

Bahá'í Approach to Non-Involvement in Partisan Political Activity

US Bahá'í National Center / October 2022

1. I feel it, therefore, incumbent upon me to stress, now that the time is ripe, the importance of an instruction which, 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. And this 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 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.

—Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 63-64

2. LOYALTY WORLD ORDER BAHÁ'U'LLÁH SECURITY ITS BASIC INSTITUTIONS BOTH IMPERATIVELY DEMAND ALL ITS AVOWED SUPPORTERS PARTICULARLY ITS CHAMPION-BUILDERS AMERICAN CONTINENT IN THESE DAYS WHEN SINISTER UNCONTROLLABLE FORCES ARE DEEPENING CLEAVAGE SUNDERING PEOPLES NATIONS CREEDS CLASSES RESOLVE DESPITE PRESSURE FAST-CRYSTALLIZING PUBLIC OPINION ABSTAIN INDIVIDUALLY COLLECTIVELY IN WORD ACTION INFORMALLY AS WELL AS IN ALL OFFICIAL UTTERANCES PUBLICATIONS FROM ASSIGNING BLAME TAKING SIDES HOWEVER INDIRECTLY IN RECURRING POLITICAL CRISES NOW AGITATING ULTIMATELY ENGULFING HUMAN SOCIETY. GRAVE APPREHENSION LEST CUMULATIVE EFFECT SUCH COMPROMISES DISINTEGRATE FABRIC CLOG CHANNEL GRACE THAT SUSTAINS SYSTEM GOD'S ESSENTIALLY SUPRANATIONAL SUPERNATURAL ORDER SO LABORIOUSLY EVOLVED SO RECENTLY ESTABLISHED.

—Shoghi Effendi, *Directives from the Guardian*, p. 56

3. The Guardian wishes me to draw the attention of the friends through you that they should be very careful in their public utterance 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 for the Cause.

—From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada, January 12, 1933; *Bahá'í News*, No. 72, April 1933, p. 3)

4. The attitude of the Bahá'ís must be two-fold, complete obedience to the government of the 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, whatever 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 dissension would spring up and destroy our unity. We must build up our own Bahá'í system, and leave the faulty systems of the world to go their

Bahá'í Approach to Non-Involvement in Partisan Political Activity

US Bahá'í National Center / October 2022

way. We cannot change them through becoming involved in them; on the contrary, they will destroy us.

–Shoghi Effendi, *Directives from the Guardian*, p. 56

5. There is one fundamental point which Shoghi Effendi wishes me to emphasize. By the principle of non-interference 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 side 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 basic considerations arising out of their teachings and of the 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 politics at all.

–From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated March 2, 1934; cited in *Lights of Guidance: A Bahá'í Reference Library*, 4th ed., p. 452

6. 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 Mr. Ellsworth Blackwell, dated January 4, 1948

7. 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 the 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.

Bahá'í Approach to Non-Involvement in Partisan Political Activity

US Bahá'í National Center / October 2022

–From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada, dated November 18, 1948; cited in *Lights of Guidance: A Bahá'í Reference Library*, 4th ed., p. 531

8. Regarding your question: the Guardian does not see how Bahá'í participation with other organizations and religious bodies, in a non-political 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 some activity in entire accord with our teachings—such as, for instance, better race relations.

–From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to Mr. Ellsworth Blackwell, dated November 21, 1948

9. 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 of the Universal House of Justice, dated December 8, 1967; cited in *Wellspring of Guidance*, p. 135

10. Civil disobedience is not permissible for Bahá'ís. However, a Bahá'í may decide, while obeying a repugnant regulation, to complain to the authorities, if wisdom and consultation with Bahá'í institutions dictate such action.

In conclusion, a Bahá'í should be implicitly obedient to the constituted authority in the community wherein he functions. Thus, for example, if school administrators are permitted by the state to promulgate rules and regulations for student conduct, the Bahá'í student will obey those rules. He may take part in action to correct such rules only by conduct which does not violate any Bahá'í principle or any law or regulation including the rule itself. Where a state or local government or agency enforces an unjust law, or unjustly enforces any law, the Bahá'í within the jurisdiction will not attempt to demonstrate the invalidity of the law by violating it, nor will he violate any second law in protest against the first.

–From the article "Obedience to Civil Authority" in the *National Bahá'í Review*, Aug. 1970

Bahá'í Approach to Non-Involvement in Partisan Political Activity

US Bahá'í National Center / October 2022

11. 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. This principle is clearly enunciated by the Guardian on pages 64 to 67 of "The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh" in the passage beginning:

"Let them 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. 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...."

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

12. 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.

Bahá'í Approach to Non-Involvement in Partisan Political Activity

US Bahá'í National Center / October 2022

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.

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

13. 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 non-interference 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.

...In any such situation the National Spiritual Assembly must weigh 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 to 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.

–From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated June 23, 1987

14. The Bahá'í principles...do not permit or encourage Bahá'ís to be confrontational or to participate in partisan politics. Civil disobedience, even though non-violent, diverges from the Bahá'í principles of consultation and obedience to political authority.

–From a letter written on behalf of the National Spiritual Assembly, dated October 26, 1987

15. 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.

Bahá'í Approach to Non-Involvement in Partisan Political Activity

US Bahá'í National Center / October 2022

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

16. 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, dated January 12, 2003

17. We would like to take this opportunity to review the guidance provided by the House of Justice in connection with a similar global day of action organized last year, should you be approached or inclined to participate in an event in your city.

As you are aware, Bahá'ís do not engage in partisan political activities. In this respect, in a message to the believers in Iran dated 31 October 2008, the House of Justice elaborated on the implications of this fundamental principle of the Faith as follows:

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

Bahá'í Approach to Non-Involvement in Partisan Political Activity

US Bahá'í National Center / October 2022

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.

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 likeminded 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.

Should questions arise in relation to your participation in events in your city, we ask that you turn to your Local Spiritual Assembly and follow its guidance. Local Spiritual Assemblies may, in turn, seek guidance from the Office of External Affairs.

–From a letter from the National Spiritual Assembly to the American Bahá'í community, dated May 27, 2010

18. 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

Bahá'í Approach to Non-Involvement in Partisan Political Activity

US Bahá'í National Center / October 2022

hearts for humanity run counter to the sense of duty they feel to expend their energies in service to their respective countries.

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

19. Now that the true intentions of your oppressors have been laid bare, it behoves you to respond to the growing interest of your fellow citizens in understanding the Bahá'í attitude towards politics, lest misconceptions be allowed to weaken the bonds of friendship you are establishing with so many souls. In this, they deserve more than a few statements, however important, that evoke images of love and unity. To assist you in conveying to them a vision of the framework that shapes the Bahá'í approach to the subject, we are providing you with the comments below.

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.

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

20. 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.”

Bahá'í Approach to Non-Involvement in Partisan Political Activity

US Bahá'í National Center / October 2022

“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.

—From a letter from the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá’ís of Iran, dated March 2, 2013

21. While the importance of keeping at a distance from all politically divisive issues is well known to the friends, their engagement with pressing social issues, motivated by a commendable and sincere wish to be of service to those around them, can present them with difficult situations. An unexpected development can turn an uncontroversial issue into one that divides people along partisan lines, and some of the same unhealthy modes of expression that are common to the political sphere can transfer into other areas of discourse. Especially in the uninhibited realm of social media, wrongs—both real and imagined—are quickly magnified, and a variety of feelings are easily stirred: righteous indignation perhaps, or a desire to promote one’s point of view, or an eagerness to be seen as the source of new information. Much that is taken to be harmless, or even well-intentioned, is, on closer examination, serving to deepen social divides, fuel differences between opposing groups, and perpetuate disagreements, driving away possibilities for consensus and the search for solutions. If one person’s contribution seems provocative or objectionable, reacting to it may have the effect of unwittingly strengthening and increasing the exposure of the original sentiment, and exacerbating matters. The followers of the Blessed Beauty must be conscious and conscientious users of any technology they decide to utilize and must apply insight and spiritual discipline. They should look to the lofty standards of the Cause to guide them at all times in the way they express themselves. Bahá’u’lláh states:

Bahá'í Approach to Non-Involvement in Partisan Political Activity

US Bahá'í National Center / October 2022

“Every word is endowed with a spirit, therefore the speaker or expounder should carefully deliver his words at the appropriate time and place, for the impression which each word maketh is clearly evident and perceptible. The Great Being saith: One word may be likened unto fire, another unto light, and the influence which both exert is manifest in the world.”

–From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to all National Spiritual Assemblies, dated December 1, 2019

22. One example among many areas in which the considerations set out above are relevant is the discussion on social media of matters pertaining to Iran. As will be readily appreciated, this is an area of particular sensitivity, and therefore the friends need to be especially on their guard. Rash statements made online could endanger the believers in that land or unwittingly provide the enemies of the Cause with the means to misrepresent the Bahá'ís. Observing strict caution in this respect is essential for the protection of the sorely tried community in Iran.

In this connection, the House of Justice has asked us to convey an additional point to the Persian believers who reside outside the Cradle of the Faith. It is understandable that these friends feel a strong personal concern for the well-being of their fellow Bahá'ís in Iran and for the future of that sacred land. Nevertheless, they are urged to bear in mind that, regardless of their land of origin, their primary obligation ought to be to the progress of the Faith in the land in which they now dwell. Indeed, over the course of the Faith's history, the contributions made by Persian Bahá'ís to the teaching work on every continent are too many to recount, and the House of Justice rejoices when these friends direct their efforts towards advancing the Five-Year Plan in the places where they reside. This must be their chief object; striving for such a goal is what will bring joy to their spiritual brothers and sisters in Iran and properly honour the sacrifices being made by those steadfast servants.

–From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to all National Spiritual Assemblies, dated December 1, 2019

23. Letter of the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of Iran dated March 2, 2013 (in its entirety)

Dearly loved Friends,

For three and a half decades now, wave after wave of persecution, varying in intensity, has battered your sorely tried and valiant community, a barrage that is but the latest in a series unleashed over one hundred and sixty years ago. Yet, contrary to the expectations of those bent on sapping the strength of the community of Bahá'u'lláh's followers in His homeland, their machinations have served ultimately to reinforce its foundations and fortify its ranks. More and more of your compatriots, themselves victims of oppression, not only see clearly the trail of injustices that have been perpetrated against Bahá'ís down the years but also recognize in your unbroken record of disinterested service to society a force of constructive change. As sympathy towards you continues to grow, so do the voices calling for the removal of the obstacles that

Bahá'í Approach to Non-Involvement in Partisan Political Activity

US Bahá'í National Center / October 2022

have prevented you from participating in the life of society in all of its dimensions. Not surprisingly, then, questions regarding the posture held by Bahá'ís everywhere towards political activity have taken on greater significance in the eyes of your fellow citizens.

Historically, of course, the position in which the Iranian Bahá'í community has found itself in this respect has been a peculiar one. It has been falsely accused, on the one hand, of being politically motivated, leagued against the prevailing regime—the agent of whatever foreign power the accuser finds most convenient to his purpose. On the other hand, the uncompromising refusal of the members of the community to participate in partisan political activity has been portrayed as a lack of concern for the affairs of the Iranian people. Now that the true intentions of your oppressors have been laid bare, it behoves you to respond to the growing interest of your fellow citizens in understanding the Bahá'í attitude towards politics, lest misconceptions be allowed to weaken the bonds of friendship you are establishing with so many souls. In this, they deserve more than a few statements, however important, that evoke images of love and unity. To assist you in conveying to them a vision of the framework that shapes the Bahá'í approach to the subject, we are providing you with the comments below.

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.

Bahá'í Approach to Non-Involvement in Partisan Political Activity

US Bahá'í National Center / October 2022

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

As you know from your study of the Bahá'í writings, the principle that is to infuse all facets of organized life on the planet is the oneness of humankind, the hallmark of the age of maturity. That humanity constitutes a single people is a truth that, once viewed with scepticism, claims widespread acceptance today. The rejection of deeply ingrained prejudices and a growing sense of world citizenship are among the signs of this heightened awareness. Yet, however promising the rise in collective consciousness may be, it should be seen as only the first step of a process that will take decades—nay, centuries—to unfold. For the principle of the oneness of humankind, as proclaimed by Bahá'u'lláh, asks not merely for cooperation among people and nations. It calls for a complete reconceptualization of the relationships that sustain society. The deepening environmental crisis, driven by a system that condones the pillage of natural resources to satisfy an insatiable thirst for more, suggests how entirely inadequate is the present conception of humanity's relationship with nature; the deterioration of the home environment, with the accompanying rise in the systematic exploitation of women and children worldwide, makes clear how pervasive are the misbegotten notions that define relations within the family unit; the persistence of despotism, on the one hand, and the increasing disregard for authority, on the other, reveal how unsatisfactory to a maturing humanity is the current relationship between the individual and the institutions of society; the concentration of material wealth in the hands of a minority of the world's population gives an indication of how fundamentally ill-conceived are relationships among the many sectors of what is now an emerging global community. The principle of the oneness of humankind implies, then, an organic change in the very structure of society.

What should be stated plainly here is that Bahá'ís do not believe the transformation thus envisioned will come about exclusively through their own efforts. Nor are they trying to create a movement that would seek to impose on society their vision of the future. Every nation and every group—indeed, every individual—will, to a greater or lesser degree, contribute to the emergence of the world civilization towards which humanity is irresistibly moving. Unity will progressively be achieved, as foreshadowed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, in different realms of social existence, for instance, “unity in the political realm”, “unity of thought in world undertakings”, “unity of races” and the “unity of nations”. As these come to be realized, the structures of a politically united world, which respects the full diversity of culture and provides channels for the expression of dignity and honour, will gradually take shape.

The question that occupies the worldwide Bahá'í community, then, is how it can best contribute to the civilization-building process as its resources increase. It sees two dimensions to its contribution. The first is related to its own growth and development, and the second to its involvement in society at large.

Regarding the first, Bahá'ís across the globe, in the most unassuming settings, are striving to establish a pattern of activity and the corresponding administrative structures that embody the principle of the oneness of humankind and the convictions underpinning it, only a few of which

Bahá'í Approach to Non-Involvement in Partisan Political Activity

US Bahá'í National Center / October 2022

are mentioned here as a means of illustration: that the rational soul has no gender, race, ethnicity or class, a fact that renders intolerable all forms of prejudice, not the least of which are those that prevent women from fulfilling their potential and engaging in various fields of endeavour shoulder to shoulder with men; that the root cause of prejudice is ignorance, which can be erased through educational processes that make knowledge accessible to the entire human race, ensuring it does not become the property of a privileged few; that science and religion are two complementary systems of knowledge and practice by which human beings come to understand the world around them and through which civilization advances; that religion without science soon degenerates into superstition and fanaticism, while science without religion becomes the tool of crude materialism; that true prosperity, the fruit of a dynamic coherence between the material and spiritual requirements of life, will recede further and further out of reach as long as consumerism continues to act as opium to the human soul; that justice, as a faculty of the soul, enables the individual to distinguish truth from falsehood and guides the investigation of reality, so essential if superstitious beliefs and outworn traditions that impede unity are to be eliminated; that, when appropriately brought to bear on social issues, justice is the single most important instrument for the establishment of unity; that work performed in the spirit of service to one's fellow human beings is a form of prayer, a means of worshipping God. Translating ideals such as these into reality, effecting a transformation at the level of the individual and laying the foundations of suitable social structures, is no small task, to be sure. Yet the Bahá'í community is dedicated to the long-term process of learning that this task entails, an enterprise in which increasing numbers from all walks of life, from every human group, are invited to take part.

Numerous, of course, are the questions that the process of learning, now under way in all regions of the world, must address: how to bring people of different backgrounds together in an environment which, devoid of the constant threat of conflict and distinguished by its devotional character, encourages them to put aside the divisive ways of a partisan mindset, fosters higher degrees of unity of thought and action, and elicits wholehearted participation; how to administer the affairs of a community in which there is no ruling class with priestly functions that can lay claim to distinction or privilege; how to enable contingents of men and women to break free from the confines of passivity and the chains of oppression in order to engage in activities conducive to their spiritual, social and intellectual development; how to help youth navigate through a crucial stage of their lives and become empowered to direct their energies towards the advancement of civilization; how to create dynamics within the family unit that lead to material and spiritual prosperity without instilling in the rising generations feelings of estrangement towards an illusory "other" or nurturing any instinct to exploit those relegated to this category; how to make it possible for decision making to benefit from a diversity of perspectives through a consultative process which, understood as the collective investigation of reality, promotes detachment from personal views, gives due importance to valid empirical information, does not raise mere opinion to the status of fact or define truth as the compromise between opposing interest groups. To explore questions such as these and the many others certain to arise, the Bahá'í community has adopted a mode of operation characterized by action, reflection, consultation and study—study which involves not only constant reference to the

Bahá'í Approach to Non-Involvement in Partisan Political Activity

US Bahá'í National Center / October 2022

writings of the Faith but also the scientific analysis of patterns unfolding. Indeed, how to maintain such a mode of learning in action, how to ensure that growing numbers participate in the generation and application of relevant knowledge, and how to devise structures for the systemization of an expanding worldwide experience and for the equitable distribution of the lessons learned — these are, themselves, the object of regular examination.

The overall direction of the process of learning that the Bahá'í community is pursuing is guided by a series of global plans, the provisions of which are established by the Universal House of Justice. Capacity building is the watchword of these plans: they aim at enabling the protagonists of collective effort to strengthen the spiritual foundations of villages and neighbourhoods, to address certain of their social and economic needs, and to contribute to the discourses prevalent in society, all while maintaining the necessary coherence in methods and approaches.

At the heart of the learning process is inquiry into the nature of the relationships that bind the individual, the community, and the institutions of society — actors on the stage of history who have been locked in a struggle for power throughout time. In this context, the assumption that relations among them will inevitably conform to the dictates of competition, a notion that ignores the extraordinary potential of the human spirit, has been set aside in favour of the more likely premise that their harmonious interactions can foster a civilization befitting a mature humanity.

Animating the Bahá'í effort to discover the nature of a new set of relationships among these three protagonists is a vision of a future society that derives inspiration from the analogy drawn by Bahá'u'lláh, in a Tablet penned nearly a century and a half ago, which compares the world to the human body. Cooperation is the principle that governs the functioning of that system. Just as the appearance of the rational soul in this realm of existence is made possible through the complex association of countless cells, whose organization in tissues and organs allows for the realization of distinctive capacities, so can civilization be seen as the outcome of a set of interactions among closely integrated, diverse components which have transcended the narrow purpose of tending to their own existence. And just as the viability of every cell and every organ is contingent upon the health of the body as a whole, so should the prosperity of every individual, every family, every people be sought in the well-being of the entire human race. In keeping with such a vision, institutions, appreciating the need for coordinated action channelled toward fruitful ends, aim not to control but to nurture and guide the individual, who, in turn, willingly receives guidance, not in blind obedience, but with faith founded on conscious knowledge. The community, meanwhile, takes on the challenge of sustaining an environment where the powers of individuals, who wish to exercise self-expression responsibly in accordance with the common weal and the plans of institutions, multiply in unified action.

If the web of relationships alluded to above is to take shape and give rise to a pattern of life distinguished by adherence to the principle of the oneness of humankind, certain foundational concepts must be carefully examined. Most notable among them is the conception of power.

Bahá'í Approach to Non-Involvement in Partisan Political Activity

US Bahá'í National Center / October 2022

Clearly the concept of power as a means of domination, with the accompanying notions of contest, contention, division and superiority, must be left behind. This is not to deny the operation of power; after all, even in cases where institutions of society have received their mandates through the consent of the people, power is involved in the exercise of authority. But political processes, like other processes of life, should not remain unaffected by the powers of the human spirit that the Bahá'í Faith—for that matter, every great religious tradition that has appeared throughout the ages—hopes to tap: the power of unity, of love, of humble service, of pure deeds. Associated with power in this sense are words such as “release”, “encourage”, “channel”, “guide” and “enable”. Power is not a finite entity which is to be “seized” and “jealously guarded”; it constitutes a limitless capacity to transform that resides in the human race as a body.

The Bahá'í community readily acknowledges that it has a considerable distance to traverse before its growing experience yields the necessary insights into the workings of the desired set of interactions. It makes no claims to perfection. To uphold high ideals and to have become their embodiment are not one and the same. Myriad are the challenges that lie ahead, and much remains to be learned. The casual observer may well choose to label the community's attempts to surmount these challenges “idealistic”. Yet it certainly would not be justified to portray Bahá'ís as uninterested in the affairs of their own countries, much less as unpatriotic. However idealistic the Bahá'í endeavour may appear to some, its deep-seated concern for the good of humankind cannot be ignored. And given that no current arrangement in the world seems capable of lifting humanity from the quagmire of conflict and contention and securing its felicity, why would any government object to the efforts of one group of people to deepen its understanding of the nature of those essential relationships inherent to the common future towards which the human race is being inexorably drawn? What harm is there in this?

Within the framework traced out by the above ideas, then, it is possible to consider the second dimension of the Bahá'í community's efforts to contribute to the advancement of civilization: its involvement in society at large. 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

Bahá'í Approach to Non-Involvement in Partisan Political Activity

US Bahá'í National Center / October 2022

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.

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,

Bahá'í Approach to Non-Involvement in Partisan Political Activity

US Bahá'í National Center / October 2022

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.

Dear Friends: We recognize that treading this path, which you have done so ably for decades, is not without its challenges. It asks for an integrity that cannot be shaken, for a rectitude of conduct that cannot be undermined, for a clarity of thought that cannot be obscured, for a love of one's country that cannot be manipulated. Now that your fellow citizens understand your plight, and possibilities will no doubt open for you to participate even further in the life of society, we pray that you will be assisted from on High in explaining to your friends and compatriots the framework articulated in these pages so that, in collaboration with them, you will find increasing opportunities to labour for the good of your people without

Bahá'í Approach to Non-Involvement in Partisan Political Activity

US Bahá'í National Center / October 2022

compromising, in any way, your identity as followers of One Who summoned humanity, more than a century ago, to a new World Order.

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

24. Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to all National Spiritual Assemblies dated December 1, 2019 (in its entirety)

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

The troubling conditions facing the world's peoples and the persistent problems caused by disunity within and between nations have, as you know, been a prominent theme in the messages of the Universal House of Justice. Bahá'ís, of course, are ever mindful of the state of the world. The well-being of humanity and its peace and tranquillity are the constant desire of all those who have taken to heart Bahá'u'lláh's exhortation to "be anxiously concerned with the needs of the age ye live in". It is abundantly clear, moreover, that the longing of the believers to contribute to the betterment of the world and to participate constructively in the life of society is in no way contradicted by their non-involvement in politics. While consciousness of the hardships afflicting so many strengthens a commitment to fundamental social change, political activity by Bahá'ís would only dissipate the community's energies and fail to bring about this change. It must arise from the spiritual transformation of society. These concepts were explored by the House of Justice much more fully in its message dated 2 March 2013 to the Bahá'ís of Iran, a message which many communities have found it useful to revisit from time to time. We have been asked to convey to you some additional points on a closely related topic, and this letter may be shared with the friends in whatever manner you deem most appropriate.

One conspicuous symptom of society's deepening malaise is the steady descent of public discourse into greater rancour and enmity, reflecting entrenched partisan points of view. A prevalent feature of such contemporary discourse is how political disagreements rapidly degenerate into invective and ridicule. However, what particularly differentiates the present age from those that preceded it is how so much of this discourse occurs in full view of the world. Social media and related communication tools tend to give the greatest exposure to all that is controversial, and the very same tools allow individuals, in an instant, to disseminate more widely whatever catches their attention and to register their support or opposition to various sentiments, whether explicitly or tacitly. The unparalleled ease with which a person can join in such public debate and the nature of the technology make momentary lapses of judgement and incautious actions more likely and their residue more enduring.

This holds particular implications for Bahá'ís, who know well that the principles of their Faith require them to refrain from involvement in political controversies and conflicts of all kinds. "Speak thou no word of politics" was the counsel of 'Abdu'l-Bahá to one believer, adding, "Except to speak well of them, make thou no mention of the earth's kings, and the worldly governments thereof." Shoghi Effendi warned against allowing our vision of the Cause

Bahá'í Approach to Non-Involvement in Partisan Political Activity

US Bahá'í National Center / October 2022

to be clouded “by the stain and dust of worldly happenings, which, no matter how glittering and far-reaching in their immediate effects, are but the fleeting shadows of an imperfect world”. While the importance of keeping at a distance from all politically divisive issues is well known to the friends, their engagement with pressing social issues, motivated by a commendable and sincere wish to be of service to those around them, can present them with difficult situations. An unexpected development can turn an uncontroversial issue into one that divides people along partisan lines, and some of the same unhealthy modes of expression that are common to the political sphere can transfer into other areas of discourse. Especially in the uninhibited realm of social media, wrongs—both real and imagined—are quickly magnified, and a variety of feelings are easily stirred: righteous indignation perhaps, or a desire to promote one’s point of view, or an eagerness to be seen as the source of new information. Much that is taken to be harmless, or even well-intentioned, is, on closer examination, serving to deepen social divides, fuel differences between opposing groups, and perpetuate disagreements, driving away possibilities for consensus and the search for solutions. If one person’s contribution seems provocative or objectionable, reacting to it may have the effect of unwittingly strengthening and increasing the exposure of the original sentiment, and exacerbating matters. The followers of the Blessed Beauty must be conscious and conscientious users of any technology they decide to utilize and must apply insight and spiritual discipline. They should look to the lofty standards of the Cause to guide them at all times in the way they express themselves. Bahá’u’lláh states:

Every word is endowed with a spirit, therefore the speaker or expounder should carefully deliver his words at the appropriate time and place, for the impression which each word maketh is clearly evident and perceptible. The Great Being saith: One word may be likened unto fire, another unto light, and the influence which both exert is manifest in the world.

It will be apparent that the precepts the friends observe in the course of their general interactions with those around them must also characterize, sometimes even more scrupulously, their communication carried out via social media. These precepts include the prohibition on backbiting, the counsel to see the world with their own eyes and not through the eyes of others, the need to uphold the oneness of humanity and avoid a mind-set of “us” and “them”, and the principles of consultation and the necessary decorum associated with it.

The friends will occasionally come across instances when their fellow believers have made comments or circulated the comments of others in ways that seem unwise, or imprudent, when judged against the standards set out in the Bahá’í Writings. It would be wrong, when encountering postings of this kind, to conclude that such behaviour must therefore be unobjectionable, condoned, or even encouraged. Not infrequently, Bahá’í institutions have had to counsel individuals about their actions online, although wherever possible they do so with discretion, out of respect for the dignity of the persons in question.

One example among many areas in which the considerations set out above are relevant is the discussion on social media of matters pertaining to Iran. As will be readily appreciated, this is an area of particular sensitivity, and therefore the friends need to be especially on their

Bahá'í Approach to Non-Involvement in Partisan Political Activity

US Bahá'í National Center / October 2022

guard. Rash statements made online could endanger the believers in that land or unwittingly provide the enemies of the Cause with the means to misrepresent the Bahá'ís. Observing strict caution in this respect is essential for the protection of the sorely tried community in Iran.

In this connection, the House of Justice has asked us to convey an additional point to the Persian believers who reside outside the Cradle of the Faith. It is understandable that these friends feel a strong personal concern for the well-being of their fellow Bahá'ís in Iran and for the future of that sacred land. Nevertheless, they are urged to bear in mind that, regardless of their land of origin, their primary obligation ought to be to the progress of the Faith in the land in which they now dwell. Indeed, over the course of the Faith's history, the contributions made by Persian Bahá'ís to the teaching work on every continent are too many to recount, and the House of Justice rejoices when these friends direct their efforts towards advancing the Five Year Plan in the places where they reside. This must be their chief object; striving for such a goal is what will bring joy to their spiritual brothers and sisters in Iran and properly honour the sacrifices being made by those steadfast servants.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

cc: International Teaching Centre
Boards of Counsellors
Counsellors