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Our History

It All Began 50 Years Ago ...

by Philip Hainsworth



The first LSA of Kampala, April 1952. The author is backrow left. Hand of the Cause, Enoch Olinga is back row middle.

Although the Guardian had planted in the minds of the British Bahá'í Community as early as 1947, the vision that they were being prepared for a brilliant future throughout the then British Empire, it was not until his triumphant cable to Convention at the completion of the first Six Year Plan, that they were advised that Africa, "after one year respite", would be the scene for their initial overseas activities: "...Formation nuclei three dependencies British Crown either East West Africa..."

This was to be the prelude, although no one at that time could have possibly foreseen it, to a world-wide mission which led the British Bahá'í Community to a unique position in the Bahá'í world. In his very last message to this community, written only sixty-six days before his tragic passing, Shoghi Effendi wrote,

"...The admiration and esteem in which a community, relatively small in numbers, strictly limited in resources, yet capable of such solid and enduring achievements, is held by its sister and daughter communities in every continent of the globe, far from declining must be further enhanced...and yield such as harvest as will astonish the entire Bahá'í world..." History tells us that this vision of the beloved Guardian was fulfilled and that, although the foundations were laid during that first Six Year Plan, the actual process began just fifty years ago.

Africa Plan launched before due date

The British Bahá'í community were so filled with joy and enthusiasm with the successful conclusion of the Six Year Plan that it seemed that nothing could hold them back. In September the NSA sought permission from the Guardian to send pioneers to Africa even before the end of the respite year and on 15 September, 1950 he cabled his approval.

A Conference was held in London at the end of December, 1950 where the Committee consulted with Musa and Samiyyih Banani, Violette Nakhjavani and Philip and Lizzie Hainsworth.

Claire Gung, a German refugee who had accepted the Faith in Torquay, actually managed to obtain a post as assistant matron in a school in Lushoto, 150 miles from Dar-es-Salaam in Tanganyika. She sailed on the "Warwick Castle" on 4 January, 1951. Subsequently the Guardian gave her the title, "Mother of Africa". Meanwhile Jalal Nakhjavani from Persia had visited Kampala, Uganda en route to Dar-es-Salaam, where he established a business as a ships' chandler.

On the 25 February the Guardian set out in no uncertain terms the responsibilities of this vibrant community,

"The magnificent spirit of devotion and the initiative and resourcefulness demonstrated in recent months by a triumphant community...merit the highest praise. By their organising ability,... by the tenacity, sagacity and fidelity which they have displayed in the course of its opening phase; by their utter consecration....they have set an example worthy of emulation by the members of Bahá'í communities in both the East and the West....On it,....will devolve the chief responsibility of guiding the destinies, of supplying the motive power, and of contributing to the resources of a crusade which, for the first time in Bahá'í history, involves the collaboration, and affects the fortunes, of no less than four National Assemblies, in both Hemispheres and within four continents of the globe....To be singled out as the chief agency in the prosecution of a task of such dimensions, such significance, and the harbinger of

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events so glorious, is indeed at once an inestimable blessing and a staggering responsibility with which the British Bahá'í community ... has been honoured at so critical and challenging an hour in the fortunes of mankind ..."

First Native Believer

On the 18 June, Mr and Mrs Musa Banani, Mr and Mrs Ali Nakhjavani and their baby daughter Bahiyyih and Philip Hainsworth flew to Dar-es-Salaam via Geneva, Rome and Cairo stopping off at each place to meet the Bahá'ís arriving 28 June. Jalal's wife, Darakhshandeh and her brother, Farhang Naimi with the Nakhjavani children, Mina and Hoda had joined Jalal in Dar -es-Salaam on the day we left London and by the time they reached there a consultant engineer, Thomas Hansford from the Isle of Man and Mr.M Thomas from India had also arrived at their pioneer post.

During the time the party from London were in Dar-es-Salaam, the Faith was introduced to an African clerk who was a native of Nyassaland He subsequently became a Bahá'í and when he returned home was the first native believer in that country

Hassan and Isobel Sabri left England for Dar-es-Salaam on July 6. While in Dar-es-Salaam the party from London learned that they should proceed to Uganda where they arrived in Kampala on 2 August. Within a very few days teaching had begun.

Due to untimely death of husband of Marguerite Welby Preston in Nairobi, the Guardian agreed that Kenya could be reinforced and Ted Cardell left on 7 October as pioneer for Nairobi where he met up with Bahá'ís in Cairo and Khartoum en route.

Third African Goal Achieved

On 22 October, Ethel Stevens, first American pioneer for Africa flew to Accra, Gold Coast, thereby opening our third African goal territory.

On November 24 a commemoration meeting for Louis Gregory was held in Kampala at which the five pioneers and Marguerite Preston (Kenya) were joined by twelve Africans. In December, the first two native Uganda Bahá'ís had been accepted - Fred Bigabwa (Mutoro) and Chrispin Kajubi (Muganda). By the end of the year Eric Manton and his son Terry left England en route to Northern Rhodesia thereby becoming the first pioneers to settle in South Africa, and William Foster (USA) had settled in Liberia.

Abbas and Shomais Afnan had married at the British Summer School, 1951 and had later obtained approval from the Guardian for Abbas to return for while to Persia and Shomais to pioneer to Africa. They eventually settled in Ethiopia..

In January, 1952 Mr and Mrs Banani went on pilgrimage from Kampala and while there Mr Banani was made a Hand of the Cause. The Kampala Bahá'ís held a meeting to coincide with a time the Guardian was known to visit the Shrines and Mr Banani was to ask him particularly to pray for Uganda as with the five pioneers and three African believers, they needed another Bahá'í to ensure an Assembly. It was at that meeting that the first member of the Teso tribe expressed his desire to accept the Faith.

Hand of the Cause Enoch Olinga

He subsequently went on leave, started the teaching work among his own people and began the process which eventually led to thousands of his fellow tribesmen enrolling; he later became the Knight of Bahá'u'lláh for British Cameroons, was designated by the Guardian as Abul Futuh (Father of Victories) and in October, 1957 was appointed as the second negro Hand of the Cause -he was Enoch Olinga..

The Guardian had instructed Mr Banani to purchase a Hazíratu'l-Quds and new pioneers from America - Rex and Mary Collison became its first caretakers in April, 1952. The five pioneers with Fred Bigabwa, Chrispin Kajubi, Peter Musoke and Enoch Olinga formed the first Spiritual Assembly of Kampala at Ridván and a sister Assembly was formed in Dar-es-Salaam consisting of Jalal and Darakhshandeh Nakhjavani, Hassan and Isobel Sabri, Denis Dudley-Smith Kutendele, Leslie Natola, Farhang Naimi, Gopalkrishnan Nayer and Eustace Mwalimu..

The Plan had called for "a nucleus" in three African territories yet in the first year two Assemblies had been formed and pioneers had settled in several other African countries..

The First Inter-continental Teaching Conference was being planned for Kampala in February, 1953. This proved to be an outstanding occasion, held in a large marquee in the grounds of the Kampala Hazíratu'l-Quds The tent, bought in America was brought by pioneers to Uganda, Alan and Mary Elston. About 230 participated in the Conference which included ten Hands, some 40 Iranian believers and more than 120 Africans.. 19 countries were represented and some of the visitors subsequently went to other parts of Uganda, Nairobi, Dar-es-Salaam, Ethiopia and Egypt .

The End of the Two Year Plan

By the end of the Two Year Plan, Assemblies were formed in the capital cities of Kenya, Tanganyika, the Gold Coast and 10 in Uganda. A total of 11 African Territories had been opened to the Faith and the British National Spiritual Assembly was co-ordinating the pioneer/teaching work of six of the eight National Spiritual Assemblies. This national assembly co-operation enabled the Guardian to cancel a third American Seven Year Plan and instead launch the 10-year Global Crusade in 1953. .

Subsequently the British National Spiritual Assembly was responsible for the establishment of "daughter" National Spiritual Assemblies in Central and East Africa (later Uganda and Central Africa, Kenya, Tanganyika and Zanzibar); Guyana, Cyprus and the Republic of Ireland, and over the years pioneers from the United Kingdom have settled in over 140 countries..

The unparalleled vision of the Guardian had been fulfilled, but it all really began fifty years ago with the launching of the Two Year Plan whose anniversary we are now commemorating.
