

## Radio Bahá'í of Lake Titicaca is born

By BORIS HANDEL

At an altitude of 12,541 feet above sea level, on the high plains of southeastern Perú, a momentous international Bahá'í teaching project linking the sister communities of Perú and Bolivia has been initiated: Radio Bahá'í of Lake Titicaca.

The radio station, located strategically near the town of Chucuito, about 11 miles from Puno on the shores of Lake Titicaca, the largest navigable lake in the world, is destined to serve as a powerful instrument for the proclamation, promotion and reinforcement of Bahá'í teaching in that area, and for the deepening and consolidation of a large number of Aymara Indian Bahá'í communities distributed throughout a 150-mile-long zone between Puno, Perú, and La Paz, Bolivia.

### Aymara culture

The Aymara people have an ancient culture that is distinguished from that of other groups by their language and deeply-rooted customs. Their principal occupations are agriculture and animal husbandry. Agriculture is limited by a hostile environment and by a shortage of arable land; animal husbandry, on the other hand, is pursued more intensively, and is even found at altitudes higher than 15,500 feet.

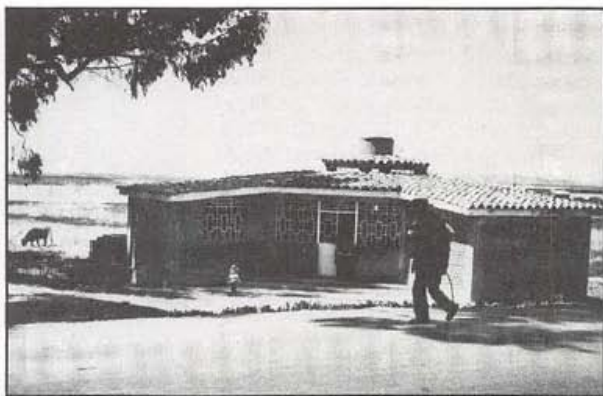
At the present time there are approximately 4,000,000 Aymaras, a large portion of whom are virtually untouched by Western civilization. Many are illiterate and do not speak Spanish. The Aymaras, from earliest times, have been characterized by a stubborn resistance to cultural change. The powerful Inca empire met strong and heroic resistance to its expansion to the east, and was able to annex the Aymaras only after establishing a treaty that respected their language, religion and organized way of life. The first Christian missionaries in Perú also encountered many problems in attempting to establish their evangelical centers among the Aymaras.

### The Message of God

Today the Word of God is deeply fixed in the hearts of these men and women. For them, the life-giving Message of Bahá'u'lláh has opened the door to their true salvation.

An ancient Aymaran tradition states that at a certain time white men would come from the other side of Lake Titicaca and forcibly impose their culture on the Indians. Then, at another time, other white men would come from across the lake, but this time to educate and guide them for their well-being.

Throughout the past few years in this rough, immense



The building that houses Radio Bahá'í of Lake Titicaca, near Puno, Perú, as seen from the highway.

land, the Bahá'í teachings have been actively promoted. Various groups and individuals have come to establish projects for teaching and expansion. The inspiration for this noble enterprise was the promise by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, reiterated many times by the beloved Guardian, that was made on Page 10 of the *Tablets of the Divine Plan*:

"You must give great importance to teaching the Indians, that is, the aborigines of America. For these souls are like the ancient inhabitants of Peninsular Arabia, who previous to the Manifestation of His Holiness Muḥammad were treated as savages. But when the Muḥammadic light shone forth in their midst, they became so illumined that they frightened the world. Likewise, should these Indians and aborigines be educated and obtain guidance, there is no doubt that through the divine teachings, they will become so enlightened as in turn to shed light to all regions."

Valuable testimony to this sacred promise has been the great receptivity to the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh in the Aymara area and definite indications of the beginnings of mass conversion. The progressively increasing acceptance of the teachings has fanned a fervent desire among the Bahá'ís to reinforce and augment the work already done, and has motivated many traveling teachers and pioneers, both national and foreign, to teach among the Aymaras.

This area of Perú has been honored by the presence of the Hands of the Cause of God Amatu'l-Bahá Ruḥíyyih Khánum and Raḥmatu'lláh Muḥájir. Among the first pioneers to come to this zone were Dr. William Baker (son of the Hand of the Cause of God Dorothy Baker and

presently an Auxiliary Board member in Bolivia), Miss Christine Hoyt, John Kepner, and Ronald Mease, who served as an Auxiliary Board member.

#### First meeting in centuries

The potential of the area, and the formation of the first Bahá'í communities, especially in the Juli region, moved the National Spiritual Assembly of Perú to organize the first International Aymara Bahá'í Conference in August 1978. It was attended by Aymaras from Perú and Bolivia. For the first and only time in their history, the Aymara peoples met together to consult about their spiritual welfare, and to study seriously the conditions under which their village life could be improved.

The most valuable fruit of this conference was the inauguration of a teaching campaign entitled "The Spiritual Conquest of Lake Titicaca," which during the Five Year Plan generated an impressive record of expansion of the Cause, opening vast new horizons for the immediate future.

The Bahá'í Teaching Institute in Juli, Perú, was dedicated to the majestic and inspiring figure of Dr. Muhájir. Bahá'í literature was translated into the Aymara language; in the space of a few months, through the dedicated efforts of native-born traveling teachers, more than 2,000 new believers were enrolled; meanwhile, local endowments were made and 20 local *Háziratu'l-Quds* were constructed.

The beloved Dr. Muhájir, during a visit to Perú in December 1979, called on the Peruvian Bahá'ís to unite and arise to carry the Message of Bahá'u'lláh to all parts of the region by participating in a special 40-day teaching project in Puno. A few days after his ringing call and moving presentation, word was received of the unexpected ascension of this illustrious teacher of the Cause of God. The friends were plunged into sadness and consternation by this news; nevertheless, it added even greater impetus to the teaching efforts, and the spirit of service and devotion of the Peruvian and Bolivian Bahá'ís was redoubled, resulting in widespread proclamation of the Faith and the enrollment of hundreds of new believers.

#### The first radio activities

Toward the end of 1978, when 18 enthusiastic indigenous



*A Bahá'í children's class is held in the middle of the 'Puna.' The jeep used by the Bahá'í teachers is at the left.*



*Bahá'ís participating in a teacher training class in Pílcuyo, Perú, present a colorful picture in their native costumes.*

believers attended the first radio workshop at the Bahá'í Teaching Institute in Juli, they could not anticipate the glorious nature of the activities they were initiating. A series of five more workshops followed, culminating in the International Bahá'í Radio and Television Conference, held in Puno in May 1980. The desire of the friends to serve Bahá'u'lláh enabled them to surmount virtually impossible difficulties, such as woefully inadequate equipment, to produce for the first time ever programs in the Aymara language that were broadcast by a local commercial radio station. Their constancy and progressively improving expertise, coupled with their devotion and the selflessness with which they shouldered the many responsibilities, assuredly attracted the blessing of being chosen by the Universal House of Justice to establish the second Bahá'í radio station in the world.

#### Radio Bahá'í of Perú is born

The first International Bahá'í Conference on Radio and Television, sponsored by the National Spiritual Assembly of Perú and the Continental Board of Counsellors for South America, was held on the campus of the National Technical University of the Altiplano. In addition to exchanging ideas and experiences in radio and TV teaching in several national communities and on several different levels, the participants also commemorated the 88th anniversary of the Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh.

At a crucial and dramatic moment during the conference, dozens of Bahá'ís came forward to volunteer their help in the development and construction of Radio Bahá'í of Lake Titicaca. The success of the conference far exceeded what had been expected. As a part of the program, the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh was proclaimed to high government officials. Among the other high points was a meeting of conference participants at the proposed site of Radio Bahá'í in Perú and the recital of prayers in several languages.

#### The 'For' project is begun

In the days following the Radio and TV Conference, a teaching program entitled "For" was launched. A number of Bahá'ís from several countries volunteered their services

and were immediately organized in teams that traveled and taught in the area around Lake Titicaca. Starting from Puno and ending at La Paz, Bolivia, where a satellite conference was held, the campaign had as its objective the location of towns that could, in future, become archetypes of a Bahá'í society.

The satellite conference was transformed into a "unity feast" at which new methods of teaching were shared, including such innovative ideas as the establishment of a traveling Bahá'í teaching institute, the use of new audio-visual materials, local "tuning in" or receiving centers (to receive and listen to Bahá'í radio programs), and so forth. On their return to Perú, the teams openly and enthusiastically taught the Faith, visiting schools, public plazas and parks, radio stations, and government representatives. The doors were opened to present the Cause at a TV station,



*Bahá'í teachers with participants in a deepening class in Plateria, Puno, Perú.*

a theatre, a Catholic church, and a military base.

Closely paralleling the teaching campaign was the initiation of construction work on the building that was to house Radio Bahá'í of Lake Titicaca. On July 15, 1980, the cornerstone was laid. Construction has been directed by Kamran Mansuri, a selfless and devoted pioneer to Ecuador from Iran who is an engineer. A number of indigenous believers from the Puno area also have volunteered their services to help construct the edifice.

#### **Expansion and consolidation**

At present, the teaching work among the Aymaras is performed largely by indigenous Bahá'ís who visit the numerous and distant localities, usually traveling on foot due to the lack of reliable transportation. Throughout the year, district institutes are held in the various regions of the country, sponsored by the Regional Teaching Committee. A permanent Bahá'í traveling teaching institute maintains a program of regular visits of a few days each to various Bahá'í communities where the local believers are deepened in such matters as Bahá'í education of children, women's activities, functions of the Local Spiritual Assembly, the Nineteen Day Feast, and so on. A Bahá'í club is being formed at the university in Puno (the National Technical University of the Altiplano) where the most talented youth in the region are to be found. During the Riḍván period of B.E. 137 (1980), 50 new localities were opened to the Faith and 51 Local Spiritual Assemblies were elected. During Riḍván 138

(1981), the number of Assemblies was increased to 130. Radio Bahá'í will be invaluable in the deepening and consolidation of these Assemblies and localities.

#### **Permission to broadcast**

Much worrying and preoccupation was caused in the Peruvian Bahá'í community by the long wait involved in the radio licensing process. Finally, after a memorable week during which the entire Peruvian national community united spiritually and prayed the Tablet of Ahmad daily, permission was granted, on March 3, 1981, to use the short-wave band at 890 KHz. The official announcement, coming less than three weeks before Naw-Rúz, filled the Bahá'ís with joy. That same day, the National Spiritual Assembly cabled the exciting news to the Universal House of Justice.

Now the finishing touches to the radio station's construction are being directed by a team of Bahá'í engineers who are lovingly dedicating their time and knowledge to the completion of this worthy project. The team includes Kurt Grove, an American geologist lately from Puerto Rico who is pioneering in Puno; Zabihollah Mohebbi, an electronics engineer from Iran who is pioneering in Bolivia; and Antonio Fernandez, a Peruvian electrical engineer. They are being guided, as the entire project has been guided, by engineer K. Dean Stephens, a pioneer from the U.S. to Puerto Rico who is the technical adviser to the Universal House of Justice on radio in the Americas.

Radio Bahá'í of Lake Titicaca was scheduled to begin broadcasting in July, with the official inauguration program to be held November 12, 1981, the 164th anniversary of the Birth of Bahá'u'lláh.

For the Bahá'ís in Perú and throughout the world, this radio station, dedicated to Bahá'u'lláh and His Cause, together with its sister station in Otavalo, Ecuador, and the future stations to be established in Bolivia, Brazil, Chile and Panama, represents the first glimmerings of the glory promised to the indigenous American believers by the prophetic pen of the beloved Master, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, in the *Tablets of the Divine Plan*.