinery devised by the leaders of men for the political unity of the world, it will still not provide the antidote to the poison sapping the vigor of present-day society. These ills can be cured only through the instrumentality of God's Faith. There are many well-wishers of mankind who devote their efforts to relief work and charity and to the material well-being of man, but only Bahá'ís can do the work which God most wants done. When we devote ourselves to the work of the Faith we are doing a work which is the greatest aid and only refuge for a needy and divided world.

The Bahá'í Community is a worldwide organization seeking to establish true and universal peace on earth. If a Bahá'í works for one political party to overcome another it is negation of the very spirit of the Faith. Membership in any political party, therefore, necessarily entails repudiation of some or all of the principles of peace and unity proclaimed by Bahá'u'lláh. As 'Abdu'l-Bahá stated: 'Our Party is God's party; we do not belong to any party.'

If a Bahá'í were to insist on his right to support a certain political party he could not deny the same degree of freedom to other believers. This would remain that within the ranks of the Faith whose primary mission is to unite all men as one great family under God, there would be Bahá'ís opposed to each other. Where, then, would be the example of unity and harmony which the world is seeking?

If the institutions of the Faith, God forbid, became involved in politics, the Bahá'ís would find themselves arousing antagonism instead of love. If they took one stand in one country, they would be bound to change the views of the people in other countries about the aims and purposes of the Faith. By becoming involved in political disputes, the Bahá'ís instead of changing the world or helping it, would themselves be lost and destroyed. The world situation is so confused and moral issues which were once clear have become so mixed up with selfish and battling factions, that the best way Bahá'ís can serve the highest interests of their country and the cause of true salvation for the world, is to sacrifice their political pursuits and affiliations and wholeheartedly and fully support the divine system of Bahá'u'lláh.

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to National Spiritual Assemblies in Africa, dated February 8, 1970)



We have received your letter of 12 December 1973 concerning the problem of . . . who says that it is very difficult for him to keep his job as a teacher in a public school without being registered as a member of one of the political parties now in the government.

A similar question has arisen in some other countries, particularly in Africa where the one-party system is in use. Although we understand that there is more than one political party in your country, we think it would be helpful to you to have a summary of the instructions we have given to African Assemblies, and this is enclosed.

We suggest that ...'s case might offer your Assembly an opportunity to seek an appointment with the proper government official or officials to explain the Bahá'í position on non-interference in political affairs, as well as on obedience and loyalty to government. Your approach should be to seek advice on what can be done in ...'s situation and in similar cases to avoid identification with party politics while at the same time showing the utmost loyalty to the government. Certainly this would afford your Assembly yet another opportunity to proclaim the Faith and its principles and seek the respect and understanding of the officials.

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Bolivia, dated December 28, 1973)



1. The beloved Guardian repeatedly emphasized the principle of refusing to join any political party. In 'The Advent of Divine Justice' in speaking of the rectitude of conduct which must manifest itself in the Bahá'í community, he said: "It must characterize the attitude of every loyal believer towards non-acceptance of political posts, non-identification with political parties, non-participation on political controversies, and non-membership in political organizations...."

2. a. "If the National Spiritual Assembly is satisfied that membership in the party is not compulsory according to the law of the land, but is promoted merely by persuasion, the Bahá'ís should refrain from joining the party, whatever the personal sacrifices may be.

b. "If, however, it is ascertained by the National Spiritual Assembly, that the law requires every citizen to belong to the party, Bahá'ís may pay money equivalent to the dues involved, without accepting membership of the party. There is no objection to their carrying receipts indicating that the contribution has been made.

c. "If alternative 2b. is not possible, Bahá'ís have no choice but to accept membership, without becoming active in the party, such as holding offices."

(From a summary of instructions of the Universal House of Justice attached to a letter to the National Spiritual Assembly of Bolivia, dated December 28, 1973)

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It is contrary to Bahá'í principles for a believer to resort to partisan political action in asserting his rights or in seeking to obtain justice. It would be quite wrong for a Bahá'í to take up arms for a cause he or she believes to be just; such an action would be a direct contradiction of the aims of the Faith and of its laws. Believers are enjoined to deepen themselves more fully in the principles of world order expounded by Shoghi Effendi in his writings, so that they will gradually come to understand the underlying cause of the oppression of minorities, as well as the spiritual forces released by Bahá'u'lláh and animating the work of the Bahá'í community in laboriously erecting and perfecting the administrative institutions which are the means by which justice is being established in the world.

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to individuals, dated June 15, 1987)

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The desperate search for solutions to the social and economic problems afflicting these countries is tempting people, in increasing numbers, to indulge in partisan political activities; the indigenous Bahá'ís should refuse to be drawn into such divisive pursuits and should strive to acquire a more profound insight into the nature of the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, which offers a pattern for a future society distinguished by justice and unity, far removed from the contention of competing political interests.

(From a letter of The Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of Australasia, Ridván 1996)

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With hearts grieved by events unfolding in Iran, we address this letter to you, the steadfast followers of Bahá'u'lláh in that land. To the concern for your safety that has long weighed on us is now added mounting fear for the safety of millions of Iranian men and women, so many of them at the pinnacle of their youth, their vast potentialities yearning to be realized. How rapidly have veils been rent asunder! Cruelty meted out in calculated measures to you and others over the years has been unleashed in the streets of Iran for all humanity to see. No matter what the turn of events, we are confident you will adhere firmly to the fundamental principle of our Faith that strictly prohibits any involvement in partisan political activity by individual Bahá'ís or by Bahá'í institutions. Yet you cannot remain aloof and insensitive to the suffering of your people. Decades of hardship have

prepared each of you to stand as a beacon of strength in the circle of your family and friends, your neighbours and acquaintances, radiating hope and compassion to all those in need. Keep alive in your hearts the feeling of confidence that the future of Iran holds bright promise, the certitude that the light of knowledge will inevitably dispel the clouds of ignorance, the conviction that concern for justice will protect the nation from falling prey to calumny, and the belief that love will ultimately conquer hatred and enmity. You have demonstrated in the example of your lives that the proper response to oppression is neither to succumb in resignation nor to take on the characteristics of the oppressor. The victim of oppression can transcend it through an inner strength that shields the soul from bitterness and hatred and which sustains consistent, principled action. May the words of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá resound: “Iran shall become a focal centre of divine splendours. Her darksome soil will become luminous and her land will shine resplendent.” You and your compatriots are in our continued prayers.

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá’ís of Iran, dated June 23, 2009)



## Voting in Elections

[N]o Bahá’í vote for an officer nor Bahá’í participation in the affairs of the Republic shall involve acceptance by that individual of a program or policy that contravenes any vital principle, spiritual or social, of the Faith . . . .

“I feel it incumbent upon me to clarify the above statement, written in my behalf, by stating that no vote cast, or office undertaken, by a Bahá’í should necessarily constitute acceptance, by the voter or office holder, of the entire programme of any political party. No Bahá’í can be regarded as either a Republican or Democrat, as such. He is, above all else, the supporter of the principles enunciated by Bahá’u’lláh, with which, I am firmly convinced, the programme of no political party is completely harmonious.”

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual, dated January 26, 1933, with a postscript by Shoghi Effendi himself)



As regards the non-political character of the Faith . . . [t]he friends may vote, if they can do it without identifying themselves with one party or another. To enter the arena of party politics is surely detrimental to the best interests of the Faith and will harm the Cause. It remains for the individuals to so use their right to vote as to keep aloof from party politics, and always bear in mind that they are voting on the merits of the individual, rather than because he belongs to one party or another. The matter must be made perfectly clear to the individuals who will be left free to exercise their discretion and judgment. But if a certain person does enter into party politics and labors for the ascendancy of one party over another, and continues to do it against the expressed appeals and warnings of the Assembly, then the Assembly has the right to refuse him the right to vote in Bahá’í elections.

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada, dated March 16, 1933)





The main principle, as you know, is that the friends should refrain from participating in any political election, unless they ascertain that in casting their vote for this or that candidate they are not affiliating themselves with any political party or organization, and are not identifying themselves with any political program. The whole question hangs on the matter of identification, and not on voting.

The application of this principle the Guardian has left to the individuals who are conscientiously required to submit their own special cases in which they are doubtful to their Assemblies for consideration and guidance.

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual, dated December 28, 1936)



As a matter of principle, the Faith regards choices in electing individuals to office and voting on issues as being a private matter. Bahá'ís are therefore left free to perform these functions according to the dictates of their own consciences. It would thus be out of order for a Bahá'í institution to instruct the believers as to how they should vote in elections or on issues within or outside the Bahá'í community. One has to trust that the Bahá'í friends will act in such private functions according to the principles of their sacred beliefs.

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to an individual, dated September 1995)



One other point that may need to be mentioned is that the friends may, in practice, see that following fully the spiritual principles of Bahá'í elections while participating in a civil election is not an easy task. They should not feel, therefore, an undue guilt of conscience, whatever their decision, as the nature of these two elections is different.

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of Iran, dated February 4, 2008)



In connection with participation in presidential and parliamentary elections, the following is an extract from a letter dated 18 April 1956 written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer:

The Guardian feels that it is permissible for individuals to vote for members of Parliament, if they can so vote without becoming identified with political parties. In some countries this is feasible because an individual can vote by simply voting for an individual and not voting as a member of any party. In other countries this is very difficult.

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of Iran, dated May 1, 2008)

## Campaigns and Candidates

The Guardian wishes me to draw the attention of the friends through you that they should be very careful in their public utterances not to mention any political figures – either side with them or

denounce them. This is the first fact to bear in mind. Otherwise they will involve the friends in political matters, which is infinitely dangerous for the Cause.

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assemblies of the United States and Canada, dated January 12, 1933)



In reply to your query of 24 September concerning the involvement of a Bahá'í in producing television advertising for a political campaign, the Universal House has directed us to convey its advice that the person in question should refrain from activities promoting the campaign of a politician, although this should not be construed as a restriction on non-Bahá'í associates.

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Alaska, dated October 29, 1979)



Active support... of an individual who has announced his candidacy for political office is not permissible to Bahá'ís. Even if the person is not attached to a political party, the very fact of promoting his candidacy over that of other competitors is an act of partisanship, which is inimical to the principles of the Faith. As you well know, campaigning and nominations are forbidden in Bahá'í elections. The friends should endeavor to keep in mind the non-partisan character of the Faith and to employ the attitude of non-partisanship, to the greatest extent possible, in the exercise of their civic responsibilities as voters. Bahá'ís are, of course, free to vote except, in primaries, but should not express support for any candidate.

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated May 25, 1992)



In regard to the main question which you have posed, the requirement of Bahá'ís refraining from political involvement should not be construed merely as a comment on one's integrity; rather, it is a matter of the general state of society and confusion in the realm of politics. To have Bahá'ís involved in the regular machinery of campaign politics would be to undermine the Faith's essential position of non-partisanship. Therefore, the House of Justice feels that a Bahá'í should neither campaign on his own behalf nor do anything to promote his candidacy. Partisan politics, it should be borne in mind, includes not only party affiliation but also campaigning, whether in the context of a political party or not, by setting oneself up against another in a political contest. There is a clear distinction which separates those elections which take place in the public arena from those which take place in the Bahá'í community, where there is neither campaigning nor nominations. At the same time, in view of the different circumstances involving election to office, it is advisable for the friends to consult their Local Spiritual Assembly or National Spiritual Assembly concerning any specific instance in which a Bahá'í would be involved in a public election.

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual, dated July 6, 1995)

## Movements, Organizations, Demonstrations and Activism

The National Spiritual Assembly has refrained from examining the thousands of non-governmental organizations on a case by case basis, leaving the Local Spiritual Assemblies and friends to determine for themselves whether, in light of the Bahá'í teachings on political non-involvement, their membership or association with a particular organization is in harmony with Bahá'í principles. In this regard it is important to determine the degree to which its aims and methods approximate the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh. The more closely the organization fits the principles and teachings of the Faith, the more closely the friends can participate as Bahá'ís. The friends must ensure that their participation does not compromise any principle of the Faith, nor give the impression that they are acting as Bahá'í representatives. Bahá'í institutions, on the other hand, must be more cautious when considering membership since they automatically represent the Faith in all their activities.

Let him also attempt to devise such methods as association with clubs, exhibitions, and societies, lectures on subjects akin to the teachings and ideals of his Cause such as temperance, morality, social welfare, religious and racial tolerance, economic cooperation, Islam, and Comparative Religion, or participation in social, cultural, humanitarian, charitable, and educational organizations and enterprises which, while safeguarding the integrity of his Faith, will open up to him a multitude of ways and means whereby he can enlist successively the sympathy, the support, and ultimately the allegiance of those with whom he comes in contact.

(Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 51)



It should also be borne in mind that the very extension of the activities in which we are engaged, and the variety of the communities which labor under divers forms of government, so essentially different in their standards, policies, and methods, make it absolutely essential for all those who are the declared members of any one of these communities to avoid any action that might, by arousing the suspicion or exciting the antagonism of any one government, involve their brethren in fresh persecutions or complicate the nature of their task. How else, might I ask, could such a far-flung Faith, which transcends political and social boundaries, which includes within its pale so great a variety of races and nations, which will have to rely increasingly, as it forges ahead, on the good-will and support of the diversified and contending governments of the earth – how else could such a Faith succeed in preserving its unity, in safeguarding its interests, and in ensuring the steady and peaceful development of its institutions?

Such an attitude, however, is not dictated by considerations of selfish expediency, but is actuated, first and foremost, by the broad principle that the followers of Bahá'u'lláh will, under no circumstances, suffer themselves to be involved, whether as individuals or in their collective capacities, in matters that would entail the slightest departure from the fundamental verities and ideals of their Faith. Neither the charges which the uninformed and the malicious may be led to bring against them, nor the allurements of honors and rewards, will ever induce them to surrender their trust or to deviate from their path. Let their words proclaim, and their conduct testify, that they who follow Bahá'u'lláh, in whatever land they reside, are actuated by no selfish ambition, that they neither thirst for power, nor

mind any wave of unpopularity, of distrust or criticism, which a strict adherence to their standards might provoke.

Difficult and delicate though be our task, the sustaining power of Bahá'u'lláh and of His Divine guidance will assuredly assist us if we follow steadfastly in His way, and strive to uphold the integrity of His laws. The light of His redeeming grace, which no earthly power can obscure, will if we persevere, illuminate our path, as we steer our course amid the snares and pitfalls of a troubled age, and will enable us to discharge our duties in a manner that would redound to the glory and the honor of His blessed Name.

(Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 66-67)

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It is surely very necessary that the Friends should keep in touch with the modern social movements, but their main objective should be to draw more people to the spirit and teachings of the Cause. They should learn from the experience of others and not permit themselves to go (off) at a tangent, and finally be so absorbed in other movements as to forget the Cause of God.

(Shoghi Effendi, *Principles of Bahá'í Administration*, p. 26)

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Bahá'í elected representatives as well as individuals should refrain from any act or word that would imply a departure from the principles, whether spiritual, social or administrative, established by Bahá'u'lláh. Formal affiliation with and acceptance of membership in organizations whose programs or policies are not wholly reconcilable with the Teachings is of course out of the question . . . . To merely address such gatherings on one or two occasions on a subject which is in harmony with the spirit of the Teachings does not constitute acceptance by the Bahá'í speaker of the entire program of the Fellowship. We should welcome and seize every opportunity that presents itself, however modest it may be, to give a wider publicity to the Cause, to demonstrate its all-inclusiveness and liberal attitude, its independence and purity, without committing ourselves, whether by word or deed, to programs or policies that are not in strict conformity with the tenets of the Faith.

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada, dated June 17, 1933)

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The negro race has been, and still is, the victim of unjust prejudice, and it is obviously the duty of every Bahá'í, negro or white, to do all in their power to destroy the prejudices which exist on both sides. They can do this not only by exemplifying the true Bahá'í spirit in all their associations and acts, but also by taking an active part in any progressive movements aimed at the betterment of the lot of those who are under-privileged, as long as these movements are absolutely non-political and non-subversive in every respect.

Movements for social progress and social justice, as long as they are disassociated from both political and religious partisanship, should be supported by those Bahá'ís who feel urged to undertake such

work. Consequently there is no reason why you should not work for the betterment of your race through channels that in no way conflict with our Bahá'í attitude.

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual, dated November 23, 1941)

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He does not see any objection to Bahá'í students taking part as Bahá'ís in a protest such as that mentioned in the clipping. On the contrary, he does not see how they could remain indifferent when fellow students were voicing our own Bahá'í attitude on such a vital issue and one we feel so strongly about.

He thinks that the quotation you cite from "The Advent of Divine Justice" would certainly indicate that such a protest was justifiable. As there was nothing political about it there was no reason for the Bahá'í students not to participate.

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual, dated January 4, 1948)

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In connection with the subject matter of Mr. Blackwell's letter and your reference to it, the Guardian feels that, as he said in his letter to Mr. Blackwell, there was no objection at all to students taking part in something so obviously akin to the spirit of our teachings as a campus demonstration against race prejudice. The Bahá'ís did not inaugurate this protest, they merely were proud to have a voice as Bahá'ís in such a protest, took part, and he thinks they did quite right and violated no administrative principle.

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada, dated November 18, 1948)

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The Guardian does not see how Bahá'í participation, with other organizations and religious bodies, in a nonpolitical meeting to promote civic unity and welfare along some line can be considered political. Much as the friends must guard against in any way ever seeming to identify themselves or the Cause with any political party, they must also guard against the other extreme of never taking part with other progressive groups, in conferences or committees designed to promote in entire accord with our teachings – such as, for instance, better race relations.

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual, dated November 21, 1948)

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There is no objection to the Bahá'ís associating with such organizations as the World Government Organization However, great care should be taken to make sure these organizations are absolutely non-partisan in their political views and lean neither to East or West.

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual, dated June 1950)

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The Alaska Public Employees Association appears to be a type of union organization. As long as this and other associations, such as the special interest groups you mention, are not affiliated with any

political party and are not involved in political activities there is no objection to Bahá'ís belonging to them nor to their holding office in them.

As for participation in elections of non-Bahá'í organizations which are open to Bahá'ís but which employ election methods different from Bahá'í practices, believers need not avoid the election procedures carried out in such organization.

In all such activities the friends should bear in mind the following exhortation so clearly set forth by the beloved Guardian in a letter dated February 20, 1927 to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada:

Fully aware of the repeated statements of 'Abdu'l-Bahá that universality is of God, Bahá'ís in every land are ready, nay anxious, to associate themselves by word and deed with any association of men which, after careful scrutiny, they feel satisfied is free from every tinge of partnership and politics and is wholly devoted to the interests of all mankind.... They should always bear in mind, however, the dominating purpose of such collaboration, which is to secure in time the recognition by those with whom they are associating of the paramount necessity and the true significance of the Bahá'í Revelation in this day.

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Alaska, dated January 4, 1979)



One of the great obstacles to progress is the tendency of Bahá'ís to be sucked into the general attitudes and disputes that surround them, to be influenced, for example, as you yourself pointed out, by the prevailing attitude to marriage so that the divorce rate becomes a problem within the Bahá'í community itself which should be an example to the rest of society in such matters. Involvement in politics and controversial questions is another aspect of the same phenomenon. In one of His Tablets Bahá'u'lláh warns the Bahá'ís: "Dispute not with any one concerning the things of this world and its affairs, for God hath abandoned them to such as have set their affection upon them. Out of the whole world He hath chosen for Himself the hearts of men -- hearts which the hosts of revelation and of utterance can subdue." (Gleanings CXXVIII) As you realize, this cannot mean that Bahá'ís must not be controversial since, in many societies, being a Bahá'í is itself a controversial matter. The central importance of this principle of avoidance of politics and controversial matters is that Bahá'ís should not allow themselves to be drawn into the disputes of the many conflicting elements of the society around them. The aim of the Bahá'ís is to reconcile, to heal divisions, to bring about tolerance and mutual respect among men, and this aim is undermined if we allow ourselves to be swept along by the ephemeral passions of others. This does not mean that Bahá'ís cannot collaborate with any non-Bahá'í movement; it does mean that good judgment is required to distinguish those activities and associations which are beneficial and constructive from those which are divisive.

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual, dated January 3, 1982)



Violating as it does the very honor of humanity, the system of apartheid arouses in peoples of all nations and cultures deep feelings of abhorrence. Bahá'ís share these feelings particularly keenly. The

moral challenge which the situation represents, however, has now become intertwined with partisan political concerns. So complete is this interrelationship that the issues in the conflict are inextricable from one another: social protest originating in moral outrage has assumed the character of political action.

It is natural that it should do so, given the adversary principle that characterizes our political traditions throughout the world. But political action, in the absence of conditions for genuine consultation, in which partisan interests are subordinated to the interests of the whole, will not itself bring an enduring resolution of problems as serious as those convulsing South Africa. However difficult the task and however disheartening the present situation may seem, segments of South African society who believe full integration to be the fundamental issue face the challenge of focusing their efforts on creating such conditions. This is a moral imperative as urgent as any other motivating peoples of good will who seek to free South Africa from its terrible burden.

Bahá'ís are required by the teachings of their Faith to refrain from involvement in partisan political activity and civil disorder. This is true whether such activity is a response to racial oppression, as is generally the case in South Africa, or to more widespread attempts to keep people divided and vulnerable such as the persecution of religious belief, the suppression of women, or the denial of political freedom. The hard-won experience of Bahá'ís under all these conditions convinces them beyond any doubt that humanity can learn to live as one family and that all the forces of contemporary history are rapidly impelling the race in this direction. The pressure of these forces is inescapable; eventually even South Africa will respond. The quality of that response, and its speed, will depend as much on spiritual and moral conditions as it will on economic and political ones.

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to all National Spiritual Assemblies, dated October 12, 1986)



In reply to your letter of 19 March 1985 asking whether the friends should participate in demonstrations and protest activities sponsored by an active anti-apartheid group in Bermuda, the Universal House of Justice has instructed us to convey the following apartheid.

Revulsion against the segregation of races, particularly as it is practiced in South Africa, is increasing, and the House of Justice appreciates that the friends in Bermuda are much affected by feelings of wanting to show how objectionable racial prejudice is to them. However, as apartheid is identified with the South African Government, the participation of Bahá'ís in the demonstrations and protest activities of the anti-apartheid group could be construed as opposition to the South African Government, which would be tantamount to involvement in politics. On the other hand, Bahá'ís could, and indeed should, support groups advocating the abolition of all racial prejudices.

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated April 16, 1985)

'Abdu'l-Bahá in general disapproved of strikes. The Bahá'í attitude is that when the law recognizes strikes as legal, as when called by a properly constituted authority such as a trade union, the Bahá'í

teaching neither requires nor forbids an individual to participate in the strike but leaves him free to decide for himself what is the proper course of action in the particular circumstances.

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual, dated June 23, 1985)



In reply to your letter of 15 July seeking further clarification on the issue of apartheid, the Universal House of Justice has instructed us to point out that as the policy of apartheid from racial discrimination, it cannot be accepted by Bahá'ís wherever, and in whatever form, it may be practiced.

While the friends should, of course, support the principles of the Faith, including those advocating the oneness of mankind, and may associate with groups and engage in activities which promote these principles, they must scrupulously take care not to become involved in political issues. As stated in the letter to you dated 16 April 1985, participation in anti-apartheid demonstrations and protest activities could be construed as involvement in politics, and therefore should be avoided.

In your current letter you ask what is the difference between Bahá'í appeals to various governments about the persecutions of the friends in Iran and similar appeals about apartheid. While we have indeed sought support from governments of the free world on behalf of our Faith, we have never called for political demonstrations to bring pressure to bear on governments. As Bahá'ís, we are occupied in obeying the commands of the Manifestation of God to build up the Bahá'í Administrative Order and to diffuse His Message throughout the world. In doing this we will use every legal method available to us to obtain recognition for the Faith, to acquire legal rights for the operation of our institutions and the application of our laws, and to obtain redress for persecution of Bahá'ís. We will not, however, attempt to obtain legislation to compel non-Bahá'ís to obey Bahá'í laws and principles, nor will we ever engage in subversive activities or advocate rebellion.

The world around us is seething with unrest caused by conflicting interests of Governments, peoples, races and individuals. Each of these contending parties has some good and some evil on its side, and, whereas we will unhesitatingly uphold Bahá'í principles, we will never become embroiled in these internecine conflicts by identifying ourselves with one or other of the parties, however much in our hearts we may sympathize with its aims.

The positive attitude to the question of racial prejudice is radiant and whole-hearted exemplification of the principle of the oneness of mankind, first among the members of your National Spiritual Assembly and then throughout the Bahá'í community.

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly, dated August 18, 1985)



Generally, the wisest course for the Bahá'í community in controversial situations is to remain uninvolved; however, at times when primary Bahá'í principles are at the heart of an issue, the decision of the National Assembly concerned should not necessarily be to observe silence but, rather, to take action which rises above the partisan political manifestations of the controversy. The Assembly may, for instance, present its own statement to the authorities, setting forth its views on essential issues on the basis of principle, letting the circumstances determine how the principle is best



to be applied. If you feel that such action would be appropriate in the situation you face with respect to the issues raised in your letter, you may wish to draft such a statement, but before releasing it, kindly check with the World Centre.

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of the Mariana Islands, dated January 14, 1988)



Such a perspective does not mean that Bahá'ís should avoid doing whatever they can to help others and alleviate human distress, or that they should not associate with and support suitable likeminded organizations. On the contrary, the believers should, at all times, be alert to opportunities to do whatever is within their power to make the conditions of human life better; by this means they will manifest that commitment to action exemplified by the Master, will demonstrate the relevance of Bahá'í principles to issues of contemporary society, and will attract the receptive and discerning to the Bahá'í teachings. In so doing they should keep clearly in mind that the ultimate purpose is to hasten the establishment and triumph of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh within which resides the power to heal the ills of the world and to establish a world civilization.

Not only is the Bahá'í perspective unique, so too are the methods used by the believers to achieve their objectives. Unity and co-operation are the important values which should be the watchwords for activities in which the believers engage. As a consequence, Bahá'ís eschew the adversarial approach of dispute and confrontation, and seek rather the methods of consultation, with its commitment to informed discussion and mutual respect, and with its goal the achievement of consensus in the pursuit of truth. Bahá'ís aim to persuade others of the correctness of their views through their example and the use of reason, and shun the techniques of pressure, condemnation and abuse which are a deplorable feature of much of the present-day quest for social justice.

The injunction to avoid participation in political controversies, identification with political pursuits, or involvement in partisan political affairs is binding on all believers, whether they act as individuals or as representatives of the Bahá'í community. Within those bounds, there is a wide range of possible activities open to them in participating with other groups which aim to promote measures entirely in accord with the Bahá'í principles, such as improvement in race relations, the emancipation of women, conservation of the earth's resources, the promotion of world peace, and so on. The institutions of the Faith are generally subject to a greater restriction in the issues with which they would choose to identify themselves, since their involvement will necessarily have a direct implication for the reputation of the Faith and for its possible misrepresentation by its adversaries.

These considerations may be used to clarify the specific issues raised in your letter. For example, in light of the Bahá'í approach to the search for truth, it would not be proper for a Bahá'í to become involved in environmental activities which are confrontationist. The concern of the . . . Bahá'ís for conservation is highly commendable, but they should be aided to find other, more productive means to express this concern.

. . .

In considering whether they should participate in coordinated campaigns such as letter writing, or signing petitions, Bahá'ís should be guided by their Spiritual Assemblies, and are encouraged to

accept this guidance in a spirit of radiant acquiescence. The Assemblies should give careful consideration to the motives of the originators of the activity and the methods which are being used. Bahá'ís should avoid contention and strife, and are to be distinguished by their honesty and fair-mindedness, and their respect for the rule of law. They should carefully avoid being involved in partisan activities which are sponsored by a political organization, and are warned to “beware lest they allow themselves to become the tools of unscrupulous politicians, or to be entrapped by the treacherous devices of the plotters and the perfidious among their countrymen.”

As your letter points out, there are instances where the Guardian endorsed Bahá'ís identifying themselves with protest activities on the vital issues which the Bahá'í teachings illuminate. It must be remembered that there is an important distinction between protest against attitudes and practices prevalent in some quarters of society and protest antagonistic to the government. The Bahá'í Faith directs its attention principally to the promotion of attitudinal change consequent to the acceptance of the claim of Bahá'u'lláh, confident that the transformation of attitudes and values will, in due course, yield its fruit in measures which will resolve the problems with which humanity is now burdened.

The Universal House of Justice appreciates the serious attention you are giving to providing appropriate guidance to the believers as they seek to steer their course around the many hazards and pitfalls associated with this transitional stage in human affairs. Understanding the Bahá'í approach is facilitated by a deep appreciation of the implications of the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, destined to evolve from the present-day Administrative Order; this divinely ordained system is an expression of the social reorganization of humanity far beyond the conception of present-day political and social movements whose aim is no more than to repair a lamentably defective order which is fundamentally incapable of meeting the needs of the new age into which humanity is being irresistibly propelled.

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Australia, dated October 24, 1990)



The Bahá'í community of Iran was hardly in a position to protest in its own behalf in response to the persecution against it. The friends there have never enjoyed any standing in the eyes of the Government of Iran, not even during the time of the Shah, and have always been a persecuted minority. On the broader question, how can the Bahá'í community devote its limited time to protesting the myriad cases of human rights abuses in the world when it knows full well that the basic solution to all problems facing society depends on the extent to which the Bahá'í Faith and its Teachings are spread throughout the world? It is not that the Bahá'ís are unconcerned about human rights violations, but rather, that priority must be given to establishing the means through which problems deeply seated in the disunity of the human race can be resolved. Only the Cause of God can do this.

There are many organizations that have devoted themselves to protesting against human rights violations, and in many instances individual Bahá'ís are among those supporting such organizations. Given the relatively small size of the Bahá'í community throughout the world, and the fact that in a great many places the Bahá'ís are themselves not yet fully knowledgeable of the Teachings, it is not possible at this stage for them to assail all the evils afflicting humanity, but must, of necessity, take the

time to internalize the principles of the Faith and expand its numbers to a degree that it can influence a profound change in the behavior of world society.

A point to bear in mind is that as laudable as may be the desire to join in protests against human rights violations, in many instances, the direct involvement of Bahá'ís in such activities would draw them into political entanglements which would be detrimental to the Cause of God. This is why the principle of association but not affiliation must be upheld as regards organizations such as Amnesty International.

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated December 2, 1992)



As you point out, Amnesty International, from its own viewpoint, is a non-political organization; however, its definition of "politics" is different from that used in the context of Bahá'í teachings. In addition, Amnesty International states that it is opposed to the death penalty in all cases and without reservation, while the law of Bahá'u'lláh expressed in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas is that the death penalty is applicable for murder and arson under certain circumstances.

Even though it is not appropriate for Bahá'ís to become members of Amnesty International, its humanitarian aspects make it possible for Bahá'ís to have friendly relationships with the organization. Thus, Bahá'ís are encouraged to feel free to collaborate as individuals in certain Amnesty International's projects, while retaining the right to abstain from participation in actions which could conflict with Bahá'í principles.

Regarding the enquiry in the penultimate paragraph of your letter, the Universal House of Justice had not established a list of different organizations that the Bahá'í Faith should not support. An important distinction, however is drawn between association with other movements and actual membership. In general Bahá'ís are encouraged to collaborate with all others who are working towards the same goals as the Faith. Bahá'ís are not permitted, however, to be members of certain secret societies, of the religious organizations of other Faiths, of political organizations or, of course, of organizations whose goals are in conflict with the Bahá'í principles. For example, Bahá'ís would gladly work together with Christians in humanitarian activities, but a Bahá'í, believing in Bahá'u'lláh, cannot be a member of a Christian church which believes that Christ has not yet returned.

It is hoped that information provided herein will be of assistance to you in attaining peace of mind and heart over this issue. To this end will the Universal House of Justice offer prayers in the Holy Shrines on your behalf.

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual, dated February 14, 1993)



As you know, it is permissible, and in certain instances even desirable, for Bahá'ís to associate themselves with public causes provided that they are compatible with the principles of the Faith. However, because present world conditions are so unstable, many seemingly innocent movements tend to drift away from their course, and the issues they propound assume a political character or take on political overtones. For example, while concern for conservation is highly commendable, it would not be proper for a Bahá'í to become involved in environmental activities which are confrontational.

It is for the National Spiritual Assembly in each country to decide, in the light of local conditions, whether a particular issue is one Bahá'ís can associate themselves with, or whether it is a political one in which they should take no side.

Clearly a differentiation needs to be made between those issues on which the institutions of the Faith should feel free to speak on behalf of the cause and those on which institutions should take no stand, but in connection with which individual believers should be left free to act as individuals.

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly, dated December 16, 1996)



As you are aware, it is not the practice of Bahá'í institutions or individuals to take positions on the political decisions of governments. One of the greatest obstacles to progress is the tendency of Bahá'ís to be drawn into the general attitudes and disputes that surround them. The central importance of the principle of avoidance of politics and controversial matters is that Bahá'ís should not allow themselves to be involved in the disputes of the many conflicting elements of the society around them.

The aim of the Bahá'ís is to reconcile viewpoints, to heal divisions, and to bring about tolerance and mutual respect among men, and this aim is undermined if we allow ourselves to be swept along by the ephemeral passions of others. This does not mean that Bahá'ís cannot collaborate with any non-Bahá'í movement; it does mean that good judgment is required to distinguish those activities and associations which are beneficial and constructive from those which are divisive.

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual, dated January 12, 2003)



You state that there are large-scale demonstrations arising in your community and in communities around the world, and you inquire about the appropriateness of Bahá'ís participating in demonstrations for peace. It is important to keep in mind that while these activities are generally carried out in the name of peace, such occasions are motivated by highly political and controversial sentiments at a time of turmoil and confusion in the world. Not only would it be contrary to the Bahá'í principle of non-involvement in politics for individual believers, or Bahá'í institutions, to become associated with such activities, it could also be harmful to the interests of the Faith internationally. The point to bear in mind here is that current demonstrations are not intended to promote peace in principle but are focused on a specific dispute among governments. As you can no doubt understand, Bahá'í participation in public demonstrations involving controversial issues would undermine the Faith's essential purpose of promoting unity in all aspects of human affairs, and your desire to remain focused on the essential work of the Faith is deeply appreciated.

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual, dated March 27, 2003)



Belief in Bahá'u'lláh and confidence in the fulfillment of the divine promise pertaining to the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth is a source of empowerment and vision for service to humanity. However, the civilization envisaged by Bahá'u'lláh cannot be established on earth solely

through efforts of the Bahá'ís. Numerous others work toward promoting peace and kinship throughout the world and long to contribute to improving the condition of society at large. Undoubtedly, we, the Bahá'ís, can learn from the experiences of these individuals as well as from various institutions that lay an effective role in contributing to the transformation of society. In turn, [we] can share with them the insights and motivating power of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh to help them fulfill their goals. Service for the common good, participation in social affairs and cooperation with like-minded groups are the prerequisites for creating opportunities for this task .

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of Iran, dated February 17, 2008)



Shoghi Effendi permitted Bahá'ís to participate with “other organizations and religious bodies” in “a non-political meeting”, and he cautioned them against two extremes:

Much as the friends must guard against in any way ever seeming to identify themselves or the Cause with any political party, they must also guard against the other extreme of never taking part, with other progressive groups, in conferences or committees designed to promote some activity in entire accord with our teachings – such as, for instance, better race relations.

A Bahá'í is free to join other organizations if their standards, aims, and activities are not in conflict with Bahá'í Teachings. While it is permissible for individual Bahá'ís to support causes compatible with the principles of the Faith, the friends should be aware that these movements may stray from their original purpose and become part of the political arena. Therefore, before participating in marches and campaigns sponsored by some organizations, for or against certain issues, each case should be carefully reviewed.

...

In relation to participation of the Bahá'í community in celebrations and the observance of activities related to the revolution, some of these may be just festivities and opportunities for creating national unity, while others may not be. Therefore, in each case the actual nature of the occasion should be determined. While the believers are well-wishers of their government they must refrain from participating in events that have partisan political explications. The issue then becomes one of determining whether or not any particular event is political and has nothing to do with general unity.

As regards the Bahá'í view concerning the involvement of Bahá'í students in demonstrations related to patriotic and religious school activities, which are held for various reasons, again, if these gatherings are political and divisive in nature, participation in them is contrary to Bahá'í principles, and each case needs to be considered separately .

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of Iran, dated May 1, 2008)



The organizers of the Global Day of Action have explicitly asserted that this undertaking is non-partisan in nature and that its aim is to call upon the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran to uphold internationally recognized human rights and the related guarantees that are enshrined in the country's Constitution. Accordingly, Bahá'ís may generally feel free to lend their support to this event by participating in it as individuals. Should they be invited to sign related petitions, they may also do

so, provided the wording is non-partisan in character. Indeed, initiatives such as this afford a welcome opportunity for Bahá'ís to demonstrate their willingness to engage with like-minded organizations and individuals in defending the human rights of all who suffer oppression and in championing the cause of justice.

Believers who choose to participate in this and other such demonstrations should, however, be sensitive to the fact that in certain countries and in particular situations the event could assume a partisan political character, notwithstanding the original intent of the organizers. In such a circumstance, believers would of course not participate or, if the event assumes such a character after it has begun, should tactfully withdraw.

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to selected National Assemblies, quoted in a letter from the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States to the American Bahá'í community, dated July 22, 2009)



Clearly what Bahá'ís see as one aspect of their contribution cannot contradict the other. They cannot be seeking to establish patterns of thought and action that give expression to the principle of oneness within their community, yet engage in activities in another context which, to whatever extent, reinforce an entirely different set of assumptions about social existence. To avoid such a duality, the Bahá'í community has progressively refined over time, on the basis of the teachings of the Faith, the main features of its participation in the life of society. First and foremost, Bahá'ís endeavour, whether as individuals or as a community, to put into practice the command of Bahá'u'lláh: “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.” It is through “association and meeting”, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has explained further, that “we find happiness and development, individual and collective.” “That which is conducive to association and attraction and unity among the sons of men”, He has written in this connection, “is the means of the life of the world of humanity, and whatever causeth division, repulsion and remoteness leadeth to the death of humankind.” Even in the case of religion, He has made it clear that it “must be the cause of love and fellowship. Should religion become the cause of contention and enmity, its absence is preferable.” So it is that Bahá'ís do their utmost at all times to heed the counsel of Bahá'u'lláh, “Shut your eyes to estrangement, then fix your gaze upon unity.” “That one indeed is a man”, He exhorts His followers, “who, today, dedicateth himself to the service of the entire human race.” “Be anxiously concerned with the needs of the age ye live in,” is His admonition, “and centre your deliberations on its exigencies and requirements.” “The supreme need of humanity is cooperation and reciprocity,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has indicated. “The stronger the ties of fellowship and solidarity amongst men, the greater will be the power of constructiveness and accomplishment in all the planes of human activity.” “So powerful is the light of unity”, Bahá'u'lláh declares, “that it can illuminate the whole earth.”

It is with such thoughts in mind that Bahá'ís enter into collaboration, as their resources permit, with an increasing number of movements, organizations, groups and individuals, establishing partnerships that strive to transform society and further the cause of unity, promote human welfare, and contribute

to world solidarity. Indeed, the standard set by passages such as the above inspires the Bahá'í community to become actively engaged in as many aspects of contemporary life as feasible. In choosing areas of collaboration, Bahá'ís are to bear in mind the principle, enshrined in their teachings, that means should be consistent with ends; noble goals cannot be achieved through unworthy means. Specifically, it is not possible to build enduring unity through endeavours that require contention or assume that an inherent conflict of interests underlies all human interactions, however subtly. It should be noted here that, despite the limitations imposed by adherence to this principle, the community has not experienced a shortage of opportunities for collaboration; so many people in the world today are working intensely towards one or another aim which Bahá'ís share. In this respect, they also take care not to overstep certain bounds with their colleagues and associates. They are not to regard any joint undertaking as an occasion to impose religious convictions. Self-righteousness and other unfortunate manifestations of religious zeal are to be utterly avoided. Bahá'ís do, however, readily offer to their collaborators the lessons they have learned through their own experience, just as they are happy to incorporate into their community-building efforts insights gained through such association.

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of Iran, dated March 2, 2013)



Bahá'ís and Bahá'í institutions should not take positions on the political decisions of governments, including disputes among governments of different nations; should refrain from becoming involved in debates surrounding any political controversy; and should not react, orally or otherwise, in a manner that could be taken as evidence of support for a partisan political stance. It is not for a Bahá'í, in offering social commentary, to vilify specific individuals, organizations, or governments or to make attacks on them. Indeed, the Guardian specifically cautioned the friends against referring to political figures in their public remarks, whether in criticism or support.

Furthermore, Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá enjoined Bahá'ís to be obedient to the government of their land. Unity, order, and cooperation are the basis for sound and lasting change. Even civil disobedience, in the form of a conscious decision to violate the law to effect social change, is not acceptable for Bahá'ís-whatever merit it appears to have had in particular political settings. Ultimately, obedience to government has a bearing on the unity of the Bahá'í community itself. In a letter written on his behalf, Shoghi Effendi stated that individual Bahá'ís should not become immersed in the "faulty systems of the world" or judge their government as "just or unjust-for each believer would be sure to hold a different viewpoint, and within our own Bahá'í fold a hotbed of dissension would spring up and destroy our unity." These considerations, however, do not imply an endorsement of the actions or policies of one's government.

...

The principles of non-involvement in politics and obedience to government, far from being obstacles to social change, are aspects of an approach set forth in the Bahá'í writings to implement effective remedies for and address the root causes of the ills afflicting society. This approach includes active involvement in the life of society as well as the possibility of influencing and contributing to the social policies of government by all lawful means. Indeed, service to others and to society is a hallmark of the Bahá'í life. And Shoghi Effendi has explained that "the machinery of the Cause has

been so fashioned, that whatever is deemed necessary to incorporate into it in order to keep it in the forefront of all progressive movements, can, according to the provisions made by Bahá'u'lláh, be safely embodied therein.”

...

There can be no question then that Bahá'ís are committed to efforts toward social transformation. . . . This involvement in activities for social reform and well-being can in certain circumstances even extend to taking part in demonstrations. . . . Thus, individual Bahá'ís are free to participate in those efforts and activities, such as peaceful rallies, that uphold constructive aims in consonance with the Bahá'í teachings, for example, the advancement of women, the promotion of social justice, the protection of the environment, the elimination of all forms of discrimination, and the safeguarding of human rights.

In deciding whether it would be appropriate for Bahá'ís to participate in particular public activities, a crucial distinction should be drawn between those events that have a partisan political character and those that do not. A further distinction can be drawn between those activities that are fully in keeping with the teachings and that can be supported explicitly by Bahá'í institutions and those where the situation is less clear, in which Bahá'í institutions should not participate but in which individuals can be given some latitude to make a personal decision to take part, without in any way implying that they are representing the Faith directly by their choice. If a believer harbors any doubt as to the appropriateness of involvement with a particular event or approach, guidance should be sought from the National Spiritual Assembly, which is in the best position to evaluate the specific circumstances and is responsible for making the final determination on such questions.

Beyond this clarification of basic principles, there are other important considerations. Too often political goals, even when pursued in the name of justice, are a chimera, for the fundamental partisanship in contemporary political life means policies are often implemented without building consensus and consequently seeds of discontent and continuing political struggle are sown. Conflict and contention ultimately yield more conflict and contention. Eliminating social problems, rather than merely ameliorating them to an extent, requires unity of thought as well as action, an open heart as well as an open hand—conditions which Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation is intended to bring about.

For many decades following the second great war of the twentieth century, humanity moved, with fits and starts, toward the promise of a united world. The failure to complete the project of the unification of nations, however, left gaps in relations in which supranational problems could fester and threaten the security and well-being of peoples and states, leading to a recrudescence of prejudice, of divers expressions of factionalism, and of virulent nationalism that are the very negation of Bahá'u'lláh's message of peace and oneness.

One of the current features of the process of the disintegration of the old world order manifest in the United States is the increasing polarization and fragmentation that has come to characterize so much of political and social life. There has been a hardening of viewpoints, increased incivility, an unwillingness to compromise or even entertain differing perspectives, and a tendency to automatically take sides and fight. Science and religion, two great lights that should guide human progress, are often compromised or swept aside. Matters of moral principle and questions of justice are reduced to intractable liberal or conservative viewpoints, and the country is increasingly divided along divergent



lines. In this context, the friends have to hold steadfastly to the Bahá'í teachings and consultative methods and not allow their pursuit of noble aims and high aspirations to draw them into one side or the other of fruitless debates and contentious processes.

In their reflections on how to contribute to the betterment of the world, Bahá'ís will undoubtedly recognize that demonstrations are not the only, or even the most effective, means available to them. Rather, they can learn and grow in capacity over time to help their fellow citizens to frame concerns in a way that rises above fissures, to share views in a manner that transcends divisive approaches, and to create and participate in spaces to work together in the quest to enact solutions to the problems that bedevil their nation. As Bahá'u'lláh stated: “Say: no man can attain his true station except through his justice. No power can exist except through unity. No welfare and no well-being can be attained except through consultation.” In this light, justice is indeed essential to resist the vain imaginings and idle fancies of social and political machinations, to see reality with one's own eyes, and to identify the requirements for an equitable social order. But then unity is essential-forged through consultative processes, including action and reflection-to achieve the power required for positive social change.

Unfortunately, sometimes when approaching such important and deeply-felt matters, the friends can create dichotomies where none exist. Thus, for example, it is contended that one must choose between either non-involvement in politics or social action; either teaching the Faith or involvement with society; either the institute process and the community-building activities it fosters or a program for race unity; and so on. Such apparent conflicts can be greatly dissipated by keeping in mind Shoghi Effendi's advice, conveyed in a letter written on his behalf, to conceive of the teachings as one great whole with many facets. “Truth may, in covering different subjects, appear to be contradictory,” the same letter indicated, “and yet it is all one if you carry the thought through to the end.” A careful reading of the Bahá'í writings and the guidance of the House of Justice can clarify how two matters that appear to be in tension with one another are coherent once the concepts and principles that connect them are understood. Particular circumstances in a locality, timeliness, and the periodic need for focus also have a bearing on such issues.

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual, dated April 27, 2017)

### Contact with Prominent People

The friends are encouraged to consult with their Local Spiritual Assemblies when devising strategies to present the Faith to individuals of prominence who live or work in their locality. Universities and colleges present a particularly fertile arena for reaching leaders of thought who have achieved national or international prominence in their field. Because of the many prominent individuals in various fields of endeavor who live in the United States, the National Assembly leaves it up to Local Assemblies to decide whether to contact prominent individuals living in their communities. The National Assembly is available to provide guidance on whether an individual of national prominence has already received Bahá'í information should a Local Assembly wish it.

To approach such well-known and important persons is always an extremely delicate matter, since it requires a good deal of wisdom, courage and ability. But those friends who really feel the urge to do so, and possess the necessary qualifications, should cultivate such friendships which, if properly done,

can be of an immense benefit to the Cause. In any case, however, the assistance and help of either the local or the National Assembly is not only useful but necessary if important contacts of this sort are to be fruitful and promising. 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 cooperation 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.

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual, dated August 30, 1933)



Basically, “people of capacity” are those individuals, no matter in what walk of life they are found, and no matter what their level of education, who demonstrate capacity in various ways. For example, among any group of people there are those who are outstanding because they show a capacity for understanding, for work, for efficient action, for leadership, for drawing other people together, for self-sacrificing and devoted service – for any number of qualities which enable them to respond actively to the needs of their environment and make a difference to it. In some cases the capacity has already been amply demonstrated; in others it is still latent but can be developed. It is for such people that we should search, since they can quickly become either devoted and active Bahá'ís or valued collaborators in the work of promoting Bahá'í ideals.

People in authority are also often people of capacity, but not always. Indeed one of the major obstacles to progress is when people of little capacity occupy the seat of authority. Nevertheless it is important for Bahá'ís to cultivate those who are in authority, whether or not they are people of capacity, because it is they who have power to assist or oppose the development of society.

Prominent people may or may not have authority, but by virtue of their prominence they are in the public eye and exert an influence on society, so they need to be acquainted with the Faith and its ideas.

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly, dated November 6, 1994)



As you are aware, it is the responsibility of the institutions of the Faith to coordinate and supervise the external affairs activities within their respective jurisdictions. As a general rule, it is necessary to consult with your National Spiritual Assembly or its Office of External Affairs prior to contacting prominent individuals, including government officials, regarding matters involving the Bahá'í Faith. This is wise in relation to some individuals even when reference to the Faith is indirect, since there may be sensitivities of which only the administrative institutions are aware.

Clearly, for casual mentions of the Faith within communications with prominent people that primarily focus on unrelated issues, the question of contacting the Assembly does not arise. However, if the purpose of the letter or conversation is to inform them about the Faith or to solicit their involvement in affairs of concern to the Bahá'í community, approval must be sought and received in advance.

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual, dated March 18, 2012)

### Contact with Government Agencies and Officials

I entirely agree with you that non-interference in politics does not imply non-association on the part of the friends with the outside world. I hope you will impress the friends with the necessity of maintaining close, but not too intimate relationships, with the authorities, the foreign representatives, and the leaders of public thought in the capital. They should be on their guard, however, lest too close an association should lead, imperceptibly to compromise in the principles which we cherish and uphold. They must mix with all classes of society without associating themselves with their policies and schemes.

(A postscript by Shoghi Effendi from a letter written on his behalf to an individual, dated October 8, 1927)

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It is our supreme obligation to endeavor to bring the knowledge of this Revelation to the highest authorities and the leading personalities among our countrymen, but to refrain from associating ourselves or of identifying our Faith, with their political pursuits, their conflicting ambitions and party programs.

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual, dated April 15, 1932)

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He sincerely hopes that through such approaches and communications the authorities will come to take into consideration the importance of the Cause and gradually feel deep sympathy and admiration for its spirit. It is very important that they should know how we stand and what is our attitude towards some of the outstanding problems and issues that face the world in the present day. These are very difficult questions and most delicate, but the Master's spirit will surely guide you and inspire you to do what is proper and wise.

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual, dated May 4, 1932)

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The Faith is not opposed to the true interest of any nation, nor is it against any party or faction. It holds aloof from all controversies and transcends them all, while enjoining upon its followers loyalty to government and a sane patriotism. This love for their country the Bahá'ís show by serving its well-being in their daily activity, or working in the administrative channel of the government instead of through party politics or in diplomatic or political posts. The Bahá'ís may, indeed are encouraged to, mix with all strata of society, with the highest authorities and with leading personalities as well as with the mass of people, and should bring the knowledge of the Faith to them: but in so doing they should strictly avoid becoming identified or identifying the Faith, with political pursuits and party programs.

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assemblies in Africa, dated February 8, 1970)

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A very important activity which has been pursued effectively in all too few countries, is the undertaking by the National Spiritual Assembly of a sustained, planned effort to foster cordial relations with prominent people and responsible government officials and to familiarize them personally with the basic tenets and the teachings of the Faith. Such an activity must be carried out with wisdom and discretion, and requires the constant attention of a responsible committee as well as periodic review by the National Spiritual Assembly itself. Where successful it can effectively forestall opposition to the Faith and smooth the way for many essential aspects of the development of the Bahá'í community.

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to all National Spiritual Assemblies, dated Naw-Rúz 1974)



In view of the necessity of the Bahá'í community to relate to governments, whether for reasons of defending its persecuted members or of responding to opportunities to be of service, a correct understanding of what is legitimate Bahá'í action in the face of the policy of noninterference with government affairs is bound to be difficult to achieve on the part of individual friends. The force of circumstances, operating internally and externally, is pressing the Bahá'í community into certain relationships with governments. Hence, it is important that decisions as to the conduct of such relationships be made by authorized institutions of the Faith and not by individuals. In matters of this kind, given the utter complexity of human affairs with which the Bahá'í community must increasingly cope both spiritually and practically, individual judgment is not sufficient.

The support of passage of the Genocide Convention in the United States Senate, referred to in your letter, is a case in point. The particular circumstances which influenced the National Spiritual Assembly's involvement in the matter were delicate and compelling. There may be other situations in which significant questions being considered by a government are so intimately related to fundamental principles of our Faith, and the conditions are such, that the maintenance of strict neutrality on the part of the Bahá'í community would not be in the best interests of either the Faith or society. Awareness of this probability should, however, not cause the friends to go at a tangent and take such sensitive matters into their own hands. In any such situation the National Spiritual Assembly must weight carefully the consequences, pro and con, of any contemplated action and carry out its decision, preferably with the foreknowledge and consent of the House of Justice. The friends must learn to appreciate this new situation, to acquiesce in the prerogative of their elected institutions to decide on questions involving or affecting relations with their governments, and evince confidence in the incontrovertible promise of Bahá'u'lláh to protect His community.

Considering the unusual challenges facing National Spiritual Assemblies, particularly resulting from the persecutions in Iran and the issuance of the Peace Statement, the Universal House of Justice will surely continue to guide these institutions to relate to their governments in ways which will preserve the essentials of the policy of noninvolvement in politics.

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual, dated June 23, 1987)



To lend spiritual impetus to the momentum which that grand attainment will generate, the need for a Bahá'í strategy is evident. One of its expressions should be the exertion of a kind of leadership, principally a moral leadership, by coherently, comprehensively and continually imparting our ideas for the advancement of civilization, and this through a unified voice that because of the diverse composition of our community could come to be regarded as representative of the aspirations of the peoples of the world.

...

The coherence of our endeavors globally would depend largely on the clarity and common understanding of programmatic concepts, on the application of these concepts in relation to international, national and local opportunities and conditions, on the involvement of National Spiritual Assemblies, and on the utilization of the talents of the largest possible number of competent individuals.

(External Affairs strategy document, commissioned by the Universal House of Justice, 1994)

### **Bahá'ís Serving in Government**

Ye who are the sincere well-wishers of the state, who are the dutiful and compliant subjects of the government, should occupy yourselves in constant service. Anyone who entereth the employ of the government should show forth in all his deeds and actions the highest degree of rectitude and honesty, of temperance and self-discipline, of purity and sanctity, of justice and equity. If, God forbid, he should be guilty of the least breach of trust, or approach his duties in a slack or desultory fashion, or extort so much as a farthing from the populace, or seek to further his own selfish interests and personal gain – then it is certain that he shall be deprived of the outpourings of God's grace.

...

In discharging the functions of the office to which thou hast been appointed, thy conduct and actions should attest to the highest standard of trustworthiness and honesty, to a degree of sincerity that is altogether above suspicion, and to an integrity that is immune to the promptings of self-interest. Thus shall all know that the Bahá'ís are the embodiments of probity, and the very essence of spotless virtue. If they accept office, their motive is to render service to the whole of humanity, not to seek their own self-interest; and their object is to vindicate the cause of truth, not to give themselves over to self-indulgence and base ingratitude.

...

As for those who are engaged in government service, they should perform their duties with the utmost fidelity, trustworthiness, rectitude, uprightness, integrity and high-mindedness. Let them not tarnish their good repute by pursuing personal interests, nor, for the sake of transient worldly benefits, make themselves objects of public odium and outcasts of the Threshold of Grandeur.

...

Those persons who are selected to serve the public, or are appointed to administrative positions, should perform their duties in a spirit of true servitude and ready compliance. That is to say, they

should be distinguished by their goodly disposition and virtuous character, content themselves with their allotted remuneration, and act with trustworthiness in all their doings. They should keep themselves aloof from unworthy motives, and be far removed above covetous designs; for rectitude, probity and righteousness are among the most potent means for attracting the grace of God and securing both the prosperity of the country and the welfare of the people. Glory and honour for man are not to be found in fortunes and riches, least of all in those which have been unlawfully amassed through extortion, embezzlement and corruption practised at the expense of an exploited populace. Supreme honour, nobility and greatness in the human world, and true felicity in this life and the life to come – all consist in equity and uprightness, sanctity and detachment. If a man would seek distinction, he should suffice himself with a frugal provision, seek to better the lot of the poor of the realm, choose the way of justice and fair-mindedness, and tread the path of high-spirited service. Such a one, needy though he be, shall win imperishable riches and attain unto everlasting honour.

...

If any of the friends should enter into the service of the government, they should make their occupation a means of drawing nearer to the divine Threshold: they should act with probity and uprightness, rigorously shun all forms of venality and corruption, and content themselves with the salaries they are receiving, taking pride, rather, in the degree of sagacity, competence and judgement that they can bring to their work. If a person content himself with a single loaf of bread, and perform his duties with as much justice and fair-mindedness as lieth within his power, he will be the prince of mortals, and the most praiseworthy of men. Noble and distinguished will he be, despite his empty purse! Pre-eminent will he rank among the free, although his garb be old and worn! For man, praise and glory reside in virtuous and noble qualities; honour and distinction in nearness to the divine Threshold. The world's wealth is, by contrast, the stuff of illusion. Those who lust after it are the followers of evil and, ere long, they shall be plunged into confusion and despair. Which is better – that a man should be thus, or that he should comport himself with consecration and sanctity of purpose and stand out conspicuously for his integrity, uprightness and honesty? Nay, such qualities are better than the riches of Korah, and dearer than all the treasures of existence.

...

If one of the friends... be appointed to a high administrative office, he should strive diligently to perform the duties committed to his charge with perfect honesty, integrity, sincerity, rectitude and uprightness. If, however, he abuse his position through corrupt or mercenary behaviour, he will be held in detestation at the Threshold of Grandeur and incur the wrath of the Abha Beauty – nay, he shall be forsaken by the one true God and all who adore Him. So far from acting thus, he should content himself with his salary and allowances, seek out the way of righteousness, and dedicate his life to the service of state and people. Such must be the conduct and bearing of the Bahá'ís. Whoso transgresseth these bounds shall fall at length into manifest loss.

...

Those souls who are employed in government departments should approach their duties with entire detachment, integrity and independence of spirit, and with complete consecration and sanctity of purpose. Content with the wages they are receiving, they should see that they do not stain their fair character through acts of bribery and fraud. Were one of the friends in this day to misappropriate so

much as a single penny, the sacred mantle of God's Cause would become sullied by his action and the shame of it would attach to the whole community. Heaven forbid! Nay, rather, the government and people should come to repose such trust in the Bahá'ís as to wish to commit all affairs of state throughout the provinces into the chaste, pure hands of God's well-beloved.

...

All government employees, whether of high or low rank, should, with perfect integrity, probity and rectitude, content themselves with the modest stipends and allowances that are theirs. They should keep their hands unsullied and preserve their fair name from blemish.... If a man deal faithlessly with a just government he shall have dealt faithlessly with God; and if he render it faithful service he shall have rendered that service to God.

...

Let them perform their services with complete sanctity and detachment, and on no account defile themselves by receiving bribes, harbouring unseemly motives, or engaging in noxious practices. Let them be content with their wages, and seek distinction in truthfulness, straightforwardness, and the pursuit of virtue and excellence; for vanity in riches is worthy of none but the base, and pride in possessions besemeth only the foolish. To attain to true glory and honour, man should exercise justice and equity, forbear to act in an oppressive manner, render service to his government, and work for the good of his fellow-citizens. Were he to seek after aught else but this he would indeed be in manifest loss.

...

How foolish and ignorant must a man be, how base his nature, and how vile the clay of which he is fashioned, if he would defile himself with the contamination of bribery, corruption and perfidy towards the state! Truly, the vermin of the earth are to be preferred to such people!

...

If it should happen that one of the friends be called upon to serve his country and people in some capacity, he should apply himself to his work with heart and soul, and discharge his duties with perfect honesty, trustworthiness and godliness.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, excerpts from tablets printed in *Trustworthiness: A Cardinal Bahá'í Virtue*, a compilation prepared by the Universal House of Justice, January 1987)

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Actual politicians, he feels, will for the most part never be willing to forget their ambitions, work and prestige in order to embrace the Faith, but association with all people, in government occupation or otherwise, who are progressive minded, is advisable, as we publicize the Faith this way and may meet receptive souls. There is no objection to Bahá'ís serving in government jobs that are purely non-political.

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual, dated May 30, 1947)

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There is no objection to a Bahá'í being elected a Barrio Captain or serving on a Barrio Council provided:

1. He is not required to become a member of a political party.
2. Serv[ing] as a Barrio Captain or as a member of the Barrio Council Captain does not involve him in partisan politics.
3. That he does not campaign for election of office. There is no objection to allowing one's name to be placed in nomination if required by law. If nominations are not obligatory and the voter is allowed to write on the ballot paper and vote for the names of those he wishes to be elected, this procedure should be followed by the Bahá'ís.

It would be preferable, of course, if the election of members of a Barrio Council and Barrio Captains should be strictly in accordance with Bahá'í principles. We would appreciate knowing whether this can be done in... or whether it may be possible to amend the laws so that this procedure can be adopted in villages where the population is entirely or predominantly Bahá'ís.

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Philippines, dated April 24, 1972)



There may be occasions when an enrollment must be postponed, as in the case of someone holding a political post, unless that person is able and can, in good conscience, resign from such a post immediately.

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a Local Spiritual Assembly, dated April 4, 1977)



It is better if the friends avoid accepting either elected or appointive posts of the nature described in your letter.... [S]uch posts should only be accepted if in the process of obtaining the appointment, in winning the election, or in discharging their duties they do not contravene Bahá'í principles. This includes the following:

That they do not campaign for election.

That they do not contravene the guidelines set forth by the Guardian in the following passage:

“Let them refrain from associating themselves, whether by word or by deed, with the political pursuits of their prospective nations, with the politics of their governments and the schemes and programs of parties and factions. In such controversies they should assign no blame, take no side, further no design, and identify themselves with no system prejudicial to the best interests of that world-wide-Fellowship which it is their aim to guard and foster. Let them beware lest they allow themselves to become the tools of unscrupulous politicians, or to be entrapped by the treacherous devices of the plotters and the perfidious among their countrymen. Let them so shape their lives and regulate their conduct that no charge secrecy, of fraud, of bribery or of intimidation may, however ill-founded, be brought against them. Let them rise above all particularism and partisanship, above the vain disputes, the petty calculations, transient passions that agitate the face, and engage the intention,



of a challenging world. It is their duty to strive to distinguish, as clearly as they possibly can, and if needed with the aid of their elected representative, such posts and functions as are either diplomatic or political from those that are purely administrative in character, and which under no circumstances are affected by the changes and chances that political activities and party government, in every land, must necessarily involve. Let them affirm their unyielding determination to stand, firmly and unreservedly, for the way of Bahá'u'lláh, to avoid the entanglements and bickerings inseparable from the pursuits of the politician, and to become worthy agencies of that divine policy which incarnates God's immutable Purpose for all men."

The application of the above principles is left to the discretion of your National Spiritual Assembly.

(From a letter written on the behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Panama, dated October 12, 1977)

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Bahá'ís are permitted to apply to the International Communication agency for employment with the United States Foreign Service.

(From a letter written on behalf of the United House of Justice to an individual, dated May 7, 1979)

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In the case of Mr. ..., it is important that you ascertain precisely what his membership on a village council entitles, and how he achieved such membership, i.e., by election or appointment. Your Assembly should understand that Bahá'ís do not engage in political activities nor belong to political parties, but may freely undertake non-political administrative work with governments may hold appointive posts which are not political in character, or may serve on local councils if they do not campaign for office and are not required to undertake partisan political activities.

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Leeward Islands, dated February 15, 1982)

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The House of Justice feels that it would be permissible for you to accept the position of Vice-Consul on the understanding that you are not required to become involved in political activities. The House of Justice urges you to pay particular attention to this matter so that you do not enter upon a course that, at a later stage, would inevitably lead you into political matters. The House of Justice feels sure that you are aware of this point and of the delicate line that must be drawn.

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual, dated July 15, 1984)

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It is up to the National Spiritual Assembly to determine which posts and functions are "diplomatic or political" and which are "purely administrative in character" and "under no circumstances are affected by the changes and chances that political activities and party government, in every land, must necessarily involve." While the former represent activities the friends must avoid, the latter functions are open to Bahá'ís. Indeed, such functions are to be welcomed by the friends as they constitute

opportunities which enable them “to serve, in an unselfish, unostentatious and patriotic fashion, the highest interests of the country” To which they belong.

To throw oneself into the maelstrom of political struggles or to withdraw utterly from any interest in the affairs of men outside the Bahá’í community are two extremes that must be avoided by every loyal Bahá’í. The true course is more difficult to follow, and requires wisdom and mature judgment.

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Guyana, dated November 20, 1989)



Concerning the Bahá’í view with regard to the election of city and local councils and whether a Bahá’í can serve on such bodies; this depends largely on the nature of the “responsibilities undertaken as a member of these councils. There is no objection to the believers’ accepting appointments or being elected, so long as their duties are clearly defined as providing service to the general public and are free from involvement in partisan politics.

Under these same conditions, if elected, Bahá’ís may even serve as mayors in small towns as far as it does not necessitate taking part in political activities and electioneering. A Bahá’í should not, however, seek nomination for election to office, but if he is nominated by non- Bahá’ís and accepts the nomination, he cannot himself campaign for election, although others, namely, non- Bahá’ís, cannot be prevented from doing so on his behalf. If elected he should make his position quite clear, that he has accepted the post only in order to serve the people

...

With respect to the fulfillment of civic responsibilities, a letter dated November 30, 1930 written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer states:

The Bahá’ís in Persia avoid political posts and positions, abstain from any interference in matters pertaining to the policy of the state, but fill the more important administrative posts that have no political character. They feel that in this manner they can best serve the interest of their country and prove by their action their integrity and attachment to Persia.

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá’ís of Iran, dated May 1, 2008)

## **Evolving Understandings of Political Participation**

There can be no doubt that the progress of the Cause from this time onward will be characterized by an ever-increasing relationship to the agencies, activities, institutions and leading individuals of the non-Bahá’í world. We shall acquire greater stature at the United Nations, become better known in the deliberations of governments, a familiar figure to the media, a subject of interest to academics, and inevitably the envy of failing establishments. Our preparation for and response to this situation must be a continual deepening of our faith, an unwavering adherence to its principles of abstention from partisan politics and freedom from prejudices, and above all an increasing understanding of its fundamental verities and relevance to the modern world.

(From a letter written by the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá’ís of the World, dated Rīḍván 1984)



The general policy already enunciated by Shoghi Effendi in *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, pages 63-67, should be scrupulously upheld by the friends. However, as the Faith emerges from obscurity, the application of certain aspects of this policy will require the clarification of the House of Justice. With the passage of time, practices in the political realm will definitely undergo the profound changes anticipated in the Bahá'í writings. As a consequence, what we understand now of the policy of non-involvement in politics will also undergo a change; but as Shoghi Effendi has written, this instruction, “at the present stage of the evolution of our Faith, should be increasingly emphasized, irrespective of its application to the East or to the West.”

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual, dated June 23, 1987)



As for the statement made by Shoghi Effendi in his letter of 21 March 1932, the well-established principles of the Faith concerning the relationship of the Bahá'í institutions to those of the country in which the Bahá'ís reside make it unthinkable that they would ever purpose to violate a country's constitution or so to meddle in its political machinery as to attempt to take over the powers of government. This is an integral element of the Bahá'í principle of abstention from involvement in politics. However, this does not by any means imply that the country itself may not, by constitutional means, decide to adopt Bahá'í laws and practices and modify its constitution or method of government accordingly. The relationship between the principle of abstention from involvement in politics and the emergence of the Bahá'í State is commented on later in this letter. In the meantime we can quote the following extracts from letters written on behalf of the Guardian in response to queries from individual believers, which indicate that the relationship is an evolving one:

Regarding the question raised in your letter, Shoghi Effendi believes that for the present the Movement, whether in the East or the West, should be dissociated entirely from politics. This was the explicit injunction of ‘Abdu'l-Bahá. . . . Eventually, however, as you have rightly conceived it, the Movement will, as soon as it is fully developed and recognized, embrace both religious and political issues. In fact Bahá'u'lláh clearly states that affairs of state as well as religious questions are to be referred to the House of Justice into which the Assemblies of the Bahá'ís will eventually evolve. (30 November 1930)

The Bahá'ís will be called upon to assume the reins of government when they will come to constitute the majority of the population in a given country, and even then their participation in political affairs is bound to be limited in scope unless they obtain a similar majority in some other countries as well. (19 November 1939)

The Bahá'ís must remain non-partisan in all political affairs. In the distant future, however, when the majority of a country have become Bahá'ís then it will lead to the establishment of a Bahá'í State. (19 April 1941)

...

Clearly the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth is a “political” enterprise, and the Teachings of the Faith are filled with “political” principles – using the word in the sense of the

science of government and of the organization of human society. At the same time the Bahá'í world community repeatedly and emphatically denies being a “political” organization, and Bahá'ís are required, on pain of deprivation of their administrative rights, to refrain from becoming involved in “political” matters and from taking sides in “political” disputes. In other words, the Bahá'ís are following a completely different path from that usually followed by those who wish to reform society. They eschew political methods towards the achievement of their aims, and concentrate on revitalizing the hearts, minds and behaviour of people and on presenting a working model as evidence of the reality and practicality of the way of life they propound.

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual, dated April 27, 1995)

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The Guardian described the emerging consciousness of the oneness of humankind that has been unfolding for the past hundred years as being driven by the two parallel and interrelated processes of integration and disintegration. It is by working in the context of the imperatives created by the two processes identified by Shoghi Effendi that we, as individuals, can respond effectively to the promptings of our conscience.

The most obvious parameter of this context is, of course, the moral obligation to demonstrate in our lives the sense of justice that the Faith teaches. Yet another is the concern you mention to avoid involvement in any form of partisan political action. This principle should not, however be misunderstood. The programme of the Bahá'í Cause itself operates in the political realm to the extent that it is concerned with inducing changes in public policy and behavior at local, national and international levels. To this end, the community collaborates with other likeminded organizations and works closely with sympathetic governments and United Nations agencies. In doing so, its efforts are scrupulous to avoid entanglement in agendas that serve the interests of particular parties, factions, or similarly biased political forces. This standard must likewise govern the behavior of individual believers.

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to an individual dated November 27, 2001)

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Your email letter dated 26 June 2008, in which you inquire about the extent to which a Bahá'í, particularly one who is a social scientist or academic, may speak publicly on sociopolitical issues, has been received by the Universal House of Justice. We have been asked to convey the following reply.

You are, of course, well aware of the principle of noninvolvement in politics enunciated by Shoghi Effendi. Bahá'ís are to “refrain from associating themselves, whether by word or by deed, with the political pursuits of their respective nations, with the policies of their governments and the schemes and programs of parties and factions.” They “assign no blame, take no side, further no design, and identify themselves with no system prejudicial to the best interests” of the Faith and eschew “the entanglements and bickerings inseparable from the pursuits of the politician”. They are to “rise above all particularism and partisanship, above the vain disputes, the petty calculations, the transient passions that agitate the face, and engage the attention, of a changing world. This principle, which demands strict avoidance of any type of partisan political activity, must be scrupulously upheld. However, as society and its political processes evolve and as the Faith grows, the interaction between

the two becomes increasingly complex. The House of Justice will provide the necessary guidance over time to apply this principle to existing circumstances.

The term “politics” can have a broad meaning, and therefore it is important to distinguish between partisan political activity and the discourse and action intended to bring about constructive social change. While the former is proscribed, the latter is enjoined; indeed, a central purpose of the Bahá’í community is social transformation. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s treatise, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, amply demonstrates the Faith’s commitment to promoting social change without entering into the arena of partisan politics. So too, innumerable passages in the Bahá’í Writings encourage the believers to contribute to the betterment of the world. “Be anxiously concerned with the needs of the age ye live in,” Bahá’u’lláh states, “and center your deliberations on its exigencies and requirements.” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá urges the friends to “become distinguished in all the virtues of the human world- for faithfulness and sincerity, for justice and fidelity, for firmness and steadfastness, for philanthropic deeds and service to the human world, for love toward every human being, for unity and accord with all people, for removing prejudices and promoting international peace.” Further, in a letter written on his behalf, Shoghi Effendi explains that “much as the friends must guard against in any way seeming to identify themselves or the Cause with any political party, they must also guard against the other extreme of never taking part, with other progressive groups, in conferences or committees designed to promote some activity in entire accord with our teachings”. In another letter written on his behalf in 1948, when racial inequality was enshrined in the laws of many states in the United States, he indicates that there is “no objection at all to the students taking part in something so obvious akin to the *spirit* of our teachings as a campus demonstration against race prejudice.” Bahá’ís must therefore be tireless in addressing through word and deed, a range of social issues.

When the Bahá’í community was small, its contribution to social well-being was naturally limited. In 1983 the House of Justice announced that the growth of the Faith had given rise to the need for a greater involvement in the life of society. Bahá’ís began to engage more systematically in the work of social and economic development through activities of varying degrees of complexity. Efforts to contribute to social transformation also include participation in the public discourse on issues of concern to humanity, such as peace, the elimination of prejudices of all kinds, the spiritual and moral empowerment of youth, and the promotion of justice. These two types of activity have steadily increased over the past twenty-five years and will grow in scope and influence in the future.

The organized endeavors of the Bahá’í community in these areas are reinforced by the diverse initiatives of individual believers working in various fields – as volunteers, professionals, and experts – to contribute to social change. The distinctive nature of their approach is to avoid conflict and the contest for power while striving to unite people in the search for underlying moral and spiritual principles and for practical measures that can lead to the just resolution of the problems afflicting society. Bahá’ís perceive humanity as a single body. All are inseparably bound to one another. A social order structured to meet the needs of one group at the expense of another results in injustice and oppression. Instead, the best interest of each component part is achieved by considering its needs in the context of the well-being of the whole.

Involvement in social discourse and action will at times require that Bahá’ís become associated with the development of public policy. In this regard, the term “policy,” like the term “politics,” has a

broad meaning. While refraining from discussion of policies pertaining to political relations between nations or partisan political affairs within a country, Bahá'ís will no doubt contribute to the formulation and implementation of policies that address certain social concerns. Examples of such concerns are safeguarding the rights of women, extending to effective education to all children, curbing the spread of infectious disease, protecting the environment, and eliminating the extremes of wealth and poverty.

It is evident, then, that as a Bahá'í who is a political scientist you have a great deal of latitude to comment on social issues. Yet it is also possible to participate in the generation and application of knowledge in your field by dealing with topics that are more directly political in nature. You are no doubt aware of the general advice, written on behalf of the Guardian, that one way to criticize the social and political order of the day without siding with or opposing an existing regime is to offer a deeper analysis on the level of political theory rather than practical politics. Another approach would be to contribute to scientific inquiry has shed light on differing viewpoints to seek common understanding and effective solutions without succumbing to partisan advocacy and obfuscation. Bahá'u'lláh states that “every matter related to state affairs which ye raise for discussion falls under the shadow of one of the words sent down from the heaven of His glorious and exalted utterance.” You have the opportunity to mine the gems of His Revelation and to prepare and present them in a manner that is attractive to those seeking new insights. You will have to learn over time how to find a balance between the principles and concepts you hold as true that come from the Teachings of Faith and from your discipline.

Challenges will inevitably arise. For example, you may find that an issue pertaining to social action has been co-opted by the political debate among competing factions, and wisdom will be required to determine whether to adjust your approach or let the matter rest for a time.

In some cases it may be necessary to forgo opportunities that would thrust you into political debate or criticism of partisan policies of governments. In other instances there may be special sensitivities, such as topics related to countries where the Bahá'í community faces hardship or oppression, when comments could create the impression that the friends are engaged in political activity against the interests of a particular government. These same considerations arise when evaluating invitations from the media to comment or engage in discussion on the political affairs of the day. Your National Spiritual Assembly is available to assist you in clarifying particular questions should the need arise.

Be assured of the prayers of the House of Justice at the Sacred Threshold that your efforts to reflect the principles of the Faith in your professional activities may attract the blessings and confirmations of the Ancient Beauty.

(From a letter written on behalf of Universal House of Justice to an individual, dated December 23, 2008)

## War and Peace

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### The Nature of War

O peoples of the earth! Haste ye to do the pleasure of God, and war ye valiantly, as it behooveth you to war, for the sake of proclaiming His resistless and immovable Cause. We have decreed that war shall be waged in the path of God with the armies of wisdom and utterance, and of a goodly character and praiseworthy deeds. Thus hath it been decided by Him Who is the All-Powerful, the Almighty. There is no glory for him that committeth disorder on the earth after it hath been made so good. Fear God, O people, and be not of them that act unjustly.

...

Beware lest ye shed the blood of any one. Unsheathe the sword of your tongue from the scabbard of utterance, for therewith ye can conquer the citadels of men's hearts. We have abolished the law to wage holy war against each other. God's mercy hath, verily, encompassed all created things, if ye do but understand.

(Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, p. 24)

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He that wisheth to promote the Cause of the one true God, let him promote it through his pen and tongue, rather than have recourse to sword or violence. We have, on a previous occasion, revealed this injunction, and We now confirm it, if ye be of them that comprehend.

(Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 329)

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Praise be to Him, ye are acquainted with the various laws, institutions and principles of the world; today nothing short of these divine teachings can assure peace and tranquility to mankind. But for these teachings, this darkness shall never vanish, these chronic diseases shall never be healed; nay, they shall grow fiercer from day to day. The Balkans will remain discontented. Its restlessness will increase. The vanquished Powers will continue to agitate. They will resort to every measure that may rekindle the flame of war. Movements, newly-born and worldwide in their range, will exert their utmost effort for the advancement of their designs. The Movement of the Left will acquire great importance. Its influence will spread.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, p. 249)

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A conquest can be a praiseworthy thing, and there are times when war becomes the powerful basis of peace, and ruin the very means of reconstruction. If, for example, a high-minded sovereign marshals his troops to block the onset of the insurgent and the aggressor, or again, if he takes the field and distinguishes himself in a struggle to unify a divided state and people, if, in brief, he is waging war for a righteous purpose, then this seeming wrath is mercy itself, and this apparent tyranny the very

substance of justice and this warfare the cornerstone of peace. Today, the task befitting great rulers is to establish universal peace, for in this lies the freedom of all peoples.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, The Secret of Divine Civilization, p. 70)



War is really nothing more but the result of existing forces. Should we desire to end that devastating consequence we should go back to the basic causes and remedy those evils. We should eliminate the hatreds, national bigotry, mistrust and self-aggrandizement as well as economic, social and religious differences which now prevail in the world if we desire to establish an abiding peace. And nothing can achieve this save the Teachings of Bahá’u’lláh, for they change the human heart and also prescribe definite precepts that would render our social environment healthy and peaceful.

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual, dated May 11, 1932)

Enlistment in the Armed Services

He has noted your Assembly’s request for his advice as to what forms of national service the friends may volunteer for in times of emergency. While the believers, he feels, should exert every effort to obtain from the authorities a permit exempting them from active military service in a combatant capacity, it is their duty at the same time, as loyal and devoted citizens, to offer their services to their country in any field of national service which is not specifically aggressive or directly military. Such forms of national work as air raid precaution service, ambulance corps, and other humanitarian work or activity of a noncombatant nature, are the most suitable types of service the friends can render, and which they should gladly volunteer for, since in addition to the fact that they do not involve any violation of the spirit of principle of the Teachings they constitute a form of social and humanitarian service which the Cause holds sacred and emphatically enjoins.”

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the British Isles, dated November 27, 1938)



It is still his firm conviction that the believers, while expressing their readiness to unreservedly obey any directions that the authorities may issue concerning national service in time of war, should also, and while there is yet no outbreak of hostilities, appeal to the government for exemption from active military service in a combatant capacity, stressing the fact that they are doing so not prompted by any selfish considerations, but by the sole and supreme motive of upholding the Teachings of the Faith, which make it a moral obligation for them to desist from any act that would involve them into direct warfare with their fellow-humans of any other race or nation.

The Bahá’í Teachings, indeed, condemn, emphatically and unequivocally, any form of physical violence, and warfare in the battlefield is obviously a form, and perhaps the worst form which such violence can assume.

...

It is immaterial whether such services would still expose them to dangers, either at home or in the front, since their desire is not to protect their lives, but to desist from any acts of willful murder.

The friends should consider it their conscientious duty, as loyal members of the Faith, to apply for such exemption, even though there may be slight prospect of their obtaining the consent and approval of the authorities to their petition. It is most essential that in times of such national excitement and emergency such as those through which so many countries in the world are now passing that the believers should not allow themselves to be carried away by the passions agitating the masses, and act in a manner that would make them deviate from the path of wisdom and moderation, and lead them to violate, however reluctantly and indirectly, the spirit as well as the letter of the Teachings.

(From a letter of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the British Isles, dated June 4, 1939)



Our position as Bahá'ís is not that we won't obey our Government or support the country if attacked; it is that we do not believe in, or wish to take part in, killing our fellow men. We are not conscientious objectors at all, we will serve, but wish, as there is a provision in the law of the United States covering our attitude, to be classified as non-combatants.

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual, dated July 15, 1952)



We think that Bahá'ís should be discouraged from seeking or continuing a career in the military, and that in any event they must, in obedience to the Guardian's clear instructions, apply for exemptions from military duty which necessitate the taking of human life.

When the law imposes an obligation upon citizens to fulfill a term of military service, as the US Selective Service Act does, and a Bahá'í may fulfill this term by enlisting, re-enlisting or by being commissioned as an officer, he may do so provided he does not in any way jeopardize his right to 'apply for and maintain the noncombatant status' within the spirit of the above principle."

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly dated September 20, 1965)



Bahá'ís recognize the right and duty of governments to use force for the maintenance of law and order and to protect their people. Thus, for a Bahá'í, the shedding of blood for such a purpose is not necessarily essentially wrong. The Bahá'í Faith draws a very definite distinction between the duty of an individual to forgive and 'to be killed rather than to kill' and the duty of society to uphold justice. This matter is explained by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in Some Answered Questions. In the present condition of the world Bahá'ís try to keep themselves out of the internecine conflicts that are raging among their fellow men and to avoid shedding blood in such struggles, but this does not mean that we are absolute pacifists.

...

With reference to the absolute pacifists, or conscientious objectors to war; their attitude, judged from the Bahá'í standpoint, is quite anti-social and due to its exaltation of the individual conscience leads inevitably to disorder and chaos in society. Extreme pacifists are thus very close to the anarchists, in

the sense that both of these groups lay an undue emphasis on the rights and merits of the individual. The Bahá'í conception of social life is essentially based on the subordination of the individual will to that of society. It neither suppresses the individual nor does it exalt him to the point of making him an anti-social creature, a menace to society. As in everything, it follows the 'golden mean'. The only way that society can function is for the minority to follow the will of the majority.

...

The other main objection to the conscientious objectors is that their method of establishing peace is too negative. Non-cooperation is too passive a philosophy to become an effective way for social reconstruction. Their refusal to bear arms can never establish peace. There should first be a spiritual revitalization which nothing, except the Cause of God, can effectively bring to every man's heart."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, dated February 9, 1967)

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Bahá'ís cannot voluntarily enlist in any branch of the Armed Forces where they would be subject to orders to engage in the taking of human life.... [T]here is no objection to a Bahá'í enlisting voluntarily in the armed forces of a country in order to obtain a training in some trade or professions, provided that he can do so without making himself liable to undertake combatant service.

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Fiji Islands, dated August 2, 1971)

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There is likewise no objection to a Bahá'í seeking or continuing a career in the armed forces, provided that he can do so without making himself liable to undertake combatant service.

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly, dated January 13, 1981)

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It is true that Bahá'ís are not pacifists since we uphold the use of force in the service of justice and upholding the law. But we do not believe that war is very necessary and its abolition is one of the essential purposes and brightest promises of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation. His specific command to the kings of the earth is: 'Should any among you take up arms against another, ride ye all against him, for this is naught but manifest justice.' (Tablet to Queen Victoria, "The Proclamation of Bahá'u'lláh", p. 13) The beloved Guardian has explained that the unity of mankind implies the establishment of a world commonwealth, a world federal system, '...liberated from the curse of war and its miseries... in which Force is made the servant of Justice... ' whose world executive 'backed by an international Force... will safeguard the organic unity of the whole commonwealth.' This is obviously not war but the maintenance of law and order on a world scale. Warfare is the ultimate tragedy of disunity among nations where no international authority exists powerful enough to restrain them from pursuing their own limited interests. Bahá'ís therefore ask to serve their countries in non-combatant ways during such fighting; they will doubtless serve in such an international Force as Bahá'u'lláh' envisions, whenever it comes into being.

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual, dated September 11, 1984)

### Disarmament and Collective Security

It is incumbent upon the Sovereigns of the world – may God assist them – unitedly to hold fast unto this Peace, which is the chief instrument for the protection of all mankind. It is Our hope that they will arise to achieve what will be conducive to the well-being of man. It is their duty to convene an all-inclusive assembly, which either they themselves or their ministers will attend, and to enforce whatever measures are required to establish unity and concord amongst men. They must put away the weapons of war, and turn to the instruments of universal reconstruction. Should one king rise up against another, all the other kings must arise to deter him. Arms and armaments will, then, be no more needed beyond that which is necessary to insure the internal security of their respective countries. If they attain unto this all-surpassing blessing, the people of each nation will pursue, with tranquillity and contentment, their own occupations, and the groanings and lamentations of most men would be silenced. We beseech God to aid them to do His will and pleasure. He, verily, is the Lord of the throne on high and of earth below, and the Lord of this world and of the world to come. It would be preferable and more fitting that the highly honored kings themselves should attend such an assembly, and proclaim their edicts. Any king who will arise and carry out this task, he verily will, in the sight of God, become the cynosure of all kings. Happy is he, and great is his blessedness!

(Bahá'u'lláh, Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, p. 30)



The Great Being, wishing to reveal the prerequisites of the peace and tranquility of the world and the advancement of its peoples, hath written: The time must come when the imperative necessity for the holding of a vast, an all-embracing assemblage of men will be universally realized. The rulers and kings of the earth must needs attend it, and, participating in its deliberations, must consider such ways and means as will lay the foundations of the world's Great Peace amongst men. Such a peace demandeth that the Great Powers should resolve, for the sake of the tranquility of the peoples of the earth, to be fully reconciled among themselves. Should any king take up arms against another, all should unitedly arise and prevent him. If this be done, the nations of the world will no longer require any armaments, except for the purpose of preserving the security of their realms and of maintaining internal order within their territories. This will ensure the peace and composure of every people, government and nation. We fain would hope that the kings and rulers of the earth, the mirrors of the gracious and almighty name of God, may attain unto this station, and shield mankind from the onslaught of tyranny.

...

The day is approaching when all the peoples of the world will have adopted one universal language and one common script. When this is achieved, to whatsoever city a man may journey, it shall be as if he were entering his own home. These things are obligatory and absolutely essential. It is incumbent upon every man of insight and understanding to strive to translate that which hath been written into reality and action.

. . .

That one indeed is a man who, today, dedicateth himself to the service of the entire human race. The Great Being saith: Blessed and happy is he that ariseth to promote the best interests of the peoples and kindreds of the earth. In another passage He hath proclaimed: "It is not for him to pride himself who loveth his own country, but rather for him who loveth the whole world. The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens."

(Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 248)

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True civilization will unfurl its banner in the midmost heart of the world whenever a certain number of its distinguished and high-minded sovereigns – the shining exemplars of devotion and determination – shall, for the good and happiness of all mankind, arise, with firm resolve and clear vision, to establish the Cause of Universal Peace. They must make the Cause of Peace the object of general consultation, and seek by every means in their power to establish a Union of the nations of the world. They must conclude a binding treaty and establish a covenant, the provisions of which shall be sound, inviolable and definite. They must proclaim it to all the world and obtain for it the sanction of all the human race. This supreme and noble undertaking – the real source of the peace and well-being of all the world – should be regarded as sacred by all that dwell on earth. All the forces of humanity must be mobilized to ensure the stability and permanence of this Most Great Covenant. In this all-embracing Pact the limits and frontiers of each and every nation should be clearly fixed, the principles underlying the relations of governments towards one another definitely laid down, and all international agreements and obligations ascertained. In like manner, the size of the armaments of every government should be strictly limited, for if the preparations for war and the military forces of any nation should be allowed to increase, they will arouse the suspicion of others. The fundamental principle underlying this solemn Pact should be so fixed that if any government later violate any one of its provisions, all the governments on earth should arise to reduce it to utter submission, nay the human race as a whole should resolve, with every power at its disposal, to destroy that government. Should this greatest of all remedies be applied to the sick body of the world, it will assuredly recover from its ills and will remain eternally safe and secure.

Observe that if such a happy situation be forthcoming, no government would need continually to pile up the weapons of war, nor feel itself obliged to produce ever new military weapons with which to conquer the human race. A small force for the purposes of internal security, the correction of criminal and disorderly elements and the prevention of local disturbances, would be required – no more. In this way the entire population would, first of all, be relieved of the crushing burden of expenditure currently imposed for military purposes, and secondly, great numbers of people would cease to devote their time to the continual devising of new weapons of destruction – those testimonials of greed and bloodthirstiness, so inconsistent with the gift of life – and would instead bend their efforts to the production of whatever will foster human existence and peace and well-being, and would become the cause of universal development and prosperity. Then every nation on earth will reign in honor, and every people will be cradled in tranquillity and content.

A few, unaware of the power latent in human endeavor, consider this matter as highly impracticable, nay even beyond the scope of man's utmost efforts. Such is not the case, however. On the contrary,

thanks to the unfailing grace of God, the loving-kindness of His favored ones, the unrivaled endeavors of wise and capable souls, and the thoughts and ideas of the peerless leaders of this age, nothing whatsoever can be regarded as unattainable. Endeavor, ceaseless endeavor, is required. Nothing short of an indomitable determination can possibly achieve it. Many a cause which past ages have regarded as purely visionary, yet in this day has become most easy and practicable. Why should this most great and lofty Cause – the daystar of the firmament of true civilization and the cause of the glory, the advancement, the well-being and the success of all humanity – be regarded as impossible of achievement? Surely the day will come when its beauteous light shall shed illumination upon the assemblage of man.

The apparatus of conflict will, as preparations go on at their present rate, reach the point where war will become something intolerable to mankind.

It is clear from what has already been said that man's glory and greatness do not consist in his being avid for blood and sharp of claw, in tearing down cities and spreading havoc, in butchering armed forces and civilians. What would mean a bright future for him would be his reputation for justice, his kindness to the entire population whether high or low, his building up countries and cities, villages and districts, his making life easy, peaceful and happy for his fellow beings, his laying down fundamental principles for progress, his raising the standards and increasing the wealth of the entire population.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, p. 64)



As to the question of disarmament, all nations must disarm at the same time. It will not do at all, and it is not proposed, that some nations shall lay down their arms while others, their neighbors, remain armed. The peace of the world must be brought about by international agreement. All nations must agree to disarm simultaneously.... No nation can follow a peace policy while its neighbor remains warlike. There is no justice in that. Nobody would dream of suggesting that the peace of the world could be brought about by any such line of action. It is to be brought about by a general and comprehensive international agreement, and in no other way....

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *‘Abdu’l-Bahá in Canada*, p. 34)



At the present time, the subject of nuclear disarmament has become very much a political issue, with demonstrations taking place not only in the United States but also in England and some western European countries. To single out nuclear disarmament falls short of the Bahá'í position and would involve the Faith in the current disputes between nations. It is very clear that Bahá'ís believe disarmament, not only of nuclear weapons but of biological, chemical and all other forms, is essential.

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual, dated January 12, 1983)



Two points bear emphasizing in all these issues. One is that the abolition of war is not simply a matter of signing treaties and protocols; it is a complex task requiring a new level of commitment to resolving issues not customarily associated with the pursuit of peace. Based on political agreements

alone, the idea of collective security is a chimera. The other point is that the primary challenge in dealing with issues of peace is to raise the context to the level of principle, as distinct from pure pragmatism. For, in essence, peace stems from an inner state supported by a spiritual or moral attitude, and it is chiefly in evoking this attitude that the possibility of enduring solutions can be found.

(The Universal House of Justice, *The Promise of World Peace*, p. 27)



The forces which united the remedial reactions of so many nations to the sudden crisis in this region demonstrated beyond any doubt the necessity of the principle of collective security prescribed by Bahá'u'lláh more than a century ago as a means of resolving conflict. While the international arrangement envisioned by Him for the full application of this principle is far from having been adopted by the rulers of mankind, a long step towards the behavior outlined for the nations by the Lord of the Age has thus been taken. How illuminating are Bahá'u'lláh's words foreshadowing the future reorientation of the nations: "Be united, O concourse of the sovereigns of the world," He wrote, "for thereby will the tempest of discord be stilled amongst you, and your peoples find rest. Should any one among you take up arms against another, rise ye all against him, for this is naught but manifest justice.

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of the world, dated Ridván 148 (1991))



As can readily be seen, the application of collective security has yet to mature in an evolving process which derives its efficacy from a solidarity of purpose arrived at through unity of vision and action on the part of all the nations. The ways of applying it will of necessity differ from case to case and take time, with the trials and reverses such challenges entail, to acquire the status of a confirmed international policy. Ups and downs of so crucial a development in the ordering of human affairs throughout the planet are inevitable; it is therefore not possible, nor is it wise, for Bahá'ís to judge the elements of what is happening in the primal attempts at employing this principle. They can, however, take heart from the efforts that have been and will be made to effect it that what Bahá'u'lláh has prescribed is indeed coming to pass step by step.

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual, dated February 26, 2003)

Collapse of Old World Order

Amidst the shadows which are increasingly gathering about us we can faintly discern the glimmerings of Bahá'u'lláh's unearthly sovereignty appearing fitfully on the horizon of history. To us, the "generation of the half-light," living at a time which may be designated as the period of the incubation of the World Commonwealth envisaged by Bahá'u'lláh, has been assigned a task whose high privilege we can never sufficiently appreciate, and the arduousness of which we can as yet but dimly recognize. We may well believe, we who are called upon to experience the operation of the dark forces destined to unloose a flood of agonizing afflictions, that the darkest hour that must precede the dawn of the Golden Age of our Faith has not yet struck. Deep as is the gloom that already

encircles the world, the afflictive ordeals which that world is to suffer are still in preparation, nor can their blackness be as yet imagined. We stand on the threshold of an age whose convulsions proclaim alike the death-pangs of the old order and the birth-pangs of the new. Through the generating influence of the Faith announced by Bahá'u'lláh this New World Order may be said to have been conceived. We can, at the present moment, experience its stirrings in the womb of a travailing age – an age waiting for the appointed hour at which it can cast its burden and yield its fairest fruit. (Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 168)

(Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 168)



Indeed, as we gaze in retrospect beyond the immediate past, and survey, in however cursory a manner, the vicissitudes afflicting an increasingly tormented society, and recall the strains and stresses to which the fabric of a dying Order has been increasingly subjected, we cannot but marvel at the sharp contrast presented, on the one hand, by the accumulated evidences of the orderly unfoldment, and the uninterrupted multiplication of the agencies, of an Administrative Order designed to be the harbinger of a world civilization, and, on the other, by the ominous manifestations of acute political conflict, of social unrest, of racial animosity, of class antagonism, of immorality and of irreligion, proclaiming, in no uncertain terms, the corruption and obsolescence of the institutions of a bankrupt Order.

...

Against the background of these afflictive disturbances – the turmoil and tribulations of a travailing age – we may well ponder the portentous prophecies uttered well-nigh four score years ago, by the Author of our Faith, as well as the dire predictions made by Him Who is the unerring Interpreter of His teachings, all foreshadowing a universal commotion, of a scope and intensity unparalleled in the annals of mankind.

The violent derangement of the world's equilibrium; the trembling that will seize the limbs of mankind; the radical transformation of human society; the rolling up of the present-day Order; the fundamental changes affecting the structure of government; the weakening of the pillars of religion; the rise of dictatorships; the spread of tyranny; the fall of monarchies; the decline of ecclesiastical institutions; the increase of anarchy and chaos; the extension and consolidation of the Movement of the Left; the fanning into flame of the smoldering fire of racial strife; the development of infernal engines of war; the burning of cities; the contamination of the atmosphere of the earth – these stand out as the signs and portents that must either herald or accompany the retributive calamity which, as decreed by Him Who is the Judge and Redeemer of mankind, must, sooner or later, afflict a society which, for the most part, and for over a century, has turned a deaf ear to the Voice of God's Messenger in this day – a calamity which must purge the human race of the dross of its age-long corruptions, and weld its component parts into a firmly knit world-embracing Fellowship.

(From a letter of Shoghi Effendi to the Bahá'ís of the world, dated April 1957)



There can be no doubt whatever that what has already been accomplished, significant and unexampled though it is in the history of mankind, still immeasurably falls short of the essential requirements of the system which these words foreshadow. The League of Nations, its opponents will observe, still lacks the universality which is the prerequisite of abiding success in the efficacious settlement of international disputes. The United States of America, its begetter, has repudiated it, and is still holding aloof, while Germany and Japan, who ranked among its most powerful supporters, have abandoned its cause and withdrawn from its membership. The decisions arrived at and the action thus far taken, others will maintain, should be regarded as no more than a magnificent gesture, rather than a conclusive evidence of international solidarity. Still others may contend that though such a verdict has been pronounced, and such pledges been given, collective action must, in the end, fail in its ultimate purpose, and that the League itself will perish and be submerged by the flood of tribulations destined to overtake the whole race. Be that as it may, the significance of the steps already taken cannot be ignored. Whatever the present status of the League or the outcome of its historic verdict, whatever the trials and reverses which, in the immediate future, it may have to face and sustain, the fact must be recognized that so important a decision marks one of the most distinctive milestones on the long and arduous road that must lead it to its goal, the stage at which the oneness of the whole body of nations will be made the ruling principle of international life.

This historic step, however, is but a faint glimmer in the darkness that envelops an agitated humanity. It may well prove to be no more than a mere flash, a fugitive gleam, in the midst of an ever-deepening confusion. The process of disintegration must inexorably continue, and its corrosive influence must penetrate deeper and deeper into the very core of a crumbling age. Much suffering will still be required ere the contending nations, creeds, classes and races of mankind are fused in the crucible of universal affliction, and are forged by the fires of a fierce ordeal into one organic commonwealth, one vast, unified, and harmoniously functioning system. Adversities unimaginably appalling, undreamed of crises and upheavals, war, famine, and pestilence, might well combine to engrave in the soul of an unheeding generation those truths and principles which it has disdained to recognize and follow. A paralysis more painful than any it has yet experienced must creep over and further afflict the fabric of a broken society ere it can be rebuilt and regenerated.

(Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 192)

Justice and Peace

O people of God! That which traineth the world is Justice, for it is upheld by two pillars, reward and punishment. These two pillars are the sources of life to the world. Inasmuch as for each day there is a new problem and for every problem an expedient solution, such affairs should be referred to the House of Justice that the members thereof may act according to the needs and requirements of the time. They that, for the sake of God, arise to serve His Cause, are the recipients of divine inspiration from the unseen Kingdom. It is incumbent upon all to be obedient unto them. All matters of State should be referred to the House of Justice, but acts of worship must be observed according to that which God hath revealed in His Book.

(Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitab-i-Aqdas*, p. 91)



Justice, which consisteth in rendering each his due, dependeth upon and is conditioned by two words: reward and punishment. From the standpoint of justice, every soul should receive the reward of his actions, inasmuch as the peace and prosperity of the world depend thereon, even as He saith, exalted be His glory: “The structure of world stability and order hath been reared upon, and will continue to be sustained by, the twin pillars of reward and punishment”. In brief, every circumstance requireth a different utterance and every occasion calleth for a different course of action. Blessed are they that have arisen to serve God, who speak forth wholly for His sake, and who return unto Him.

(Bahá'u'lláh, *The Tabernacle of Unity*, p. 40)



O SON OF SPIRIT! The best beloved of all things in My sight is Justice; turn not away therefrom if thou desirest Me, and neglect it not that I may confide in thee. By its aid thou shalt see with thine own eyes and not through the eyes of others, and shalt know of thine own knowledge and not through the knowledge of thy neighbor. Ponder this in thy heart; how it behooveth thee to be. Verily justice is My gift to thee and the sign of My loving-kindness. Set it then before thine eyes.

(Bahá'u'lláh, *The Arabic Hidden Words*, #2)



The light of men is Justice. Quench it not with the contrary winds of oppression and tyranny. The purpose of justice is the appearance of unity among men. The ocean of divine wisdom surgeth within this exalted word, while the books of the world cannot contain its inner significance. Were mankind to be adorned with this raiment, they would behold the day-star of the utterance, ‘On that day God will satisfy everyone out of His abundance,’ shining resplendent above the horizon of the world. Appreciate ye the value of this utterance; it is a noble fruit that the Tree of the Pen of Glory hath yielded. Happy is the man that giveth ear unto it and observeth its precepts. Verily I say, whatever is sent down from the heaven of the Will of God is the means for the establishment of order in the world and the instrument for promoting unity and fellowship among its peoples. Thus hath the Tongue of this Wronged One spoken from His Most Great Prison.

(Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 66)



The essence of all that We have revealed for thee is Justice, is for man to free himself from idle fancy and imitation, discern with the eye of oneness His glorious handiwork, and look into all things with a searching eye.

(Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 156)



Justice and equity are twin Guardians that watch over men. From them are revealed such blessed and perspicuous words as are the cause of the well-being of the world and the protection of the nations.

(Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, p. 12)



This century is the century of the oneness of the world of humanity, the century of justice; this century is the century of universal peace, the century of the dawn of the sun of reality; this century is the century of the establishment of the kingdom of God upon this earth; therefore let us grasp every means to promote the federation of the world, that we may become the recipients of the divine outpourings.

(Abdu'l-Bahá, *Divine Philosophy*, p. 172)



“Bestir yourselves, O people,” is His emphatic warning, “in anticipation of the days of Divine justice, for the promised hour is now come. Beware lest ye fail to apprehend its import, and be accounted among the erring.” “The day is approaching,” He similarly has written, “when the faithful will behold the daystar of justice shining in its full splendor from the dayspring of glory.” “The shame I was made to bear,” He significantly remarks, “hath uncovered the glory with which the whole of creation had been invested, and through the cruelties I have endured, the daystar of justice hath manifested itself, and shed its splendor upon men.” “The world,” He again has written, “is in great turmoil, and the minds of its people are in a state of utter confusion. We entreat the Almighty that He may graciously illuminate them with the glory of His Justice, and enable them to discover that which will be profitable unto them at all times and under all conditions.” And again, “There can be no doubt whatever that if the daystar of justice, which the clouds of tyranny have obscured, were to shed its light upon men, the face of the earth would be completely transformed.”

“God be praised!” ‘Abdu'l-Bahá, in His turn, exclaims, “The sun of justice hath risen above the horizon of Bahá'u'lláh. For in His Tablets the foundations of such a justice have been laid as no mind hath, from the beginning of creation, conceived.” “The canopy of existence,” He further explains, “resteth upon the pole of justice, and not of forgiveness, and the life of mankind dependeth on justice and not on forgiveness.”

Small wonder, therefore, that the Author of the Bahá'í Revelation should have chosen to associate the name and title of that House, which is to be the crowning glory of His administrative institutions, not with forgiveness but with justice, to have made justice the only basis and the permanent foundation of His Most Great Peace, and to have proclaimed it in His Hidden Words as “the best beloved of all things” in His sight. It is to the American believers, particularly, that I feel urged to direct this fervent plea to ponder in their hearts the implications of this moral rectitude, and to uphold, with heart and soul and uncompromisingly, both individually and collectively, this sublime standard – a standard of which justice is so essential and potent an element.

(Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 27)



“The whole earth,” Bahá'u'lláh, on the other hand, forecasting the bright future in store for a world now wrapt in darkness, emphatically asserts, “is now in a state of pregnancy. The day is approaching when it will have yielded its noblest fruits, when from it will have sprung forth the loftiest trees, the most enchanting blossoms, the most heavenly blessings.” “The time is approaching when every

created thing will have cast its burden. Glorified be God Who hath vouchsafed this grace that encompasseth all things, whether seen or unseen!" "These great oppressions," He, moreover, foreshadowing humanity's golden age, has written, "are preparing it for the advent of the Most Great Justice." This Most Great Justice is indeed the Justice upon which the structure of the Most Great Peace can alone, and must eventually, rest, while the Most Great Peace will, in turn, usher in that Most Great, that World Civilization which shall remain forever associated with Him Who beareth the Most Great Name.

(Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day is Come*, p. 5)



Injustice is rife. Throughout the world it afflicts every department of life whether in the home, at the workplace, or in the public sphere as a consequence of the ill conduct of individuals, groups, or governments. Lamenting the horrors it breeds, Bahá'u'lláh made this poignant remark: 'Justice is, in this day, bewailing its plight, and Equity groaneth beneath the yoke of oppression. The thick clouds of tyranny have darkened the face of the earth, and enveloped its peoples.' So grave a situation exists at a time of unprecedented change: opposite processes of chaos and of order interact in a spiral of turbulence that signals a transition in the spiritual and social agenda of the world as a whole.

Human society has arrived at a stage in its evolution when unity of the whole human race is imperative. To not appreciate this reality is to not grasp the meaning of the current crisis in world affairs. The principle of the oneness of humankind identifies the code for resolving the far-reaching issues involved. As Bahá'ís, you understand that this principle implies not only the ultimate peaceful goal that it signifies but involves, as well, your participation in the painful tasks entailed in attaining it. Hence, you appreciate the global connotations of instances of oppression at home or abroad and accept the responsibility of striving, guided by the principles of the Faith and in collaboration with others whenever possible, to combat injustice for the common good.

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of Egypt, dated December 21, 2006)

The Lesser Peace and the Greater Peace

We pray God – exalted be His glory – and cherish the hope that He may graciously assist the manifestations of affluence and power and the daysprings of sovereignty and glory, the kings of the earth – may God aid them through His strengthening grace – to establish the Lesser Peace. This, indeed, is the greatest means for insuring the tranquillity of the nations. It is incumbent upon the Sovereigns of the world – may God assist them – unitedly to hold fast unto this Peace, which is the chief instrument for the protection of all mankind. It is Our hope that they will arise to achieve what will be conducive to the well-being of man. It is their duty to convene an all-inclusive assembly, which either they themselves or their ministers will attend, and to enforce whatever measures are required to establish unity and concord amongst men. They must put away the weapons of war, and turn to the instruments of universal reconstruction. Should one king rise up against another, all the other kings must arise to deter him. Arms and armaments will, then, be no more needed beyond that which is necessary to insure the internal security of their respective countries. If they attain unto this all-surpassing blessing, the people of each nation will pursue, with tranquillity and contentment, their

own occupations, and the groanings and lamentations of most men would be silenced. We beseech God to aid them to do His will and pleasure. He, verily, is the Lord of the throne on high and of earth below, and the Lord of this world and of the world to come. It would be preferable and more fitting that the highly honored kings themselves should attend such an assembly, and proclaim their edicts. Any king who will arise and carry out this task, he verily will, in the sight of God, become the cynosure of all kings. Happy is he, and great is his blessedness!

(Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, p. 30)



The Great Being, wishing to reveal the prerequisites of the peace and tranquility of the world and the advancement of its peoples, hath written: The time must come when the imperative necessity for the holding of a vast, an all-embracing assemblage of men will be universally realized. The rulers and kings of the earth must needs attend it, and, participating in its deliberations, must consider such ways and means as will lay the foundations of the world's Great Peace amongst men. Such a peace demandeth that the Great Powers should resolve, for the sake of the tranquility of the peoples of the earth, to be fully reconciled among themselves. Should any king take up arms against another, all should unitedly arise and prevent him. If this be done, the nations of the world will no longer require any armaments, except for the purpose of preserving the security of their realms and of maintaining internal order within their territories. This will ensure the peace and composure of every people, government and nation. We fain would hope that the kings and rulers of the earth, the mirrors of the gracious and almighty name of God, may attain unto this station, and shield mankind from the onslaught of tyranny.

...

The day is approaching when all the peoples of the world will have adopted one universal language and one common script. When this is achieved, to whatsoever city a man may journey, it shall be as if he were entering his own home. These things are obligatory and absolutely essential. It is incumbent upon every man of insight and understanding to strive to translate that which hath been written into reality and action.

...

That one indeed is a man who, today, dedicateth himself to the service of the entire human race. The Great Being saith: Blessed and happy is he that ariseth to promote the best interests of the peoples and kindreds of the earth. In another passage He hath proclaimed: "It is not for him to pride himself who loveth his own country, but rather for him who loveth the whole world. The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens."

(Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 248)



O ye rulers of the earth! Wherefore have ye clouded the radiance of the Sun, and caused it to cease from shining? Harken unto the counsel given you by the Pen of the Most High, that haply both ye and the poor may attain unto tranquillity and peace. We beseech God to assist the kings of the earth to establish peace on earth. He, verily, doth what He willeth.

O kings of the earth! We see you increasing every year your expenditures, and laying the burden thereof on your subjects. This, verily, is wholly and grossly unjust. Fear the sighs and tears of this wronged One, and lay not excessive burdens on your peoples. Do not rob them to rear palaces for yourselves; nay rather choose for them that which ye choose for yourselves. Thus We unfold to your eyes that which profiteth you, if ye but perceive. Your people are your treasures. Beware lest your rule violate the commandments of God, and ye deliver your wards to the hands of the robber. By them ye rule, by their means ye subsist, by their aid ye conquer. Yet, how disdainfully ye look upon them! How strange, how very strange!

Now that ye have refused the Most Great Peace, hold ye fast unto this, the Lesser Peace, that haply ye may in some degree better your own condition and that of your dependents.

O rulers of the earth! Be reconciled among yourselves, that ye may need no more armaments save in a measure to safeguard your territories and dominions. Beware lest ye disregard the counsel of the All-Knowing, the Faithful.

Be united, O kings of the earth, for thereby will the tempest of discord be stilled amongst you, and your peoples find rest, if ye be of them that comprehend. Should any one among you take up arms against another, rise ye all against him, for this is naught but manifest justice.

(Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 253)



The sixth Glad-Tidings is the establishment of the Lesser Peace, details of which have formerly been revealed from Our Most Exalted Pen. Great is the blessedness of him who upholdeth it and observeth whatsoever hath been ordained by God, the All-Knowing, the All-Wise.

(Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 23)



It is incumbent upon the ministers of the House of Justice to promote the Lesser Peace so that the people of the earth may be relieved from the burden of exorbitant expenditures. This matter is imperative and absolutely essential, inasmuch as hostilities and conflict lie at the root of affliction and calamity.

(Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh* p. 89)



He was very glad to see that you are active in representing the Cause among Peace Societies and gradually bringing them to contact our principles on that all-important subject. The sooner they come to appreciate the significance of the Message of Bahá'u'lláh the sooner will they be able to bring about the realization of their object and hope and rehabilitate our perturbed society.

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual, dated May 11, 1932)



With reference to the question you have asked concerning the time and means through which the Lesser and Most Great Peace, referred to by Bahá'u'lláh, will be established, following the coming

world war. Your view that the Lesser Peace will come about through the political efforts of the states and nations of the world, and independently of any direct Bahá'í plan or effort, and the Most Great Peace established through the instrumentality of the believers, and by the direct operation of the laws and principles revealed by Bahá'u'lláh and the functioning of the Universal House of Justice as the supreme organ of the Bahá'í super state – your view on this subject is quite correct and in full accord with the pronouncements of the Guardian as embodied in the “Unfoldment of World Civilization”.

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual, dated March 14, 1939)



We are told by Shoghi Effendi that two great processes are at work in the world: the great Plan of God, tumultuous in its progress, working through mankind as a whole, tearing down barriers to world unity and forging humankind into a unified body in the fires of suffering and experience. This process will produce in God's due time, the Lesser Peace, the political unification of the world.^{+F142} Mankind at that time can be likened to a body that is unified but without life. The second process, the task of breathing life into this unified body – of creating true unity and spirituality culminating in the Most Great Peace – is that of the Bahá'ís, who are labouring consciously, with detailed instructions and continuing divine guidance, to erect the fabric of the Kingdom of God on earth, into which they call their fellowmen, thus conferring upon them eternal life.^{+F143}

[F143. For an explanation of the Most Great Peace, see the Glossary.]

[F142. For an explanation of the Lesser Peace, see the Glossary.]

The working out of God's Major Plan proceeds mysteriously in ways directed by Him alone, but the Minor Plan that He has given us to execute, as our part in His grand design for the redemption of mankind, is clearly delineated.^{+F144} It is to this work that we must devote all our energies, for there is no one else to do it. So vital is this function of the Bahá'ís that Bahá'u'lláh has written: “O friends! Be not careless of the virtues with which ye have been endowed, neither be neglectful of your high destiny. Suffer not your labours to be wasted through the vain imaginations which certain hearts have devised. Ye are the stars of the heaven of understanding, the breeze that stirreth at the break of day, the soft-flowing waters upon which must depend the very life of all men, the letters inscribed upon His sacred scroll. 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.” (Gleanings, XCVI)

[F144. The Major Plan is God's plan for humanity that Bahá'ís believe He Himself operates, which is tumultuous in its progress, which works through humanity as a whole, and which forges mankind into a unified body through the fires of suffering and tribulation. Its ultimate object is the Kingdom of God on earth. The Minor Plan is that part of God's plan which the Bahá'ís are called upon to carry out. It is clear and orderly and operates in the world through the plans, instructions, and guidance given by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi, and now by the Universal House of Justice.]

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual, dated December 8, 1967)



It is true that 'Abdu'l-Bahá made statements linking the establishment of the unity of the nations to the twentieth century. For example ‘...The fifth candle is the unity of nations – a unity which, in this

century, will be securely established, causing all the peoples of the world to regard themselves as citizens of one common fatherland.... ’ And, in *The Promised Day is Come*, following a similar statement quoted from *Some Answered Questions*, Shoghi Effendi makes this comment: ‘This is the stage which the world is now approaching, the stage of world unity, which, as `Abdu’l-Bahá assures us, will, in this century, be securely established.’

There is also this statement from a letter written in 1946 to an individual believer on behalf of the beloved Guardian by his secretary:

‘All we know is that the lesser and the Most Great Peace will come – their exact dates we do not know. The same is true as regards the possibility of a future war; we cannot state dogmatically it will or will not take place – all we know is that mankind must suffer and be punished sufficiently to make it turn to God.’

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of the United States, dated July 29, 1974)



You make reference to calamities and request specific answers if there are any as to when they may occur and with what magnitude. The House of Justice noted your comments that you have read what Bahá’u’lláh had to say about the collapse of the old world order and the coming of the new, and that in recent times friends returning from their pilgrimages spoke of meeting with Hands of the Cause and members of the House of Justice in which the coming of great world upheavals was related to a time ‘around the end of the Five Year Plan and afterwards’. The House of Justice points out that calamities have been and are occurring and will continue to happen until mankind has been chastened sufficiently to accept the Manifestation for this day. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá anticipated that the Lesser Peace could be established before the end of the twentieth century. However, Bahá’ís should not be diverted from the work of the Cause by the fear of catastrophes but should try to understand why they occur. The beloved Guardian, in innumerable places, has explained the reasons for these occurrences, and since they happen from time to time as explained above we should not be concerned as to when they occur.

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual, dated April 15, 1976)



As you are no doubt aware, the Guardian indicated that the development of mankind from its present chaotic condition to the stage of Bahá’í World Commonwealth would be a long and gradual one. The coming into existence of a World Authority and the initiation of the Lesser peace, is one major transformation in this process, and will be followed by other stages of the development of the Faith as outlined by Shoghi Effendi in his writings. Undoubtedly, as these developments are taking place, the counsel the institutions of the Faith can give to governments, the pattern of world administration offered by the Bahá’í community and the great humanitarian projects which will be launched under the aegis of the Universal House of Justice, will exercise a great influence on the course of progress.

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual, dated January 19, 1983)



“This generation of Bahá’í youth enjoys a unique distinction. You will live your lives in a period when the forces of history are moving to a climax, when mankind will see the establishment of the Lesser Peace, and during which the Cause of God will play an increasingly prominent role in the reconstruction of human society. It is you who will be called upon in the years to come to stand at the helm of the Cause in face of conditions and developments which can, as yet, scarcely be imagined.”

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to the European Youth Conference in Innsbruck, dated July 4, 1983)



Bahá’u’lláh’s principal mission in appearing at this time in human history is the realization of the oneness of mankind and the establishment of peace among the nations; therefore, all the forces which are focused on accomplishing these ends are influenced by His Revelation. We know, however, that peace will come in stages. First, there will come the Lesser Peace, when the unity of nations will be achieved, then gradually the Most Great Peace – the spiritual as well as social and political unity of mankind, when the Bahá’í World Commonwealth, operating in strict accordance with the laws and ordinances of the Most Holy Book of the Bahá’í Revelation, will have been established through the efforts of Bahá’ís.

As to the Lesser Peace, Shoghi Effendi has explained that this will initially be a political unity arrived at by the decision of the governments of various nations; it will not be established by direct action of the Bahá’í community. This does not mean, however that the Bahá’ís are standing aside and waiting for the Lesser Peace to come before they do something about the peace of mankind. Indeed, by promoting the principles of the Faith, which are indispensable to the maintenance of peace, and by fashioning the instruments of the Bahá’í Administrative Order, which we are told by beloved Guardian is the pattern for future society, the Bahá’ís are constantly engaged in laying the groundwork for a permanent peace, the Most Great Peace being their ultimate goal.

The Lesser Peace itself will pass through stages; at the initial stage the governments will act entirely on their own without the conscious involvement of the Faith; later on, in God’s good time, the Faith will have a direct influence on it in ways indicated by Shoghi Effendi in his “The Goal of a New World Order”. In connection with the steps that will lead to this latter stage, the Universal House of Justice will certainly determine what has to be done, in accordance with the guidance in the Writings, such as the passage you quoted from ‘Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh’, page 89. In the meantime, the Bahá’ís will undoubtedly continue to do all in their power to promote the establishment of peace.

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual, dated January 31, 1985)



It is not advisable for Bahá’í institutions or individuals to initiate actions designed to prod government leaders to urge their governments or the leaders of other governments to convene the world conference called for by Bahá’u’lláh and echoed in “Promise of World Peace”. Two points should be borne in mind in this regard 1): Because of the political gravity of the decisions implied by this call and the differing political attitudes which it evokes, such actions on the part of the Bahá’í community would embroil the friends in partisan politics. There is quite a difference between identifying, as does the Peace Statement, the need for a convocation of world leaders and initiating

the political processes towards its realization. 2) In the writings of the Faith (e. g., the closing passages of “The Promised Day is Come”), it is clear that the establishment of the Lesser Peace, of which the conference of leaders will be a related event, will come about independently of any direct Bahá’í plan or action.

The following reply was written on behalf of the beloved Guardian in a letter dated 14 March 1939 to an individual believer:

...Your view that the Lesser Peace will come about through the political efforts of the states and nations of the world, and independently of any direct Bahá’í plan or effort, and the Most Great Peace established through the instrumentality of the believers, and by the direct operation of the laws and principles revealed by Bahá’u’lláh and the functioning of the Universal House of Justice as the supreme organ of the Bahá’í super state – your view on this subject is quite correct and in full accord with the pronouncements of the Guardian as embodied in the “Unfoldment of World Civilization”. It is clear, then, that the friends must respect the prerogatives of political leaders in this matter and allow them the latitude to exercise the initiative that only they can effectively take towards the establishment of the Lesser Peace. The fact that Bahá’í institutions will not be directly involved in the eventual convocation of the world leaders and in effecting the political unity of nations does not mean that the Bahá’ís are standing aside and waiting for the Lesser Peace to come before they do something about the peace of humanity. Indeed, by promoting the principles of the Faith, which are indispensable to the maintenance of peace, by living the Teachings, and by fashioning the instruments of the Bahá’í Administrative Order, which we are told by the beloved Guardian is the pattern for future society, the Bahá’ís are constantly engaged in laying the foundation for world peace, the Most Great Peace being their ultimate goal. The Bahá’ís should do whatever they can within the context of their Bahá’í teachings and consolidation plans and also through their professional and other regular activities to promulgate universal peace.

Concerning your specific questions, the details of your current activities to promote peace should be taken up with your National Spiritual Assembly and its guidance followed. The grassroots effort of the Bahá’ís should prepare the ground for the transition from the present system of national sovereignty to a system of world government. This it can do by concentrating on wide and continual dissemination of the Peace Statement whose contents should be known by the generality of humanity, on engaging people from all walks of life in discussions on peace, and on instilling and encouraging a sense of personal commitment to the prerequisites of peace. In a word, what is needed now is a world-wide consciousness of not only the requirements but also the possibility, and inevitability, of peace. Therefore, our immediate and inescapable task as Bahá’ís is to imbue the populations with such hope.

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual, dated June 17, 1987)

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It is clear, then, that the friends must respect the prerogatives of political leaders in this matter and allow them the latitude to exercise the initiative that only they can effectively take towards the establishment of the Lesser Peace. It should be borne in mind in this regard that because of the political gravity of the decisions involved in the establishment of the Lesser Peace, and the differing

political attitudes which it evokes, certain actions on the part of the Bahá'í community would embroil the friends in partisan politics. There is quite a difference between identifying the need for a convocation of world leaders, as does the Peace Statement, and initiating the political processes towards its realization. Even though the establishment of the Lesser Peace, of which the conference of leaders will be a related event, will come about independently of any Bahá'í plan or action, Bahá'ís should not be inert. Indeed, they may promote the concept of world peace with all that it implies without allowing their activities to assume a character that could be identified with the political processes which its realization will require.

It is not the wish of the Universal House of Justice to dampen anyone's enthusiasm for assisting in the developments towards peace, but it is critical that the friends understand the proprieties to be observed by the Bahá'í community in a matter of such vital importance. If, for example, the Bahá'ís attempt to take a leading role in organizing events associated with the anticipated convocation of world leaders, their motives could be misunderstood. The risk is that Bahá'ís might act in a manner which would put non Bahá'ís in the awkward position of appearing to endorse a specifically Bahá'í vision or make them feel that they are seeking to impose the requirements of our religion upon others. One needs to be aware that we Bahá'ís can, in our zeal, easily overwhelm others and even, owing to the wariness that we might inadvertently engender, cause them to lose sight of the practical importance of establishing world peace.

(Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual, dated January 14, 1996)



Even though the establishment of the Lesser Peace is not dependent on any Bahá'í plan or action, and although it will not represent the ultimate goal humanity is destined to reach in the Golden Age, our community has a responsibility to lend spiritual impetus to the processes towards that peace. The need at this exact time is to so intensify our efforts in building the Bahá'í System that we will attract the confirmations of Bahá'u'lláh and thus invoke a spiritual atmosphere that will accrue to the quickening of these processes.

...

The Bahá'í world community will expand its endeavors in both social and economic development and external affairs, and thus continue to collaborate directly with the forces leading towards the establishment of order in the world.

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of the world, dated Ridvan 153 (1996))

## The Bahá'í Administrative Order

The Administrative Order, which ever since 'Abdu'l-Bahá's ascension has evolved and is taking shape under our very eyes in no fewer than forty countries of the world, may be considered as the framework of the Will itself, the inviolable stronghold wherein this new-born child is being nurtured and developed. This Administrative Order, as it expands and consolidates itself, will no doubt manifest the potentialities and reveal the full implications of this momentous Document – this most remarkable expression of the Will of One of the most remarkable Figures of the Dispensation of

Bahá'u'lláh. It will, as its component parts, its organic institutions, begin to function with efficiency and vigor, assert its claim and demonstrate its capacity to be regarded not only as the nucleus but the very pattern of the New World Order destined to embrace in the fullness of time the whole of mankind.

It should be noted in this connection that this Administrative Order is fundamentally different from anything that any Prophet has previously established, inasmuch as Bahá'u'lláh has Himself revealed its principles, established its institutions, appointed the person to interpret His Word and conferred the necessary authority on the body designed to supplement and apply His legislative ordinances. Therein lies the secret of its strength, its fundamental distinction, and the guarantee against disintegration and schism.

(Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 144)



A word should now be said regarding the theory on which this Administrative Order is based and the principle that must govern the operation of its chief institutions. It would be utterly misleading to attempt a comparison between this unique, this divinely-conceived Order and any of the diverse systems which the minds of men, at various periods of their history, have contrived for the government of human institutions. Such an attempt would in itself betray a lack of complete appreciation of the excellence of the handiwork of its great Author. How could it be otherwise when we remember that this Order constitutes the very pattern of that divine civilization which the almighty Law of Bahá'u'lláh is designed to establish upon earth? The divers and ever-shifting systems of human polity, whether past or present, whether originating in the East or in the West, offer no adequate criterion wherewith to estimate the potency of its hidden virtues or to appraise the solidity of its foundations.

The Bahá'í Commonwealth of the future, of which this vast Administrative Order is the sole framework, is, both in theory and practice, not only unique in the entire history of political institutions, but can find no parallel in the annals of any of the world's recognized religious systems. No form of democratic government; no system of autocracy or of dictatorship, whether monarchical or republican; no intermediary scheme of a purely aristocratic order; nor even any of the recognized types of theocracy, whether it be the Hebrew Commonwealth, or the various Christian ecclesiastical organizations, or the Imamate or the Caliphate in Islam – none of these can be identified or be said to conform with the Administrative Order which the master-hand of its perfect Architect has fashioned.

This new-born Administrative Order incorporates within its structure certain elements which are to be found in each of the three recognized forms of secular government, without being in any sense a mere replica of any one of them, and without introducing within its machinery any of the objectionable features which they inherently possess. It blends and harmonizes, as no government fashioned by mortal hands has as yet accomplished, the salutary truths which each of these systems undoubtedly contains without vitiating the integrity of those God-given verities on which it is ultimately founded.

The Administrative Order of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh must in no wise be regarded as purely democratic in character inasmuch as the basic assumption which requires all democracies to depend fundamentally upon getting their mandate from the people is altogether lacking in this Dispensation.

In the conduct of the administrative affairs of the Faith, in the enactment of the legislation necessary to supplement the laws of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, the members of the Universal House of Justice, it should be borne in mind, are not, as Bahá'u'lláh's utterances clearly imply, responsible to those whom they represent, nor are they allowed to be governed by the feelings, the general opinion, and even the convictions of the mass of the faithful, or of those who directly elect them. They are to follow, in a prayerful attitude, the dictates and promptings of their conscience. They may, indeed they must, acquaint themselves with the conditions prevailing among the community, must weigh dispassionately in their minds the merits of any case presented for their consideration, but must reserve for themselves the right of an unfettered decision. "God will verily inspire them with whatsoever He willeth," is Bahá'u'lláh's incontrovertible assurance. They, and not the body of those who either directly or indirectly elect them, have thus been made the recipients of the divine guidance which is at once the life-blood and ultimate safeguard of this Revelation. Moreover, he who symbolizes the hereditary principle in this Dispensation has been made the interpreter of the words of its Author, and ceases consequently, by virtue of the actual authority vested in him, to be the figurehead invariably associated with the prevailing systems of constitutional monarchies.

Nor can the Bahá'í Administrative Order be dismissed as a hard and rigid system of unmitigated autocracy or as an idle imitation of any form of absolutistic ecclesiastical government, whether it be the Papacy, the Imamate or any other similar institution, for the obvious reason that upon the international elected representatives of the followers of Bahá'u'lláh has been conferred the exclusive right of legislating on matters not expressly revealed in the Bahá'í writings. Neither the Guardian of the Faith nor any institution apart from the International House of Justice can ever usurp this vital and essential power or encroach upon that sacred right. The abolition of professional priesthood with its accompanying sacraments of baptism, of communion and of confession of sins, the laws requiring the election by universal suffrage of all local, national, and international Houses of Justice, the total absence of episcopal authority with its attendant privileges, corruptions and bureaucratic tendencies, are further evidences of the non-autocratic character of the Bahá'í Administrative Order and of its inclination to democratic methods in the administration of its affairs.

Nor is this Order identified with the name of Bahá'u'lláh to be confused with any system of purely aristocratic government in view of the fact that it upholds, on the one hand, the hereditary principle and entrusts the Guardian of the Faith with the obligation of interpreting its teachings, and provides, on the other, for the free and direct election from among the mass of the faithful of the body that constitutes its highest legislative organ.

Whereas this Administrative Order cannot be said to have been modeled after any of these recognized systems of government, it nevertheless embodies, reconciles and assimilates within its framework such wholesome elements as are to be found in each one of them. The hereditary authority which the Guardian is called upon to exercise, the vital and essential functions which the Universal House of Justice discharges, the specific provisions requiring its democratic election by the representatives of the faithful – these combine to demonstrate the truth that this divinely revealed Order, which can never be identified with any of the standard types of government referred to by Aristotle in his works, embodies and blends with the spiritual verities on which it is based the beneficent elements which are to be found in each one of them. The admitted evils inherent in each of these systems being rigidly and permanently excluded, this unique Order, however long it may endure and however extensive its

ramifications, cannot ever degenerate into any form of despotism, of oligarchy, or of demagogy which must sooner or later corrupt the machinery of all man-made and essentially defective political institutions.

(Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 153)



No machinery falling short of the standard inculcated by the Bahá'í Revelation, and at variance with the sublime pattern ordained in His teachings, which the collective efforts of mankind may yet devise can ever hope to achieve anything above or beyond that "Lesser Peace" to which the Author of our Faith has Himself alluded in His writings. "Now that ye have refused the Most Great Peace," He, admonishing the kings and rulers of the earth, has written, "hold ye fast unto this the Lesser Peace, that haply ye may in some degree better your own condition and that of your dependents." Expatiating on this Lesser Peace, He thus addresses in that same Tablet the rulers of the earth: "Be reconciled among yourselves, that ye may need no more armaments save in a measure to safeguard your territories and dominions.

...

Be united, O kings of the earth, for thereby will the tempest of discord be stilled amongst you, and your peoples find rest, if ye be of them that comprehend. Should any one among you take up arms against another, rise ye all against him, for this is naught but manifest justice."

The Most Great Peace, on the other hand, as conceived by Bahá'u'lláh – a peace that must inevitably follow as the practical consequence of the spiritualization of the world and the fusion of all its races, creeds, classes and nations – can rest on no other basis, and can be preserved through no other agency, except the divinely appointed ordinances that are implicit in the World Order that stands associated with His Holy Name.

(Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 162)



The lack of such appreciation will detract from the perspective of anyone who measures Bahá'í administrative processes against practices prevalent in today's society. For notwithstanding its inclination to democratic methods in the administration of its affairs, and regardless of the resemblance of some of its features to those of other systems, the Administrative Order is not to be viewed merely as an improvement on past and existing systems; it represents a departure both in origin and in concept. "This newborn Administrative Order", as Shoghi Effendi has explained, "incorporates within its structure certain elements which are to be found in each of the three recognized forms of secular government, without being in any sense a mere replica of any one of them, and without introducing within its machinery any of the objectionable features which they inherently possess. It blends and harmonizes, as no government fashioned by mortal hands has as yet accomplished, the salutary truths which each of these systems undoubtedly contains without vitiating the integrity of those God-given verities on which it is ultimately founded.

You are, no doubt, conversant with the Guardian's expatiations on this theme. Why, then, this insistent emphasis? Why this repeated review of fundamentals? This emphasis, this review, is to

sound an appeal for solid thinking, for the attainment of correct perspectives, for the adoption of proper attitudes. And these are impossible without a deep appreciation of Bahá'í fundamentals.

The great emphasis on the distinctiveness of the Order of Bahá'u'lláh is not meant to belittle existing systems of government. Indeed, they are to be recognized as the fruit of a vast period of social evolution, representing an advanced stage in the development of social organization. What motivates us is the knowledge that the supreme mission of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, the Bearer of that Order, is, as Shoghi Effendi pointed out, “none other but the achievement of this organic and spiritual unity of the whole body of nations”, indicating the “coming of age of the entire human race”. The astounding implication of this is the near prospect of attaining an age-old hope, now made possible at long last by the coming of Bahá'u'lláh. In practical terms, His mission signals the advent of “an organic change in the structure of present-day society, a change such as the world has not yet experienced”. It is a fresh manifestation of the direct involvement of God in history, a reassurance that His children have not been left to drift, a sign of the outpouring of a heavenly grace that will enable all humanity to be free at last from conflict and contention to ascend the heights of world peace and divine civilization. Beyond all else, it is a demonstration of that love for His children, which He knew in the depth of His “immemorial being” and in the “ancient eternity” of His Essence, and which caused Him to create us all. In the noblest sense, then, attention to the requirements of His World Order is a reciprocation of that love.

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of the United States, dated December 29, 1988 (often referred to as “Individual Rights and Freedoms”))



All Bahá'ís, and especially those who make a profound study of the Cause, need to grasp the differences between the Bahá'í concepts of governance and those of the past, and to abstain from measuring Bahá'í institutions and methods against the faulty man-made institutions and methods hitherto current in the world.

...

Among the many complementary Teachings in the Faith which resolve the dilemmas of past societies are those of the unity of mankind on the one hand, and loyalty to the covenant on the other. As already mentioned, no one in this Dispensation is compelled to be a Bahá'í, and the division of humankind into the “clean” and the “unclean”, the “faithful” and the “infidels”, is abolished. At the same time, anyone who does choose to be a Bahá'í accepts the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh and, while free expression of opinion within the Bahá'í community is encouraged, this cannot ever be permitted to degenerate to the level of undermining the Covenant for this would vitiate the very purpose of the Revelation itself.

One of the major concerns of the Universal House of Justice, as the Bahá'í Administrative Order unfolds, will be to ensure that it evolves in consonance with the spirit of the Bahá'í Revelation. While many beneficial aspects of human society at large can be safely incorporated into Bahá'í Administration, the House of Justice will guard against the corrupting influence of those non-Bahá'í political and social concepts and practices which are not in harmony with the divine standard.

(From a letter written of behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual, dated April 27, 1995)

## A World Commonwealth

We pray God – exalted be His glory – and cherish the hope that He may graciously assist the manifestations of affluence and power and the daysprings of sovereignty and glory, the kings of the earth – may God aid them through His strengthening grace – to establish the Lesser Peace. This, indeed, is the greatest means for insuring the tranquillity of the nations. It is incumbent upon the Sovereigns of the world – may God assist them – unitedly to hold fast unto this Peace, which is the chief instrument for the protection of all mankind. It is Our hope that they will arise to achieve what will be conducive to the well-being of man. It is their duty to convene an all-inclusive assembly, which either they themselves or their ministers will attend, and to enforce whatever measures are required to establish unity and concord amongst men. They must put away the weapons of war, and turn to the instruments of universal reconstruction. Should one king rise up against another, all the other kings must arise to deter him. Arms and armaments will, then, be no more needed beyond that which is necessary to insure the internal security of their respective countries. If they attain unto this all-surpassing blessing, the people of each nation will pursue, with tranquillity and contentment, their own occupations, and the groanings and lamentations of most men would be silenced. We beseech God to aid them to do His will and pleasure. He, verily, is the Lord of the throne on high and of earth below, and the Lord of this world and of the world to come. It would be preferable and more fitting that the highly honored kings themselves should attend such an assembly, and proclaim their edicts. Any king who will arise and carry out this task, he verily will, in the sight of God, become the cynosure of all kings. Happy is he, and great is his blessedness!

(Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, p. 30)



A Supreme Tribunal shall be elected by the peoples and governments of every nation, composed of members elected from each country and Government. The members of this Great Council shall assemble in unity. All disputes of an international character shall be submitted to this Court, its work being to arrange by arbitration everything which otherwise would be a cause of war. The mission of this Tribunal would be to prevent war.

(Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, p. 155)



The question of universal peace, about which Bahá'u'lláh says that the Supreme Tribunal must be established: ...the Supreme Tribunal which Bahá'u'lláh has described will fulfil this sacred task with the utmost might and power. And his plan is this: that the national assemblies of each country and nation – that is to say parliaments – should elect two or three persons who are the choicest men of that nation, and are well informed concerning international laws and the relations between governments and aware of the essential needs of the world of humanity in this day. The number of these representatives should be in proportion to the number of inhabitants of that country. The elections of these souls who are chosen by the National Assembly, that is, the parliament, must be confirmed by the upper house, the congress and the cabinet and also by the president or monarch so these persons may be the elected ones of all the nation and the government. From among these people the members

of the Supreme Tribunal will be elected, and all mankind will thus have a share therein, for every one of these delegates is fully representative of his nation. When the Supreme Tribunal gives its ruling on any international question, either unanimously or by majority rule, there will no longer be any pretext for the plaintiff or ground of objection for the defendant. In case any of the governments or nations, in the execution of the irrefutable decision of the Supreme Tribunal, be negligent or dilatory, the rest of the nations will rise up against it, because all the governments and nations of the world are the supporters of this Supreme Tribunal. Consider what a firm foundation this is!

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, p.306)

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As regards the International Executive referred to by the Guardian in his ‘Goal of a New World Order’ it should be noted that this statement refers by no means to the Bahá’í Commonwealth of the future, but simply to that world government which will herald the advent and lead to the final establishment of the World Order of Bahá’u’lláh. The formation of this International Executive, which corresponds to the executive head or board in present-day national governments, is but a step leading to the Bahá’í world government of the future, and hence should not be identified with either the institution of the Guardianship or that of the International House of Justice.

(From letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual, dated March 17, 1934)

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To claim to have grasped all the implications of Bahá’u’lláh’s prodigious scheme for world-wide human solidarity, or to have fathomed its import, would be presumptuous on the part of even the declared supporters of His Faith. To attempt to visualize it in all its possibilities, to estimate its future benefits, to picture its glory, would be premature at even so advanced a stage in the evolution of mankind. All we can reasonably venture to attempt is to strive to obtain a glimpse of the first streaks of the promised Dawn that must, in the fullness of time, chase away the gloom that has encircled humanity. All we can do is to point out, in their broadest outlines, what appear to us to be the guiding principles underlying the World Order of Bahá’u’lláh, as amplified and enunciated by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, the Center of His Covenant with all mankind and the appointed Interpreter and Expounder of His Word.

(Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 34)

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What else could these weighty words signify if they did not point to the inevitable curtailment of unfettered national sovereignty as an indispensable preliminary to the formation of the future Commonwealth of all the nations of the world? Some form of a world super-state must needs be evolved, in whose favor all the nations of the world will have willingly ceded every claim to make war, certain rights to impose taxation and all rights to maintain armaments, except for purposes of maintaining internal order within their respective dominions. Such a state will have to include within its orbit an international executive adequate to enforce supreme and unchallengeable authority on every recalcitrant member of the commonwealth; a world parliament whose members shall be elected by the people in their respective countries and whose election shall be confirmed by their respective

governments; and a supreme tribunal whose judgment will have a binding effect even in such cases where the parties concerned did not voluntarily agree to submit their case to its consideration. A world community in which all economic barriers will have been permanently demolished and the interdependence of Capital and Labor definitely recognized; in which the clamor of religious fanaticism and strife will have been forever stilled; in which the flame of racial animosity will have been finally extinguished; in which a single code of international law – the product of the considered judgment of the world’s federated representatives – shall have as its sanction the instant and coercive intervention of the combined forces of the federated units; and finally a world community in which the fury of a capricious and militant nationalism will have been transmuted into an abiding consciousness of world citizenship – such indeed, appears, in its broadest outline, the Order anticipated by Bahá’u’lláh, an Order that shall come to be regarded as the fairest fruit of a slowly maturing age.

(Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 40)

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Such a unique and momentous crisis in the life of organized mankind may, moreover, be likened to the culminating stage in the political evolution of the great American Republic – the stage which marked the emergence of a unified community of federated states. The stirring of a new national consciousness, and the birth of a new type of civilization, infinitely richer and nobler than any which its component parts could have severally hoped to achieve, may be said to have proclaimed the coming of age of the American people. Within the territorial limits of this nation, this consummation may be viewed as the culmination of the process of human government. The diversified and loosely related elements of a divided community were brought together, unified and incorporated into one coherent system. Though this entity may continue gaining in cohesive power, though the unity already achieved may be further consolidated, though the civilization to which that unity could alone have given birth may expand and flourish, yet the machinery essential to such an unfoldment may be said to have been, in its essential structure, erected, and the impulse required to guide and sustain it may be regarded as having been fundamentally imparted. No stage above and beyond this consummation of national unity can, within the geographical limits of that nation, be imagined, though the highest destiny of its people, as a constituent element in a still larger entity that will embrace the whole of mankind, may still remain unfulfilled. Considered as an isolated unit, however, this process of integration may be said to have reached its highest and final consummation.

Such is the stage to which an evolving humanity is collectively approaching.

(Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 165)

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The unity of the human race, as envisaged by Bahá’u’lláh, implies the establishment of a world commonwealth in which all nations, races, creeds and classes are closely and permanently united, and in which the autonomy of its state members and the personal freedom and initiative of the individuals that compose them are definitely and completely safeguarded. This commonwealth must, as far as we can visualize it, consist of a world legislature, whose members will, as the trustees of the whole of mankind, ultimately control the entire resources of all the component nations, and will enact such

laws as shall be required to regulate the life, satisfy the needs and adjust the relationships of all races and peoples. A world executive, backed by an international Force, will carry out the decisions arrived at, and apply the laws enacted by, this world legislature, and will safeguard the organic unity of the whole commonwealth. A world tribunal will adjudicate and deliver its compulsory and final verdict in all and any disputes that may arise between the various elements constituting this universal system. A mechanism of world intercommunication will be devised, embracing the whole planet, freed from national hindrances and restrictions, and functioning with marvelous swiftness and perfect regularity. A world metropolis will act as the nerve center of a world civilization, the focus towards which the unifying forces of life will converge and from which its energizing influences will radiate. A world language will either be invented or chosen from among the existing languages and will be taught in the schools of all the federated nations as an auxiliary to their mother tongue. A world script, a world literature, a uniform and universal system of currency, of weights and measures, will simplify and facilitate intercourse and understanding among the nations and races of mankind. In such a world society, science and religion, the two most potent forces in human life, will be reconciled, will cooperate, and will harmoniously develop. The press will, under such a system, while giving full scope to the expression of the diversified views and convictions of mankind, cease to be mischievously manipulated by vested interests, whether private or public, and will be liberated from the influence of contending governments and peoples. The economic resources of the world will be organized, its sources of raw materials will be tapped and fully utilized, its markets will be coordinated and developed, and the distribution of its products will be equitably regulated.

National rivalries, hatreds, and intrigues will cease, and racial animosity and prejudice will be replaced by racial amity, understanding and cooperation. The causes of religious strife will be permanently removed, economic barriers and restrictions will be completely abolished, and the inordinate distinction between classes will be obliterated. Destitution on the one hand, and gross accumulation of ownership on the other, will disappear. The enormous energy dissipated and wasted on war, whether economic or political, will be consecrated to such ends as will extend the range of human inventions and technical development, to the increase of the productivity of mankind, to the extermination of disease, to the extension of scientific research, to the raising of the standard of physical health, to the sharpening and refinement of the human brain, to the exploitation of the unused and unsuspected resources of the planet, to the prolongation of human life, and to the furtherance of any other agency that can stimulate the intellectual, the moral, and spiritual life of the entire human race.

A world federal system, ruling the whole earth and exercising unchallengeable authority over its unimaginably vast resources, blending and embodying the ideals of both the East and the West, liberated from the curse of war and its miseries, and bent on the exploitation of all the available sources of energy on the surface of the planet, a system in which Force is made the servant of Justice, whose life is sustained by its universal recognition of one God and by its allegiance to one common Revelation – such is the goal towards which humanity, impelled by the unifying forces of life, is moving.

(Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 203)



The Supreme Tribunal is an aspect of a World Superstate; the exact nature of its relationship to that State we cannot present foresee. Supreme Tribunal is the correct translation; it will be a contributing factor in establishing the Lesser Peace.

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, dated November 19, 1945)



You have asked whether it is possible to have a World Federation when not all countries have attained their independence. The answer is in the negative. Both ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi likened the emergence of the American Republic and the unification of the “diversified and loosely related elements” of its “divided” community into one national entity, to the unity of the world and the incorporation of its federated units into “one coherent system.” Just as the American Constitution does not allow one state to be more autonomous than another, so must the nations of the world enjoy equal status in any form of World Federation. Indeed one of the “candles” of unity anticipated by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is “unity in freedom”.

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual, dated July 7, 1976)

The Destiny of America

May this American democracy be the first nation to establish the foundation of international agreement. May it be the first nation to proclaim the universality of mankind. May it be the first to upraise the standard of the Most Great Peace, and through this nation of democracy may these philanthropic intentions and institutions be spread broadcast throughout the world. Truly, this is a great and revered nation. Here liberty has reached its highest degree. The intentions of its people are most praiseworthy. They are, indeed, worthy of being the first to build the Tabernacle of the Most Great Peace and proclaim the oneness of mankind. I will supplicate God for assistance and confirmation in your behalf.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 36)



Thou kind Lord! This gathering is turning to Thee. These hearts are radiant with Thy love. These minds and spirits are exhilarated by the message of Thy glad tidings. O God! Let this American democracy become glorious in spiritual degrees even as it has aspired to material degrees, and render this just government victorious. Confirm this revered nation to upraise the standard of the oneness of humanity, to promulgate the Most Great Peace, to become thereby most glorious and praiseworthy among all the nations of the world. O God! This American nation is worthy of Thy favors and is deserving of Thy mercy. Make it precious and near to Thee through Thy bounty and bestowal.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 67)



The American continent gives signs and evidences of very great advancement; its future is even more promising, for its influence and illumination are far-reaching, and it will lead all nations spiritually. The flag of freedom and banner of liberty have been unfurled here, but the prosperity and advancement of a city, the happiness and greatness of a country depend upon its hearing and obeying the call of God. The light of reality must shine therein and divine civilization be founded; then the radiance of the Kingdom will be diffused and heavenly influences surround. 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. Jesus declares that there is spiritual capacity in some people, for all are not submerged in the sea of materialism. They seek the Divine Spirit; they turn to God; they long for the Kingdom. It is my hope that these revered people present may attain both material and spiritual progress. As they have advanced wonderfully in material degrees, so may they, likewise, advance in spiritual development until the body shall become refined and beautiful through the wealth of spiritual potentiality and efficiency.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 104)



The full measure of your success is as yet unrevealed, its significance still unapprehended. Ere long ye will, with your own eyes, witness how brilliantly every one of you, even as a shining star, will radiate

in the firmament of your country the light of Divine Guidance, and will bestow upon its people the glory of an everlasting life.... I fervently hope that in the near future the whole earth may be stirred and shaken by the results of your achievements.... The Almighty will no doubt grant you the help of His grace, will invest you with the tokens of His might, and will endue your souls with the sustaining power of His holy Spirit.... Be not concerned with the smallness of your numbers, neither be oppressed by the multitude of an unbelieving world.... Exert yourselves; your mission is unspeakably glorious. Should success crown your enterprise, America will assuredly evolve into a center from which waves of spiritual power will emanate, and the throne of the Kingdom of God will, in the plenitude of its majesty and glory, be firmly established.... The moment this divine Message is carried forward by the American believers from the shores of America and is propagated through the continents of Europe, of Asia, of Africa and of Australasia, and as far as the islands of the Pacific, this community will find itself securely established upon the throne of an everlasting dominion. Then will all the peoples of the world witness that this community is spiritually illumined and divinely guided.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Tablets of the Divine Plan*, p. 39)



How great, therefore, how staggering the responsibility that must weigh upon the present generation of the American believers, at this early stage in their spiritual and administrative evolution, to weed out, by every means in their power, those faults, habits, and tendencies which they have inherited from their own nation, and to cultivate, patiently and prayerfully, those distinctive qualities and characteristics that are so indispensable to their effective participation in the great redemptive work of their Faith. Incapable as yet, in view of the restricted size of their community and the limited influence it now wields, of producing any marked effect on the great mass of their countrymen, let them focus their attention, for the present, on their own selves, their own individual needs, their own personal deficiencies and weaknesses, ever mindful that every intensification of effort on their part will better equip them for the time when they will be called upon to eradicate in their turn such evil tendencies from the lives and the hearts of the entire body of their fellow-citizens. Nor must they overlook the fact that the World Order, whose basis they, as the advance-guard of the future Bahá’í generations of their countrymen, are now laboring to establish, can never be reared unless and until the generality of the people to which they belong has been already purged from the divers ills, whether social or political, that now so severely afflict it.

(Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 20)



A rectitude of conduct, an abiding sense of undeviating justice, unobscured by the demoralizing influences which a corruption-ridden political life so strikingly manifests; a chaste, pure, and holy life, unsullied and unclouded by the indecencies, the vices, the false standards, which an inherently deficient moral code tolerates, perpetuates, and fosters; a fraternity freed from that cancerous growth of racial prejudice, which is eating into the vitals of an already debilitated society – these are the ideals which the American believers must, from now on, individually and through concerted action, strive to promote, in both their private and public lives, ideals which are the chief propelling forces that can most effectively accelerate the march of their institutions, plans, and enterprises, that can

guard the honor and integrity of their Faith, and subdue any obstacles that may confront it in the future.

(Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 22)



The world is contracting into a neighborhood. America, willingly or unwillingly, must face and grapple with this new situation. For purposes of national security, let alone any humanitarian motive, she must assume the obligations imposed by this newly created neighborhood. Paradoxical as it may seem, her only hope of extricating herself from the perils gathering around her is to become entangled in that very web of international association which the Hand of an inscrutable Providence is weaving. Abdu'l-Bahá's counsel to a highly placed official in its government comes to mind, with peculiar appropriateness and force: "You can best serve your country if you strive, in your capacity as a citizen of the world, to assist in the eventual application of the principle of federalism, underlying the government of your own country, to the relationships now existing between the peoples and nations of the world." The ideals that fired the imagination of America's tragically unappreciated President, whose high endeavors, however much nullified by a visionless generation, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, through His own pen, acclaimed as signaling the dawn of the Most Great Peace, though now lying in the dust, bitterly reproach a heedless generation for having so cruelly abandoned them.

(Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 87)