



Guidelines for Economic Living

Messages from the Universal House of Justice

Badi Shams

*Dedicated to the present and future Economists who will
help to lay the foundation for the
World Commonwealth*

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**Messages from the Universal House of Justice
Related to Economics**

Compiled by

Badi Shams

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Introduction

It is such a blessing to have the assurance that divine guidance is always there to help humanity to find its way to an ever-advancing civilisation.

To understand the uniqueness of the Universal House of Justice is not an easy task and to try to explain it is even harder, so who is more qualified than the House of Justice itself.

“The legislation enacted by the Universal House of Justice is different from interpretation. Authoritative interpretation, as uttered by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and the Guardian, is a divinely guided statement of what the Word of God means. The divinely inspired legislation of the Universal House of Justice does not attempt to say what the revealed Word means—it states what must be done in cases where the revealed Text or its authoritative interpretation is not explicit. It is, therefore, on quite a different level from the Sacred Text, and the Universal House of Justice is empowered to abrogate or amend its own legislation whenever it judges the conditions make this desirable. Moreover, the attitude to legislation is different in the Bahá’í Faith. The human tendency in past Dispensations has been to want every question answered and to arrive at a binding decision affecting every small detail of belief or practice. The tendency in the Bahá’í Dispensation, from the time of Bahá’u’lláh Himself, has been to clarify the governing principles, to make binding pronouncements on details which are considered essential, but to leave a wide area to the conscience of the individual. The same tendency appears also in administrative matters. The Guardian used to state that the working of National Spiritual Assemblies should be uniform in essentials but that diversity in secondary matters was not only permissible but desirable. For this reason, a number of points are not expressed in the National Bahá’í Constitution (the Declaration of Trust and By-Laws of National Assemblies); these are left to each National Spiritual Assembly to decide for itself.” -The Universal House of Justice, 3 January 1982

How fortunate are we to live in an era that not only we have the Holy Writings revealed by the Báb, Bahá’u’lláh, Abdu’l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi to guide us, but also have the guidance of the Universal House of Justice to help us with all areas of our lives which includes economic life. I have tried my best to select the Writings from the messages that directly or indirectly are related (in my mind) to the topic of economics. It was not an easy task to accomplish. I hope this compilation helps the readers who are interested in the subject of economics.

What an amazing time we live in, where we have all the guidance we need to face whatever the challenges life brings us.

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Baha'i Economic System

“Although Bahá’u’lláh does not set out in His Revelation a detailed economic system, a constant theme throughout the entire corpus of His teachings is the reorganization of human society. Consideration of this theme inevitably gives rise to questions of economics. Of course, the future order conceived by Bahá’u’lláh is far beyond anything that can be imagined by the present generation. Nevertheless, its eventual emergence will depend on strenuous effort by His followers to put His teachings into effect today. With this in mind, we hope that the comments below will stimulate thoughtful, ongoing reflection by the friends. The aim is to learn about how to participate in the material affairs of society in a way that is consistent with the divine precepts and how, in practical terms, collective prosperity can be advanced through justice and generosity, collaboration and mutual assistance.”

- The Universal House of Justice, 1 March 2017

“As one studies these words, one begins to understand the processes at work in the gradual unfoldment and establishment of the Bahá’í System.

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 behavior of people and on presenting a working model as evidence of the reality and practicality of the way of life they propound.

The Bahá’í Administrative Order is the “nucleus and pattern” of the divinely intended future political system of the world, and undoubtedly non-Bahá’í governments will benefit from learning how this system works and from adopting its procedures and principles in overcoming the problems they face.

Nevertheless, this Administration is primarily the framework and structure designed to be a channel for the flow of the spirit of the Cause and for the application of its Teachings.”

-The Universal House of Justice, 27 April 1995

Bahá’í scholarship and Bahá’í scholars

“The House of Justice wishes to avoid use of the terms “Bahá’í scholarship” and “Bahá’í scholars” in an exclusive sense, which would effectively establish a demarcation between those admitted into this category and those denied entrance to it. It is clear that such terms are relative, and that what is a worthy scholarly endeavor by a Bahá’í, when compared to the activities of those with whom he is in contact, may well be regarded as of vastly lesser significance when measured against the accomplishments of the outstanding scholars which the Faith has produced. The House of Justice seeks the creation of a Bahá’í community in which the members encourage each other, where there is respect for accomplishment, and a

common realization that every one is, in his or her own way, seeking to acquire a deeper understanding of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh and to contribute to the advancement of the Faith.”

-The Universal House of Justice, 19 October 1993

“The Universal House of Justice has read with great interest the report of your seminar. It regards Bahá'í scholarship as of great potential importance for the development and consolidation of the Bahá'í community as it emerges from obscurity. It noted that there are a number of problems with which you have been grappling, and while it feels that it should, in general, leave the working out of solutions to Bahá'í scholars themselves, the House of Justice has the impression that it would be helpful to provide you, at this relatively early stage of the development of Bahá'í scholarship, with a few thoughts on matters raised during your seminar. Reports of your seminar were therefore referred to the Research Department, and the Universal House of Justice commends to your study the enclosed memorandum which that Department has prepared.

The House of Justice also urges you not to feel constrained in any way in consulting it about problems, whether theoretical or practical, that you meet in your work. It has noted, for example, the difficulties presented by the current temporary requirement for the review of publications, and in this connection it asks us to inform you that it has already established the policy that doctoral theses do not have to be reviewed unless there is a proposal to publish them in larger quantities than is required by the examining body.

You are still in the early stages of a very challenging and promising development in the life of the Bahá'í community, and the Universal House of Justice is eager to foster and assist your work in whatever ways it can. We are to assure you of its prayers in the Sacred Shrines on behalf of you all and of the progress of Bahá'í scholarship.”

-The Universal House of Justice, 3 January 1979

Bahá'í World Commonwealth

“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 the Bahá'ís.”

-The Universal House of Justice, 31 January 1985

“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.”

-The Universal House of Justice, 7 July 1976

Contribution to the Baha'i Fund

“The House of Justice has never gone to the extreme of telling the friends that now is the time to give their long-range savings to the Fund. It sets forth the needs of the Cause, and calls upon the believers to sacrifice, but the degree and manner of his sacrifice depends on each believer’s own faith and good judgment in light of his responsibilities. Again and again in His Writings Bahá’u’lláh emphasizes the need for moderation in all things, and He upholds the importance of using wisdom in all we do and say.

Devoted believers in every age have found it challenging to decide how much of their worldly wealth they should give to the Cause of God, and how much they should use to meet their many responsibilities of life, such as educating their children, preparing for their old age so that they will not be a burden on others, and so forth. You will recall the story of the Muslim who asked Muhammad whether he should tie up his camel or trust in God that it would not run away. Muhammad’s answer was that he should tie up the camel *and* trust in God! In this Dispensation, by the institution of Huqúqu’lláh, Bahá’u’lláh has provided us with a measure. We are all obliged to pay that portion of our savings that is God’s Right. What remains thereafter is ours to use at our own discretion, for the promotion of the work of the Cause and for helping others less fortunate than ourselves.”

-The Universal House of Justice, 1 July 1993

“Thus to earn a livelihood is a spiritual obligation, and one should not consciously place oneself in a position where one would have to beg others for material support.

It is against this background of responsibility for oneself and one’s family that each person must estimate the degree to which he or she can sacrifice for the Funds of the Faith. The range of options and decisions that the believers can make regarding the management of their personal finances without jeopardizing their future security are great, and can only be evaluated by each individual.”

-The Universal House of Justice, 1 July 1993

“This is the immediate need. Beyond this there is, we believe, a worldwide need for appreciation of this basic principle of our Faith: that contributing to the Fund should constitute an integral part of the spiritual life of every Bahá’í and be regarded as the fulfillment of a fundamental spiritual obligation. In too many countries we have encountered a reluctance among the teachers of the Cause to include, in their presentation of the Teachings, support of the Fund as a natural part of Bahá’í life. In the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, Bahá’u’lláh more than once refers to the necessity for combining spiritual and material means in achieving the purposes of the Faith. Shoghi Effendi, for his part, referred to the Fund as the life-blood of the Cause.

We urge all the friends to give deep thought to the importance of supporting the Cause financially and to the effect that Bahá’í activities have on the condition of the entire human race.”

-The Universal House of Justice, 18 November 1991

“The provisions set out in the letter of 17 July 1978 written to your National Spiritual Assembly on behalf of the House of Justice remain applicable, including the principle that it is improper for Bahá’ís to solicit funds from non-Bahá’ís in the name of the Faith for any purpose.

... There is, however, a wide range of fund-raising activities in which Bahá’ís may engage. For example, Bahá’í institutions are free to approach governments or institutions which hold themselves out as wishing to fund charitable activities, to apply for grants to assist in specific humanitarian projects. A Bahá’í school

which has both Bahá'í and non-Bahá'í pupils is free to raise funds for its own development by such activities as concerts, etc., or by appeals to parents; in this instance, a humanitarian institution is clearly identified, and the funds are being collected in its name rather than in the name of the Faith. Another example is that of a Bahá'í who wishes to sell an item he owns to the general public for a fair market price; he is free to use the proceeds for any purpose he wishes, including contributing them all, or in part, to the Bahá'í Fund, provided he does not represent to the public that the sale is being conducted for the benefit of the Faith.

There would be no objection to the Bahá'í community's joining with others to give a concert or undertake some other similar activity to raise funds for a deserving charity. Such activities or even the making of donations to humanitarian work should be, and should be seen to be, acts of sincere assistance and cooperation. In choosing to engage in such fund-raising, a Bahá'í community would need to ensure that assisting the charity would not have partisan political implications or support purposes contrary to the interests of the Faith. It would need to watch carefully that its involvement in such activities does not divert its energies from the vital work of teaching the Faith and consolidating its Institutions."

-The Universal House of Justice, Department of the Secretariat, 20 August 1987

"This letter and the annexed memorandum of comments are addressed primarily to those National Spiritual Assemblies whose communities include large numbers of materially poor people but inasmuch as the principles expressed, as distinct from some of the procedures suggested, are of universal application, they are being sent to all National Assemblies.

There is a profound aspect to the relationship between a believer and the Fund, which holds true irrespective of his or her economic condition. When a human soul accepts Bahá'u'lláh as the Manifestation of God for this age and enters into the divine Covenant, that soul should progressively bring his or her whole life into harmony with the divine purpose—he becomes a co-worker in the Cause of God and receives the bounty of being permitted to devote his material possessions, no matter how meager, to the work of the Faith.

Giving to the Fund, therefore, is a spiritual privilege not open to those who have not accepted Bahá'u'lláh, of which no believer should deny himself. It is both a responsibility and a source of bounty. This is an aspect of the Cause which, we feel, is an essential part of the basic teaching and deepening of new believers. The importance of contributing resides in the degree of sacrifice of the giver, the spirit of devotion with which the contribution is made and the unity of the friends in this service; these attract the confirmations of God and enhance the dignity and self-respect of the individuals and the community."

-The Universal House of Justice, 7 August 1985

"A primary requisite for all who have responsibility for the care of the funds of the Faith is trustworthiness. This, as Bahá'u'lláh has stressed, is one of the most basic and vital of all human virtues, and its exercise has a direct and profound influence on the willingness of the believers to contribute to the Fund.

Conditions vary from country to country and, therefore, in educating the believers and developing the Fund, each National Spiritual Assembly needs to tailor its actions to the conditions of its area of jurisdiction.

In many parts of the world gifts of produce and handicrafts may be a large potential source of regular donations and could well be encouraged, proper arrangements being made for their collection and sale

and the disposition of the proceeds.”

-The Universal House of Justice, 7 August 1985

Deputise Financing

“Just as one deputizes another to teach in one’s stead by covering the expenses of a pioneer or traveling teacher, one can deputize a teacher serving an institute, who is, of course, a teacher of teachers. To do so, one may make contributions to the Continental Bahá’í Fund, as well as to the Local, National and International Funds, earmarked for this purpose.”

-The Universal House of Justice, Ridván 1996

“To administer a budget provided from the Bahá’í International Fund, allocating therefrom monies for the development of institutes, the implementation of various types of teaching projects, and the production and distribution of literature and audiovisual materials, as well as the operations of the Continental Boards of Counselors. To also administer the expenditure of the International Deputization Fund and to see to it that pioneers and traveling teachers are deployed in areas of need, with the help of the Continental Pioneer Committees, whose work it directs.”

-The Universal House of Justice, 10 June 1998

“We then stated that deputizing a teacher serving an institute would be one way of fulfilling this responsibility and indicated that the friends could contribute to the Continental Bahá’í Fund, as well as the Local, National and International Funds, for this purpose.”

-The Universal House of Justice, 6 August 1996

Economic Crisis

“Over the same period, cumulative instances of political upheaval and economic turmoil on various continents have shaken governments and peoples. Societies have been brought to the brink of revolution, and in notable cases over the edge. Leaders are finding that neither arms nor riches guarantee security. Where the aspirations of the people have gone unfulfilled, a store of indignation has accrued. We recall how pointedly Bahá’u’lláh admonished the rulers of the earth: “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.” A word of caution: No matter how captivating the spectacle of the people’s fervour for change, it must be remembered that there are interests which manipulate the course of events. And, so long as the remedy prescribed by the Divine Physician is not administered, the tribulations of this age will persist and deepen. An attentive observer of the times will readily recognize the accelerated disintegration, fitful but relentless, of a world order lamentably defective.”

-The Universal House of Justice, Ridván 2011

“One of the signs of the breakdown of society in all parts of the world is the erosion of trust and collaboration between the individual and the institutions of governance. In many nations the electoral process has become discredited because of endemic corruption. Contributing to the widening distrust of so vital a process are the influence on the outcome from vested interests having access to lavish funds, the restrictions on freedom of choice inherent in the party system, and the distortion in public perception of the candidates by the bias expressed in the media. Apathy, alienation, and disillusionment are a consequence, too, as is a growing sense of despair of the unlikelihood that the most capable citizens will

emerge to deal with the manifold problems of a defective social order. Evident everywhere is a yearning for institutions which will dispense justice, dispel oppression, and foster an enduring unity between the disparate elements of society.”

-The Universal House of Justice, 25 March 2007

“There is no need to comment extensively on the impotence of statesmanship, another theme treated so masterfully by the Guardian in his World Order letters. The widening economic divide between the rich and the poor, the persistence of age-old animosities among nations, the swelling numbers of the displaced, the extraordinary rise in organized crime and violence, the pervasive sense of insecurity, the breakdown of basic services in so many regions, the indiscriminate exploitation of natural resources—these are but a few of the signs of the inability of world leaders to devise viable schemes to alleviate humanity’s ills. This is not to say that sincere efforts have not been exerted, in fact, have not multiplied decade after decade.”

-The Universal House of Justice, Ridván 2006

“The world in which our efforts are taking place is likewise undergoing profound changes. On the one hand, the vast network of agencies and individuals that promote understanding and cooperation among diverse peoples affirms ever more powerfully the growing recognition that the “earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens.” On the other hand, it is equally clear that the world is moving through a period of social paralysis, tyranny and anarchy, a period marked by the widespread neglect of both governmental and personal responsibility, the ultimate consequences of which no one on earth can foresee. The effect of both developments, as Shoghi Effendi also pointed out, will be to awaken in the hearts of those who share this planet with us a longing for unity and justice that can be met only by the Cause of God.”

-The Universal House of Justice, 24 May 2001

“The economic crises so widely reported seem destined to grow even worse, but neither the economic nor other pressing problems confronting humanity will ultimately be resolved unless the Cause of Bahá’u’lláh is given due regard by nations and peoples and unless it receives the adequate material support of its avowed adherents. May the friends everywhere consider, together with their Bahá’í institutions and individually, undaunted by the uncertainties, the perils and the financial stringency afflicting nations, what must now be done by each and all to meet this inescapable, sacred responsibility resting upon them.”

-The Universal House of Justice, Ridván 1993

Economic Life

“Our call to examine the implications of the Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh for economic life is intended to reach Bahá’í institutions and communities but is directed more especially to the individual believer. If a new model of community life, patterned on the teachings, is to emerge, must not the company of the faithful demonstrate in their own lives the rectitude of conduct that is one of its most distinguishing features? Every choice a Bahá’í makes—as employee or employer, producer or consumer, borrower or lender, benefactor or beneficiary—leaves a trace, and the moral duty to lead a coherent life demands that one’s economic decisions be in accordance with lofty ideals, that the purity of one’s aims be matched by the purity of one’s actions to fulfil those aims. Naturally, the friends habitually look to the teachings to set the standard to which to aspire. But the community’s deepening engagement with society means that the economic dimension of social existence must receive ever more concentrated attention. Particularly in clusters where the community-building process is beginning to embrace large numbers, the exhortations

contained in the Bahá'í Writings should increasingly inform economic relationships within families, neighbourhoods, and peoples. Not content with whatever values prevail in the existing order that surrounds them, the friends everywhere should consider the application of the teachings to their lives and, using the opportunities their circumstances offer them, make their own individual and collective contributions to economic justice and social progress wherever they reside. Such efforts will add to a growing storehouse of knowledge in this regard.”

- *The Universal House of Justice, 1 March 2017*

“The relative prosperity enjoyed by the Bahá'ís of Iran in the past can be attributed to a culture that lays great emphasis on education and learning and which recognizes as an act of worship the assiduous and honest pursuit of a useful trade or profession, undertaken in the spirit of service.”

- *The Universal House of Justice, 2 April 2010*

“In our letter to you of 24 November 2009, we addressed the subject of the family and its role in the advancement of civilization, drawing attention to the need to rear children that see their own welfare as inseparable from the welfare of others. While stressing the importance of family solidarity, particularly as it pertains to social progress, we called for caution in this respect, lest devotion to family interests diminish one's commitment to justice and compassion for all or provide an excuse for perpetuating a harmful mentality of “us and them”. Many, indeed, are the ways in which the family can contribute to the life of society—for example, as an economic unit it can play a significant part in alleviating a variety of problems born of the economic inequalities so prevalent in the world today.”

- *The Universal House of Justice, 2 April 2010*

“Nevertheless, there are certainly practices a Bahá'í would eschew, such as dishonesty in one's transactions or the economic exploitation of others. Faithful adherence to the divine admonitions demands there be no contradiction between one's economic conduct and one's beliefs as a Bahá'í. By applying in one's life those principles of the Faith that relate to fairness and equity, a single soul can uphold a standard far above the low threshold by which the world measures itself. Humanity is weary for want of a pattern of life to which to aspire; we look to you to foster communities whose ways will give hope to the world.”

-- *The Universal House of Justice, Ridván 2012*

“Reflect on the significance of ‘Abdu'l-Bahá's words, at once complex and subtle. Quite apart from the already formidable obstacles to employment and service that certain fanatical elements have placed in your path, a host of negative forces, generated by the materialism and corruption so widespread in the world, present yet a further challenge in upholding the Bahá'í standard of conduct with respect to financial affairs. Nevertheless, following in the footsteps of your spiritual forebears, you remain undaunted, striving sincerely to reinforce within your families, particularly in your children, attitudes towards material wealth founded on Divine guidance. The members of the younger generation would do well to ponder the above statement of ‘Abdu'l-Bahá in which He conditions the acquisition of wealth on diligent work and the grace of God. Let them weigh carefully in their hearts and minds the difference between gaining wealth through earnest effort in fields such as agriculture, commerce, the arts, and industry, on the one hand, and, on the other, obtaining it without exertion or through dishonourable means. Let them consider the consequences of each for the spiritual development of the individual, as well as the progress of society, and ask themselves what possibilities exist for generating income and acquiring wealth that will draw down confirmations from on high. It will surely become evident, as they do so, that what will attract God's blessings and ensure true happiness both in this world and in the next is the development of spiritual qualities, such as honesty, trustworthiness, generosity, justice, and

consideration for others, and the recognition that material means are to be expended for the betterment of the world.”

-The Universal House of Justice, 2 April 2010

“Only if you demonstrate the rectitude of conduct to which the writings of the Faith call every soul will you be able to struggle against the myriad forms of corruption, overt and subtle, eating at the vitals of society. Only if you perceive honour and nobility in every human being—this independent of wealth or poverty—will you be able to champion the cause of justice. And to the extent that administrative processes of your institutions are governed by the principles of Bahá’í consultation will the great masses of humanity be able to take refuge in the Bahá’í community.”

-The Universal House of Justice, Ridván 2008

Future and Economics

“The future civilization envisaged by Bahá’u’lláh is a prosperous one, in which the vast resources of the world will be directed towards humanity’s elevation and regeneration, not its debasement and destruction. The act of contributing to the Fund, then, is imbued with profound meaning: it is a practical way of hastening the advent of that civilization, and a necessary one, for as Bahá’u’lláh Himself has explained, “He Who is the Eternal Truth—exalted be His glory—hath made the fulfilment of every undertaking on earth dependent on material means.” Bahá’ís conduct their lives in the midst of a society acutely disordered in its material affairs. The process of community building they are advancing in their clusters cultivates a set of attitudes towards wealth and possessions very different from those holding sway in the world. The habit of regularly giving to the Funds of the Faith—including in-kind contributions particularly in certain places—arises from and reinforces a sense of personal concern for the welfare of the community and the progress of the Cause. The duty to contribute, just like the duty to teach, is a fundamental aspect of Bahá’í identity which strengthens faith. The sacrificial and generous contributions of the individual believer, the collective consciousness promoted by the community of the needs of the Fund, and the careful stewardship of financial resources exercised by the institutions of the Faith can be regarded as expressions of the love that binds these three actors more closely together. And ultimately, voluntary giving fosters an awareness that managing one’s financial affairs in accordance with spiritual principles is an indispensable dimension of a life lived coherently. It is a matter of conscience, a way in which commitment to the betterment of the world is translated into practice.”

-The Universal House of Justice, 29 December 2015

“The key to resolving these social ills rests in the hands of a youthful generation convinced of the nobility of human beings; eagerly seeking a deeper understanding of the true purpose of existence; able to distinguish between divine religion and mere superstition; clear in the view of science and religion as two independent yet complementary systems of knowledge that propel human progress; conscious of and drawn to the beauty and power of unity in diversity; secure in the knowledge that real glory is to be found in service to one’s country and to the peoples of the world; and mindful that the acquisition of wealth is praiseworthy only insofar as it is attained through just means and expended for benevolent purposes, for the promotion of knowledge and toward the common good. Thus must our precious youth prepare themselves to shoulder the tremendous responsibilities that await them. And thus will they prove immune to the atmosphere of greed that surrounds them and press forward unwavering in the pursuit of their exalted goals.”

-The Universal House of Justice, 2 April 2010

“Whatever suffering and turmoil the years immediately ahead may hold, however dark the immediate circumstances, the Bahá’í community believes that humanity can confront this supreme trial with confidence in its ultimate outcome. Far from signaling the end of civilization, the convulsive changes towards which humanity is being ever more rapidly impelled will serve to release the “potentialities inherent in the station of man” and reveal “the full measure of his destiny on earth, the innate excellence of his reality.”

-The Universal House of Justice, October 1985

Golden Rule

“The teaching that we should treat others as we ourselves would wish to be treated, an ethic variously repeated in all the great religions, lends force to this latter observation in two particular respects: it sums up the moral attitude, the peace-inducing aspect, extending through these religions irrespective of their place or time of origin; it also signifies an aspect of unity which is their essential virtue, a virtue mankind in its disjointed view of history has failed to appreciate.”

-The Universal House of Justice, October 1985

Huqúqu’lláh

“Your third and fourth questions concern the “spiritual” portion of a Bahá’í will, that is, that portion of a believer’s will which is a statement of faith, rather than a statement about the material or, to use your word, “ordinary” aspects of a will, such as distribution of one’s possessions and provision for the upbringing of one’s children. It would seem that your understanding that the individual believer should draft the “spiritual” portion of his or her will, rather than asking a lawyer to do so, is in keeping with the same paragraph of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas referred to earlier, paragraph 109, which provides guidance as to the “spiritual” content and, additionally, makes a specification regarding how the individual should head the document: “Unto everyone hath been enjoined the writing of a will. The testator should head this document with the adornment of the Most Great Name, bear witness therein unto the oneness of God in the Dayspring of His Revelation, and make mention, as he may wish, of that which is praiseworthy, so that it may be a testimony for him in the kingdoms of Revelation and Creation and a treasure with his Lord, the Supreme Protector, the Faithful.”

-The Universal House of Justice, July 1996

“Your fifth question centers on the provision for Huqúqu’lláh in Bahá’í wills. Your understanding that the obligation to pay Huqúqu’lláh arises during one’s lifetime and is normally to be carried out with lifetime giving is correct, although at the same time it is true that there may be cases where a believer dies without having made provision in his or her will for payment of the unpaid portion of Huqúqu’lláh, if any. The event of death does not remove from a believer the obligation to pay Huqúqu’lláh. Whatever portion is due to be paid is therefore a debt due from the believer’s estate at the time of his or her death. The cost of the funeral and burial, the payment of the debts of the deceased, and the payment of whatever portion of Huqúqu’lláh remains due are prior charges on the estate which must be met before arriving at the amount of the property which has to be divided in accordance with the provisions of the law of inheritance. Thus, whether or not a person makes a will or, having made a will, whether he or she makes provision in it for

the payment of Huqúqu'lláh, the Huqúqu'lláh should be paid, like all debts, before the rest of the estate is divided.

In light of this, it is certainly advisable for a believer to make the necessary arrangements for payment of Huqúqu'lláh prior to his or her death, in order to avoid complications or confusions which could arise. It should be noted that the question of a legal wording to include provision in a will for the payment of Huqúqu'lláh after a believer has died is dependent upon so many factors, that it would be preferable to seek legal advice so that wording which is appropriate and in accordance with the laws governing inheritance can be used. Obviously, unless the believer leaves a clear accounting of his or her property and payment of Huqúqu'lláh to date, if any, it will not be possible for anyone to calculate accurately what remains to be paid at the time of death. While the application of the principles involved in payment of Huqúqu'lláh may well require subsidiary legislation by the House of Justice in the future, at the present time it falls to the executor or administrator of an estate to apply them to the extent possible, using his or her best judgment and taking into account the information available. Finally, while the payment of Huqúqu'lláh is each individual's own responsibility, a believer may be referred to the nearest Representative of the Trustee of Huqúqu'lláh, who could advise him or her in the light of any specific circumstances."

-The Universal House of Justice, 1 July 1996

Indigenous People

"The House of Justice is deeply concerned about the condition and needs of the indigenous people . . . Although there is no doubt that increased material resources would be helpful in resolving some of the problems which exist there, they will not suffice to bring about a fundamental and enduring solution. This can only come about through a realization that, at a basic level, the issues which you face are essentially spiritual, dealing with values, attitudes, and behavior. Hence, a spiritual solution is required."

-The Universal House of Justice, 6 April 1999

Individual Social and Economic Actions

"Viewed in this light, many seemingly ordinary economic activities gain new significance because of their potential to add to human welfare and prosperity. "Every person must have an occupation, a trade or a craft," explains the Master, "so that he may carry other people's burdens, and not himself be a burden to others." The poor are urged by Bahá'u'lláh to "exert themselves and strive to earn the means of livelihood", while they who are possessed of riches "must have the utmost regard for the poor". "Wealth", 'Abdu'l-Bahá has affirmed, "is praiseworthy in the highest degree, if it is acquired by an individual's own efforts and the grace of God, in commerce, agriculture, art and industry, and if it be expended for philanthropic purposes." At the same time, the Hidden Words is replete with warnings of its perilous allure, that wealth is a "mighty barrier" between the believer and the proper Object of his adoration. No wonder, then, that Bahá'u'lláh extols the station of the wealthy one who is not hindered by riches from attaining the eternal kingdom; the splendour of such a soul "shall illuminate the dwellers of heaven even as the sun enlightens the people of the earth!" 'Abdu'l-Bahá declares that "if a judicious and resourceful individual should initiate measures which would universally enrich the masses of the people, there could be no undertaking greater than this, and it would rank in the sight of God as the supreme achievement". For wealth is most commendable "provided the entire population is wealthy." Examining one's life to

determine what is a necessity and then discharging with joy one's obligation in relation to the law of Huqúqu'lláh is an indispensable discipline to bring one's priorities into balance, purify whatever wealth one possesses, and ensure that the share which is the Right of God provides for the greater good. At all times, contentment and moderation, benevolence and fellow feeling, sacrifice and reliance on the Almighty are qualities that befit the God-fearing soul."

-The Universal House of Justice, 1 March 2017

"Let those seriously concerned about the state and fate of the world give due attention to the claims of Bahá'u'lláh. Let them realize that the storms battering at the foundations of society will not be stilled unless and until spiritual principles are actively engaged in the search for solutions to social problems."

-The Universal House of Justice, 26 November 1992

"The society in the midst of which you are called upon to work is undergoing radical changes in every aspect of its life, changes which are but a concentration of the problems with which every country, and world society as a whole, is grappling. The underlying cause of this transformation is that this is the age of the Oneness of Mankind, and therefore every people, whether of the USSR or in other parts of the world, must find its way to the unity in diversity, the harmony of formerly conflicting elements, which Shoghi Effendi held forth as the goal towards which mankind is striving."

-The Universal House of Justice, 21 November 1990

"It is portentous of the profound change in the structure of present-day society which attainment to the Lesser Peace implies. Hopeful as are the signs, we cannot forget that the dark passage of the Age of Transition has not been fully traversed; it is as yet long, slippery and tortuous. For godlessness is rife, materialism rampant. Nationalism and racism still work their treachery in men's hearts, and humanity remains blind to the spiritual foundations of the solution to its economic woes. For the Bahá'í community the situation is a particular challenge, because time is running out and we have serious commitments to keep. "

-The Universal House of Justice, Ridván 1990

"The words, the deeds, the attitudes, the lack of prejudice, the nobility of character, the high sense of service to others—in a word, those qualities and actions which distinguish a Bahá'í must unfailingly characterize their inner life and outer behavior, and their interactions with friend or foe."

-The Universal House of Justice, 8 May 1985

"Intimations in the non-Bahá'í world of a rapidly growing realization that mankind is indeed entering a new stage in its evolution present us with unprecedented opportunities to show that the Bahá'í world community is not only "the nucleus but the very pattern" of that world society which it is the purpose of Bahá'u'lláh to establish and towards which a harassed humanity, albeit largely unconsciously, is striving.

The time has come for the Bahá'í community to become more involved in the life of the society around it, without in the least supporting any of the world's moribund and divisive concepts, or slackening its direct teaching efforts, but rather, by association, exerting its influence towards unity, demonstrating its ability to settle differences by consultation rather than by confrontation, violence or schism, and declaring its faith in the divine purpose of human existence."

-The Universal House of Justice, Ridván 1985

"These are momentous times. The institutions of the old world order are crumbling and in disarray. Materialism, greed, corruption and conflict are infecting the social order with a grave malaise from which it is helpless to extricate itself. With every passing day it becomes more and more evident that no time must be lost in applying the remedy prescribed by Bahá'u'lláh, and it is to this task that Bahá'ís

everywhere must bend their energies and commit their resources.”

-The Universal House of Justice, 2 September 1982

“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 ...”

-The Universal House of Justice, 3 January 1982

Inheritance

“You mention the provision in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas regarding inheritance, in which the eldest son receives preferential treatment. As you no doubt know, the duty of making a will is enjoined upon all Bahá’ís, and in such a will a believer is free to bequeath his or her property in whatever way he or she wishes (see note 25 on page 60 of the *Synopsis and Codification*). Every system of law, however, needs to make provision for the disposal of a person’s property if he or she dies without having made a will, and it is in cases of intestacy that the specific provisions stated in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas are applied. These provisions give expression to the law of primogeniture, which, as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has stated, has invariably been upheld by the Law of God. In a Tablet to a follower of the Faith in Persia He wrote: “In all the Divine Dispensations the eldest son hath been given extraordinary distinctions. Even the station of prophethood hath been his birthright.” With the distinctions given to the eldest son, however, go concomitant duties. For example, with respect to the law of inheritance ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has explained in one of His Tablets that the eldest son has the responsibility to take into consideration the needs of the other heirs. Similar considerations no doubt apply to the provisions that, in intestacy, limit the shares due to half-brothers and half-sisters of the deceased on his or her mother’s side; they will, of course, be due to receive inheritance from their own father’s estate.

Your statement that “Gifts to a wife are included in the man’s property to be given away after his death” is incorrect. It is clear from the passage in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas that certain things that a husband buys for his wife are intended to be for the general household and certain are intended to be the wife’s personal property. These latter, that is to say the wife’s used clothing and gifts which have been made to her, are *not* included in the husband’s property.

The husband’s duty to send his wife home if differences arise between them while traveling is a part of the law of divorce, and relates to the husband’s obligation to support his wife during the year of waiting. The *Synopsis and Codification of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas* reads as follows (at section (g) on pages 42 and 43):

Should differences arise between husband and wife while traveling, he is required to send her home, or entrust her to a dependable person, who will escort her there, paying her journey and her full year’s expenses.”

-The Universal House of Justice, 24 July 1975

Interconnection of the Economic World

“In an increasingly interconnected world, more light is being cast on the social conditions of every people, giving greater visibility to their circumstances. While there are developments that give hope, there

is much that should weigh heavy on the conscience of the human race. Inequity, discrimination, and exploitation blight the life of humanity, seemingly immune to the treatments applied by political schemes of every hue. The economic impact of these afflictions has resulted in the prolonged suffering of so many, as well as in deep-seated, structural defects in society. No one whose heart has been attracted to the teachings of the Blessed Beauty can remain unmoved by these consequences.”

- The Universal House of Justice, 1 March 2017

“The welfare of any segment of humanity is inextricably bound up with the welfare of the whole. Humanity’s collective life suffers when any one group thinks of its own well-being in isolation from that of its neighbours or pursues economic gain without regard for how the natural environment, which provides sustenance for all, is affected. A stubborn obstruction, then, stands in the way of meaningful social progress: time and again, avarice and self-interest prevail at the expense of the common good. Unconscionable quantities of wealth are being amassed, and the instability this creates is made worse by how income and opportunity are spread so unevenly both between nations and within nations. But it need not be so. However much such conditions are the outcome of history, they do not have to define the future, and even if current approaches to economic life satisfied humanity’s stage of adolescence, they are certainly inadequate for its dawning age of maturity. There is no justification for continuing to perpetuate structures, rules, and systems that manifestly fail to serve the interests of all peoples. The teachings of the Faith leave no room for doubt: there is an inherent moral dimension to the generation, distribution, and utilization of wealth and resources.”

- The Universal House of Justice, 1 March 2017

Internet

“The opportunity which electronic communication technology provides for more speedy and thorough consultation among the friends is highly significant. Without doubt, it represents another manifestation of a development eagerly anticipated by the Guardian when he foresaw the creation of “a mechanism of world intercommunication ... embracing the whole planet, freed from national hindrances and restrictions, and functioning with marvelous swiftness and perfect regularity.”

As you well appreciate, the extent to which such technology advances the work of the Faith depends, of course, on the manner in which it is used. As a medium for Bahá’ís to exchange views, it imposes on participants the same requirements of moderation, candor, and courtesy as would be the case in any other discussion. Likewise, those involved should avoid belittling the views of one another. In this regard, the House of Justice has noted your understandable repugnance at an apparent temptation to use misleading and invidious labels like “traditionalists” and “liberals,” which divide the Bahá’í community. To the extent that this divisive habit of mind may persist in the Bahá’í community, it is obviously a carryover from non-Bahá’í society and a manifestation of an immature conception of life. If Bahá’ís were to persist in this mode of thinking, it would bring to naught even the most worthwhile intellectual endeavor, as has so conspicuously been the case with societies of the past.

Most important of all, as with any exploration by Bahá’ís of the beliefs and practices of their Faith, electronic discussion will serve the interests of the Cause and its members only as it is conducted within the framework of the Bahá’í Teachings and the truths they enshrine. To attempt to discuss the Cause of God apart from or with disdain for the authoritative guidance inherent in these Teachings would clearly be a logical contradiction. To take the first point mentioned in your letter, it is obvious that seeking to impose limits on the universality of the authority of God’s Manifestation would lead to the frustration of

serious scholarly work and generate disharmony within an effort whose success depends precisely upon a spirit of unity and mutual trust.”

-The Universal House of Justice, 19 May 1995

“The ease and relative impersonality of the electronic medium require in some ways an even higher level of self-discipline than is the case in situations where a spirit of unity is reinforced by the opportunity for direct personal contact and social interaction. In the pursuit of such a spirit of unity, Bahá’ís will, without doubt, wish to assist the consultative processes by sharing and discussing relevant Bahá’í texts. This will itself have the further effect of drawing attention back to the framework of Bahá’í belief.”

-The Universal House of Justice, 19 May 1995

Mashriqú’l-Adhkár and Hazíratu’l-Quds

“If acquisition of a National Hazíratu’l-Quds is a responsibility assigned to you under the Five Year Plan, you should treat it as an urgent matter in view of the worldwide condition of inflation and rising property costs. Such a building, which must be suitable to serve as the seat of the National Spiritual Assembly, should be purchased as economically as possible. Preferably it should be a freehold detached building, although if such is not obtainable, a semidetached house or an apartment may be considered, or even a property on a long-term lease.

A site for a future Mashriqú’l-Adhkár can be as small as 8,000 square meters in area if a larger property would be too expensive. It should, if possible, be situated within the city designated or, if this is not feasible, within 25 kilometers from the city.

A national endowment should be regarded as an investment in real estate owned by the National Spiritual Assembly. It may be anywhere in the country and can be a small, inexpensive piece of land donated by one of the friends, or else acquired out of the resources of the National Fund.

Where we have given a goal to acquire a Hazíratu’l-Quds which is to serve the entire community in a certain country, it is to be a local Hazíratu’l-Quds at the present time but should be of a size and quality to serve as an administrative center and focal point for the whole community. We envisage that some of such Hazíratu’l-Quds may, at a later date, be converted into National Hazíratu’l-Quds, and this fact should be borne in mind when acquiring them.

In the goal for local Hazíratu’l-Quds given to some communities we state that a certain number should be large enough to accommodate activities of a number of communities in the surrounding district. While not being at all in the same category as the Hazíratu’l-Quds described in the last paragraph above, these particular buildings are intended to be rather more substantial structures than the average local Hazíratu’l-Quds, and should be located in areas which form easily accessible, central gathering places for districts in which large numbers of Bahá’ís are living. In addition to serving as a local Hazíratu’l-Quds for its own town or village, such a building can be used for district gatherings, for the holding of teaching institutes, conferences, deepening classes, etc., for the larger area, and could possibly accommodate the office of the district teaching committee.

In general we intend that the local Hazíratu’l-Quds called for in the Plan should be very simple structures to serve as focal points and meeting places for the local communities. It is hoped that land for them can be provided by local believers and that they can be built, for the most part, by the local friends. In certain

instances the National Spiritual Assembly may feel justified in giving a small amount of assistance from the National Fund.

The acquisition of local endowments, which is given as a specific goal to some national communities, is intended to assist in the consolidation of local communities and to foster the spirit of unity and collaboration among the believers. A local endowment can be quite a small piece of land; it can be purchased by the Local Spiritual Assembly or is more usually the gift of one or more of the believers. If the Local Spiritual Assembly is incorporated, the endowment should be registered in its name, but if it is not, the endowment can be held by one or more of the believers on behalf of the community. For example, if one of the believers gives a small piece of land he can continue to hold it in his name, but it will be known that he does so on behalf of the Local Spiritual Assembly and that the land will in time be transferred legally to the Assembly when that is possible. In some countries land is owned by the state or the tribe and only the use of the land can be assigned; in such places the goal can be considered achieved if the Local Spiritual Assembly can obtain the use of a plot of land in its own name. In some countries, even if the land can be purchased, government regulations require that within a specific time a building must be erected on land held by religious institutions. This problem can be met in several ways: it may be possible for the Spiritual Assembly to obtain the use of, or acquire, a plot of land for agricultural purposes, thus avoiding the need to erect a building; or if the most practical course is to erect on the land a Bahá'í institution such as a local Hazíratu'l-Quds, the Assembly could, in its own records, demarcate a portion of the land to be the endowment, distinct from the portion on which the Hazíratu'l-Quds stands.

One of the characteristics of Bahá'í society will be the gathering of the believers each day during the hours between dawn and two hours after sunrise to listen to the reading and chanting of the Holy Word. In many communities at the present time, especially in rural ones, such gatherings would fit naturally into the pattern of the friends' daily life, and where this is the case it would do much to foster the unity of the local community and deepen the friends' knowledge of the Teachings if such gatherings could be organized by the Local Spiritual Assembly on a regular basis. Attendance at these gatherings is not to be obligatory, but we hope that the friends will more and more be drawn to take part in them. This is a goal which can be attained gradually."

-The Universal House of Justice, Naw-Rúz 1974

Materialism and its Effects

"The forces of materialism promote a quite contrary line of thinking: that happiness comes from constant acquisition, that the more one has the better, that worry for the environment is for another day. These seductive messages fuel an increasingly entrenched sense of personal entitlement, which uses the language of justice and rights to disguise self-interest. Indifference to the hardship experienced by others becomes commonplace while entertainment and distracting amusements are voraciously consumed. The enervating influence of materialism seeps into every culture, and all Bahá'ís recognize that, unless they strive to remain conscious of its effects, they may to one degree or another unwittingly adopt its ways of seeing the world. Parents must be acutely aware that, even when very young, children absorb the norms of their surroundings. The junior youth spiritual empowerment programme encourages thoughtful discernment at an age when the call of materialism grows more insistent. With the approach of adulthood comes a responsibility, shared by one's generation, not to allow worldly pursuits to blind one's eyes to injustice and privation. Over time, the qualities and attitudes nurtured by the courses of the training institute, through exposure to the Word of God, help individuals to see past the illusions that, at every

stage of life, the world uses to pull attention away from service and towards the self. And ultimately, the systematic study of the Word of God and the exploration of its implications raises consciousness of the need to manage one's material affairs in keeping with the divine teachings."

- The Universal House of Justice, 1 March 2017

"Today the world is assailed by an array of destructive forces. Materialism, rooted in the West, has now spread to every corner of the planet, breeding, in the name of a strong global economy and human welfare, a culture of consumerism. It skilfully and ingeniously promotes a habit of consumption that seeks to satisfy the basest and most selfish desires, while encouraging the expenditure of wealth so as to prolong and exacerbate social conflict. How vain and foolish a worldview! And meanwhile, a rising tide of fundamentalism, bringing with it an exceedingly narrow understanding of religion and spirituality, continues to gather strength, threatening to engulf humanity in rigid dogmatism. In its most extreme form, it conditions the resolution of the problems of the world upon the occurrence of events derived from illogical and superstitious notions. It professes to uphold virtue yet, in practice, perpetuates oppression and greed. Among the deplorable results of the operation of such forces are a deepening confusion on the part of young people everywhere, a sense of hopelessness in the ranks of those who would drive progress, and the emergence of a myriad social maladies."

- The Universal House of Justice, 2 April 2010

"The questions raised in your letter go to the heart of the issues facing Bahá'ís everywhere at this critical point in world history. We are witnessing the disintegration of the great civilization which has, for over two centuries, dominated world history and shaped the behavior and attitudes of the most influential sectors of modern society. The defining characteristic of this civilization has been a materialistic view of reality, the conviction that both human consciousness and human society are essentially the products of material forces and that it is to these forces that we must look for the resolution of the great problems facing our world.

Clearly, this world view reflects a profound error about the nature of humankind. It has demonstrated conclusively its impotence to solve any significant problem facing the world's people today—political, social, economic, or moral. In the face of so massive a failure, a growing majority of people everywhere are being forced to reexamine fundamental assumptions."

- The Universal House of Justice, 13 May 1996

"Consider, when one looks about at the world and at the condition into which its peoples have fallen and the untold agony of human suffering, what could have caused such a lamentable state of affairs? Is it not a fair assumption that the reigning materialist worldview, with its inordinate emphasis on individual liberty and its discounting of ordering norms and mores, is at least partly to blame?"

- The Universal House of Justice, 1 August 1994

"The time has come when those who preach the dogmas of materialism, whether of the east or the west, whether of capitalism or socialism, must give account of the moral stewardship they have presumed to exercise. Where is the "new world" promised by these ideologies? Where is the international peace to whose ideals they proclaim their devotion? Where are the breakthroughs into new realms of cultural achievement produced by the aggrandizement of this race, of that nation or of a particular class? Why is the vast majority of the world's peoples sinking ever deeper into hunger and wretchedness when wealth on a scale undreamed of by the Pharaohs, the Caesars, or even the imperialist powers of the nineteenth century is at the disposal of the present arbiters of human affairs?"

Most particularly, it is in the glorification of material pursuits, at once the progenitor and common feature of all such ideologies, that we find the roots which nourish the falsehood that human beings are incorrigibly selfish and aggressive. It is here that the ground must be cleared for the building of a new world fit for our descendants.

That materialistic ideals have, in the light of experience, failed to satisfy the needs of mankind calls for an honest acknowledgement that a fresh effort must now be made to find the solutions to the agonizing problems of the planet. The intolerable conditions pervading society bespeak a common failure of all, a circumstance which tends to incite rather than relieve the entrenchment on every side. Clearly, a common remedial effort is urgently required. It is primarily a matter of attitude. Will humanity continue in its waywardness, holding to outworn concepts and unworkable assumptions? Or will its leaders, regardless of ideology, step forth and, with a resolute will, consult together in a united search for appropriate solutions?"

-The Universal House of Justice, October 1985

"Indeed, the chief reason for the evils now rampant in society is a lack of spirituality. The materialistic civilization of our age has so much absorbed the energy and interest of mankind, that people in general no longer feel the necessity of raising themselves above the forces and conditions of their daily material existence. There is not sufficient demand for things that we should call spiritual to differentiate them from the needs and requirements of our physical existence. The universal crisis affecting mankind is, therefore, essentially spiritual in its causes. The spirit of the age, taken on the whole, is irreligious. Man's outlook upon life is too crude and materialistic to enable him to elevate himself into the higher realms of the spirit."

-The Universal House of Justice, 12 June 1984

"We must always remember that in the cesspool of materialism, which is what modern civilization has to a certain extent become, Bahá'ís—that is some of them—are still to a certain extent affected by the society from which they have sprung. In other words, they have recognized the Manifestation of God, but they have not been believers long enough, or perhaps tried hard enough, to become "a new creation."

-The Universal House of Justice, 22 July 1981

"Yet another sacred duty is that of clinging to the cord of moderation in all things, lest they who are to be the essence of detachment and moderation be deluded by the trappings of this nether world or set their hearts on its adornments and waste their lives. If they are wealthy, they should make these bestowals a means of drawing nigh unto God's Threshold, rather than being so attached to them that they forget the admonitions of the Pen of the Most High. The Voice of Truth has said, "Having attained the stage of fulfillment and reached his maturity, man standeth in need of wealth, and such wealth as he acquireth through crafts or professions is commendable and praiseworthy in the estimation of men of wisdom." If wealth and prosperity become the means of service at God's Threshold, it is highly meritorious; otherwise it would be better to avoid them. Turn to the Book of the Covenant, the Hidden Words, and other Tablets, lest the cord of your salvation become a rope of woe which will lead to your own destruction. How numerous are those negligent souls, particularly from among your own compatriots, who have been deprived of the blessings of faith and true understanding. Witness how, no sooner had they attained their newly amassed wealth and status, than they became so bewitched by them as to forget the virtues and true perfections of man's station. They clung to their empty and fruitless lifestyle. They had naught else but their homes, their commercial success, and their ornamental trappings of which to be proud. Behold their ultimate fate. Many a triumphal arch was reduced to a ruin, many an imperial palace was converted into a barn. Many a day of deceit turned into a night of despair. Vast treasures changed hands and, at the end of their lives, they were left only with tears of loss and regret. "... all that perisheth and changeth is not, and

hath never been, worthy of attention, except to a recognized measure.” Therefore the people of Bahá must not fall prey to the corruption of the ruthless, but rather cling to contentment and moderation. They must make their homes havens for the believers, folds for their gatherings and centers for the promulgation of His Cause and the diffusion of His love, so that people of all strata, whether high or low, may feel at home and be able to consort in an atmosphere of love and fellowship.”

-The Universal House of Justice, 10 February 1980

“Rather is suggested a clearer apprehension of the purpose of God for man, and particularly of His immediate purpose as revealed and directed by Bahá’u’lláh, a purpose as far removed from current concepts of human well-being and happiness as is possible. We should constantly be on our guard lest the glitter and tinsel of an affluent society should lead us to think that such superficial adjustments to the modern world as are envisioned by humanitarian movements or are publicly proclaimed as the policy of enlightened statesmanship—such as an extension to all members of the human race of the benefits of a high standard of living, of education, medical care, technical knowledge—will of themselves fulfill the glorious mission of Bahá’u’lláh.”

-The Universal House of Justice, Ridván 1967

Moderation

“Yet another sacred duty is that of clinging to the cord of moderation in all things, lest they who are to be the essence of detachment and moderation be deluded by the trappings of this nether world or set their hearts on its adornments and waste their lives. If they are wealthy, they should make these bestowals a means of drawing nigh unto God’s Threshold, rather than being so attached to them that they forget the admonitions of the Pen of the Most High. The Voice of Truth has said, “Having attained the stage of fulfillment and reached his maturity, man standeth in need of wealth, and such wealth as he acquireth through crafts or professions is commendable and praiseworthy in the estimation of men of wisdom.” If wealth and prosperity become the means of service at God’s Threshold, it is highly meritorious; otherwise it would be better to avoid them. Turn to the Book of the Covenant, the Hidden Words, and other Tablets, lest the cord of your salvation become a rope of woe which will lead to your own destruction. How numerous are those negligent souls, particularly from among your own compatriots, who have been deprived of the blessings of faith and true understanding. Witness how, no sooner had they attained their newly amassed wealth and status, than they became so bewitched by them as to forget the virtues and true perfections of man’s station. They clung to their empty and fruitless lifestyle. They had naught else but their homes, their commercial success, and their ornamental trappings of which to be proud. Behold their ultimate fate. Many a triumphal arch was reduced to a ruin, many an imperial palace was converted into a barn. Many a day of deceit turned into a night of despair. Vast treasures changed hands and, at the end of their lives, they were left only with tears of loss and regret. “... all that perisheth and changeth is not, and hath never been, worthy of attention, except to a recognized measure.” Therefore the people of Bahá must not fall prey to the corruption of the ruthless, but rather cling to contentment and moderation. They must make their homes havens for the believers, folds for their gatherings and centers for the promulgation of His Cause and the diffusion of His love, so that people of all strata, whether high or low, may feel at home and be able to consort in an atmosphere of love and fellowship.”

-The Universal House of Justice, 10 February 1980

Morality and Economics

“Have not the evidences of selfishness, of suspicion, of fear and of fraud, which the Guardian perceived with such clarity, become so widespread as to be readily apparent to even the casual observer? Does not the threat of terrorism of which he spoke loom so large on the international scene as to preoccupy the minds of young and old alike in every corner of the globe? Have not the unquenchable thirst for, and the feverish pursuit after, earthly vanities, riches and pleasures so consolidated their power and influence as to assume authority over such human values as happiness, fidelity and love? Have not the weakening of family solidarity and the irresponsible attitude towards marriage reached such proportions as to endanger the existence of this fundamental unit of society?”

-The Universal House of Justice, Riḍván 2006

“The Guardian lays the greatest share of the blame for humanity’s moral downfall on the decline of religion as a social force. “Should the lamp of religion be obscured,” he draws our attention to the words of Bahá’u’lláh, “chaos and confusion will ensue, and the lights of fairness, of justice, of tranquility and peace cease to shine.” The decades that followed the writing of his letters have seen not only a continued deterioration in the ability of religion to exercise moral influence, but also the betrayal of the masses through the unseemly conduct of religious institutions. Attempts at reinvigorating it have only given rise to a fanaticism that, if left unchecked, could destroy the foundation of civilized relationships among people.”

-The Universal House of Justice, Riḍván 2006

“You live in a society caught in the tightening grip of moral decadence on a vast scale. But this should come as no surprise to you. It is the unavoidable consequence of a pervasive godlessness; its symptoms and repercussions were described in painful detail by Shoghi Effendi in several of his letters to the Western friends. Inevitably, the American Bahá’í community is affected by this condition to some extent. The corrosive influence of an overbearing and rampant secularization is infecting the style of administration of the Faith in your community and threatening to undermine its efficacy.

The aggressiveness and competitiveness which animate a dominantly capitalist culture; the partisanship inherent in a fervidly democratic system; the suspicion of public-policy institutions and the skepticism towards established authority ingrained in the political attitude of the people and which trace their origins to the genesis of American society; the cynical disregard of the moderating principles and rules of civilized human relationships resulting from an excessive liberalism and its immoral consequences—such unsavory characteristics inform entrenched habits of American life, which imperceptibly at first but more obviously in the long run have come to exert too great a sway over the manner of management of the Bahá’í community and over the behavior of portions of its rank and file in relation to the Cause. This unwholesome influence must be arrested by immediate, deliberate effort—an effort which must surely begin within your Assembly itself. Further accommodation of it will severely impede the progress of your community, despite the abundant possibilities of an imminent breakthrough. It was due to this concern in particular that we anxiously welcomed your request for a meeting with us.”

-The Universal House of Justice, 19 May 1994

“Collateral with these changes has been the breakdown of institutions, religious and political, which traditionally functioned as the guideposts for the stability of society. Even the most resilient of these seem to be losing their credibility as they have become preoccupied with their own internal disorder. This calls attention to the emptiness of the moral landscape and the feeling of futility deranging personal life. Thoughtful commentators write apprehensively about the fall of culture and the consequent disappearance

of values, the loss of the fullness of the inner life, a technological civilization facing an increasingly serious crisis. They write, moreover, of the human species as being at the end with its wisdom and being unable to control itself, of the need for divine wisdom and foresight, and of the human psyche as being far removed from recognizing this need.”

-The Universal House of Justice, 26 November 1992

“The inordinate disparity between rich and poor, a source of acute suffering, keeps the world in a state of instability, virtually on the brink of war. Few societies have dealt effectively with this situation. The solution calls for the combined application of spiritual, moral and practical approaches. A fresh look at the problem is required, entailing consultation with experts from a wide spectrum of disciplines, devoid of economic and ideological polemics, and involving the people directly affected in the decisions that must urgently be made. It is an issue that is bound up not only with the necessity for eliminating extremes of wealth and poverty but also with those spiritual verities the understanding of which can produce a new universal attitude. Fostering such an attitude is itself a major part of the solution.”

-The Universal House of Justice, October 1985

“There are spiritual principles, or what some call human values, by which solutions can be found for every social problem. Any well-intentioned group can in a general sense devise practical solutions to its problems, but good intentions and practical knowledge are usually not enough. The essential merit of spiritual principle is that it not only presents a perspective which harmonizes with that which is immanent in human nature, it also induces an attitude, a dynamic, a will, an aspiration, which facilitate the discovery and implementation of practical measures. Leaders of governments and all in authority would be well served in their efforts to solve problems if they would first seek to identify the principles involved and then be guided by them.”

-The Universal House of Justice, October 1985

“The decline of religious and moral restraints has unleashed a fury of chaos and confusion that already bears the signs of universal anarchy. Engulfed in this maelstrom, the Bahá’í world community, pursuing with indefeasible unity and spiritual force its redemptive mission, inevitably suffers the disruption of economic, social and civil life which afflicts its fellowmen throughout the planet.”

-The Universal House of Justice, Naw-Rúz 1979

Natural Resources

“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, ...”

-The Universal House of Justice, 2 March 2013

“The teaching work is of primary importance for this reason: the most urgent need of human beings is to recognize the Manifestation of God and thereby to learn how to collaborate constructively. All over the world tremendous efforts are being made to improve the lot of mankind—or of parts of mankind, but most of these efforts are frustrated by the conflicts of aims, by corruption of the morals of those involved, by mistrust, or by fear. There is no lack of material resources in the world if they are properly used. The problem is the education of human beings in the ultimate and most important purpose of life and in how

to weld the differences of opinion and outlook into a united constructive effort.”

-The Universal House of Justice, 3 January 1982

Non profit Organizations

“... As a national community grows, the activities undertaken by its members also increase in number and diversity. Some of these activities will be initiated and administered by the Bahá’í institutions. Others will fall in the realm of private initiative. When an initiative is in the form of a private business venture undertaken by an individual or group, the institutions of the Faith have little reason to interfere with their daily affairs. Only if difficulties arise among the friends involved in such an enterprise, if their activities could damage the good name of the Faith, or if they misrepresent their relationship to the Faith, would a Local or National Spiritual Assembly intervene. Bahá’í institutions, of course, applaud any effort by these private ventures to apply the Teachings to their operations and to use their position in society to further the interests of the Faith. Spiritual Assemblies would do well to offer them guidance, as requested or as circumstances require, and to help them develop their potential for the advancement of the Cause.

The private initiatives of believers need not, however, be limited to business ventures. The laws of most societies allow for the establishment of nonprofit organizations which, while private, are subject to special regulations and enjoy certain privileges. Customarily a board of trustees is responsible for all the affairs of such an organization and must ensure that its income is spent for the purpose stipulated in its by-laws. This board also oversees the functioning of the projects of the organization and the work of those who are in charge of them. An increasing number of believers around the world are taking advantage of this possibility and creating organizations dedicated to the application of Bahá’u’lláh’s Teachings to the analysis and resolution of important social and economic issues. The House of Justice looks with keen interest on this growing phenomenon in the Bahá’í world. It only cautions the friends that in establishing such organizations they should exercise care not to become a burden on the institutions or unduly divert the contributions of the believers from the essential and primary tasks of supporting the Funds of the Faith and the activities of the institutions. It expects them to conduct their affairs according to Bahá’í moral and ethical principles.

A question that often arises in relation to private organizations dedicated to social and economic development is whether they are “Bahá’í” or not. Such a question cannot be answered by a simple “yes” or “no.” Clearly, the fact that they have their own management structures puts them in a different category from projects and organizations administered by Bahá’í institutions. In that sense they are not “Bahá’í” enterprises. In another sense, to the extent that they are owned and directed by Bahá’ís and strive to apply the Teachings and serve the purposes of the Cause, they may indeed be regarded as “Bahá’í.” In referring to these organizations, we must avoid giving the impression that participating in their projects does not constitute legitimate service to the Cause. Otherwise sincere and devoted believers will be discouraged from engaging in activities that are “Bahá’í” in nature...”

-The Universal House of Justice, 2 September 1993

Oneness of Mankind as the Solution

“World order can be founded only on an unshakable consciousness of the oneness of mankind, a spiritual truth which all the human sciences confirm. Anthropology, physiology, psychology, recognize only one human species, albeit infinitely varied in the secondary aspects of life. Recognition of this truth requires abandonment of prejudice—prejudice of every kind—race, class, color, creed, nation, sex, degree of material civilization, everything which enables people to consider themselves superior to others.

Acceptance of the oneness of mankind is the first fundamental prerequisite for reorganization and administration of the world as one country, the home of humankind. Universal acceptance of this spiritual principle is essential to any successful attempt to establish world peace. It should therefore be universally proclaimed, taught in schools, and constantly asserted in every nation as preparation for the organic change in the structure of society which it implies.”

-The Universal House of Justice, October 1985

Peace and Unity

“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. Two main challenges face us: one is to mount a campaign of teaching in which the broad membership of our community is enthusiastically, systematically and personally engaged, and in which the activation of an extensive training program will ensure the development of a mass of human resources; the other is to complete the construction projects on Mount Carmel towards which every sacrifice must be made to provide a liberal outpouring of material means. These twin foci, if resolutely pursued, will foster conditions towards the release of pent-up forces that will forge a change in the direction of human affairs throughout the planet.

However short the path to peace, it will be tortuous; however promising the anticipated event that will set its course, it must mature through a long period of evolution, with its attendant tests, setbacks and conflicts, towards the moment when it will have emerged, under the direct influences of God’s Faith, as the Most Great Peace. In the meantime, people everywhere will often face despair and bewilderment before arriving at an appreciation of the transition in progress. We who have been enlightened by the new Revelation have the sacred Word to assure us, a Divine Plan to guide us, a history of valor to encourage us. Let us therefore take heart not only from the Word we treasure, but also from the deeds of heroism and sacrifice which even today shine resplendent in the land in which our Cause was born.”

-The Universal House of Justice, Ridván 1996

“The power released by Bahá’u’lláh works at a quickening pace, speeding the processes of change which must usher in the new order He proclaimed. The declining state of society demonstrates it, the global yearning for new solutions to human problems confirms it. Much is at stake: the fortunes of humankind hang precariously in the balance. The Bahá’í community bears grave responsibilities toward the near and far future as movement towards the Lesser Peace accelerates. Now is the time for the friends to seize new opportunities to extend the range and influence of the Faith, to reach a new level of action in expanding the community and fortifying its foundations. It is indeed time for audacious action undeterred by a fear of mistakes, fired by the urgency of ministering to the pressing needs of humanity.”

-The Universal House of Justice, 19 May 1994

“Disunity is the crux of the problems which so severely afflict the planet. It permeates attitudes in all departments of life. It is at the heart of all major conflicts between nations and peoples. More serious still, disunity is common in the relations between religions and within religions, vitiating the very spiritual and moral influence which it is their primary purpose to exert.”

-The Universal House of Justice, 26 November 1992

“The Great Peace towards which people of goodwill throughout the centuries have inclined their hearts, of which seers and poets for countless generations have expressed their vision, and for which from age to age the sacred scriptures of mankind have constantly held the promise, is now at long last within the reach of the nations. For the first time in history it is possible for everyone to view the entire planet, with all its myriad diversified peoples, in one perspective. World peace is not only possible but inevitable. It is the

next stage in the evolution of this planet—in the words of one great thinker, “the planetization of mankind.”

Whether peace is to be reached only after unimaginable horrors precipitated by humanity’s stubborn clinging to old patterns of behavior, or is to be embraced now by an act of consultative will, is the choice before all who inhabit the earth. At this critical juncture when the intractable problems confronting nations have been fused into one common concern for the whole world, failure to stem the tide of conflict and disorder would be unconscionably irresponsible.”

-The Universal House of Justice, October 1985

“As the need for peace becomes more urgent, this fundamental contradiction, which hinders its realization, demands a reassessment of the assumptions upon which the commonly held view of mankind’s historical predicament is based. Dispassionately examined, the evidence reveals that such conduct, far from expressing man’s true self, represents a distortion of the human spirit. Satisfaction on this point will enable all people to set in motion constructive social forces which, because they are consistent with human nature, will encourage harmony and cooperation instead of war and conflict.

To choose such a course is not to deny humanity’s past but to understand it. The Bahá’í Faith regards the current world confusion and calamitous condition in human affairs as a natural phase in an organic process leading ultimately and irresistibly to the unification of the human race in a single social order whose boundaries are those of the planet. The human race, as a distinct, organic unit, has passed through evolutionary stages analogous to the stages of infancy and childhood in the lives of its individual members, and is now in the culminating period of its turbulent adolescence approaching its long-awaited coming of age.

A candid acknowledgement that prejudice, war and exploitation have been the expression of immature stages in a vast historical process and that the human race is today experiencing the unavoidable tumult which marks its collective coming of age is not a reason for despair but a prerequisite to undertaking the stupendous enterprise of building a peaceful world. That such an enterprise is possible, that the necessary constructive forces do exist, that unifying social structures can be erected, is the theme we urge you to examine.”

-The Universal House of Justice, October 1985

“The increasing attention being focused on some of the most deep-rooted problems of the planet is yet another hopeful sign. Despite the obvious shortcomings of the United Nations, the more than two score declarations and conventions adopted by that organization, even where governments have not been enthusiastic in their commitment, have given ordinary people a sense of a new lease on life. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, and the similar measures concerned with eliminating all forms of discrimination based on race, sex or religious belief; upholding the rights of the child; protecting all persons against being subjected to torture; eradicating hunger and malnutrition; using scientific and technological progress in the interest of peace and the benefit of mankind—all such measures, if courageously enforced and expanded, will advance the day when the specter of war will have lost its power to dominate international relations. There is no need to stress the significance of the issues addressed by these declarations and conventions. However, a few such issues, because of their immediate relevance to establishing world peace, deserve additional comment.”

-The Universal House of Justice, October 1985

“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, October 1985

“The courage, the resolution, the pure motive, the selfless love of one people for another—all the spiritual and moral qualities required for effecting this momentous step towards peace are focused on the will to act. And it is towards arousing the necessary volition that earnest consideration must be given to the reality of man, namely, his thought. To understand the relevance of this potent reality is also to appreciate the social necessity of actualizing its unique value through candid, dispassionate and cordial consultation, and of acting upon the results of this process. ...

The very attempt to achieve peace through the consultative action he proposed can release such a salutary spirit among the peoples of the earth that no power could resist the final, triumphal outcome.”

-The Universal House of Justice, October 1985

“The holding of this mighty convocation is long overdue.

With all the ardor of our hearts, we appeal to the leaders of all nations to seize this opportune moment and take irreversible steps to convoke this world meeting. All the forces of history impel the human race towards this act which will mark for all time the dawn of its long-awaited maturity.

Will not the United Nations, with the full support of its membership, rise to the high purposes of such a crowning event?

Let men and women, youth and children everywhere recognize the eternal merit of this imperative action for all peoples and lift up their voices in willing assent. Indeed, let it be this generation that inaugurates this glorious stage in the evolution of social life on the planet.”

-The Universal House of Justice, October 1985

“The source of the optimism we feel is a vision transcending the cessation of war and the creation of agencies of international cooperation. Permanent peace among nations is an essential stage, but not, Bahá'u'lláh asserts, the ultimate goal of the social development of humanity. Beyond the initial armistice forced upon the world by the fear of nuclear holocaust, beyond the political peace reluctantly entered into by suspicious rival nations, beyond pragmatic arrangements for security and coexistence, beyond even the many experiments in cooperation which these steps will make possible lies the crowning goal: the unification of all the peoples of the world in one universal family.

Disunity is a danger that the nations and peoples of the earth can no longer endure; the consequences are too terrible to contemplate, too obvious to require any demonstration. “The well-being of mankind,” Bahá'u'lláh wrote more than a century ago, “its peace and security, are unattainable unless and until its unity is firmly established.” In observing that “mankind is groaning, is dying to be led to unity, and to terminate its age-long martyrdom,” Shoghi Effendi further commented that: “Unification of the whole of mankind is the hallmark of the stage which human society is now approaching. Unity of family, of tribe, of city-state, and nation have been successively attempted and fully established. World unity is the goal towards which a harassed humanity is striving. Nation-building has come to an end. The anarchy inherent

in state sovereignty is moving towards a climax. A world, growing to maturity, must abandon this fetish, recognize the oneness and wholeness of human relationships, and establish once for all the machinery that can best incarnate this fundamental principle of its life.”

All contemporary forces of change validate this view. The proofs can be discerned in the many examples already cited of the favorable signs towards world peace in current international movements and developments. The army of men and women, drawn from virtually every culture, race and nation on earth, who serve the multifarious agencies of the United Nations, represent a planetary “civil service” whose impressive accomplishments are indicative of the degree of cooperation that can be attained even under discouraging conditions. An urge towards unity, like a spiritual springtime, struggles to express itself through countless international congresses that bring together people from a vast array of disciplines. It motivates appeals for international projects involving children and youth. Indeed, it is the real source of the remarkable movement towards ecumenism by which members of historically antagonistic religions and sects seem irresistibly drawn towards one another. Together with the opposing tendency to warfare and self-aggrandizement against which it ceaselessly struggles, the drive towards world unity is one of the dominant, pervasive features of life on the planet during the closing years of the twentieth century.

The experience of the Bahá’í community may be seen as an example of this enlarging unity. It is a community of some three to four million people drawn from many nations, cultures, classes and creeds, engaged in a wide range of activities serving the spiritual, social and economic needs of the peoples of many lands. It is a single social organism, representative of the diversity of the human family, conducting its affairs through a system of commonly accepted consultative principles, and cherishing equally all the great outpourings of divine guidance in human history. Its existence is yet another convincing proof of the practicality of its Founder’s vision of a united world, another evidence that humanity can live as one global society, equal to whatever challenges its coming of age may entail. If the Bahá’í experience can contribute in whatever measure to reinforcing hope in the unity of the human race, we are happy to offer it as a model for study.

In contemplating the supreme importance of the task now challenging the entire world, we bow our heads in humility before the awesome majesty of the divine Creator, who out of His infinite love has created all humanity from the same stock; exalted the gemlike reality of man; honored it with intellect and wisdom, nobility and immortality; and conferred upon man the “unique distinction and capacity to know Him and to love Him,” a capacity that “must needs be regarded as the generating impulse and the primary purpose underlying the whole of creation.”

We hold firmly the conviction that all human beings have been created “to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization”; that “to act like the beasts of the field is unworthy of man”; that the virtues that befit human dignity are trustworthiness, forbearance, mercy, compassion and loving-kindness towards all peoples. We reaffirm the belief that the “potentialities inherent in the station of man, the full measure of his destiny on earth, the innate excellence of his reality, must all be manifested in this promised Day of God.” These are the motivations for our unshakable faith that unity and peace are the attainable goal towards which humanity is striving.

At this writing, the expectant voices of Bahá’ís can be heard despite the persecution they still endure in the land in which their Faith was born. By their example of steadfast hope, they bear witness to the belief that the imminent realization of this age-old dream of peace is now, by virtue of the transforming effects of Bahá’u’lláh’s revelation, invested with the force of divine authority. Thus we convey to you not only a vision in words: we summon the power of deeds of faith and sacrifice; we convey the anxious plea of our

coreligionists everywhere for peace and unity. We join with all who are the victims of aggression, all who yearn for an end to conflict and contention, all whose devotion to principles of peace and world order promotes the ennobling purposes for which humanity was called into being by an all-loving Creator.

In the earnestness of our desire to impart to you the fervor of our hope and the depth of our confidence, we cite the emphatic promise of Bahá'u'lláh: "These fruitless strifes, these ruinous wars shall pass away, and the 'Most Great Peace' shall come."

-The Universal House of Justice, October 1985

Purpose of Life

"Bahá'ís believe that God has revealed the purpose of life, has shown us how to attain it, has provided the ways in which we can work together and, beyond that, has given mankind the assurance both of continuing divine guidance and of divine assistance. As people learn and follow these teachings their efforts will produce durable results. In the absence of these teachings, a lifetime of effort only too often ends in disillusionment and the collapse of all that has been built."

-The Universal House of Justice, 3 January 1982

Science and Religion

"...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."

-The Universal House of Justice, 2 March 2013

Science and Technology

"The scientific and technological advances occurring in this unusually blessed century portend a great surge forward in the social evolution of the planet, and indicate the means by which the practical problems of humanity may be solved. They provide, indeed, the very means for the administration of the complex life of a united world. Yet barriers persist. Doubts, misconceptions, prejudices, suspicions and narrow self-interest beset nations and peoples in their relations one to another."

-The Universal House of Justice, October 1985

Self-interest and Competition

“The stresses emerging out of the long-term process of transition from a divided world to a united one are being felt within international relations as much as in the deepening fractures that affect societies large and small. With prevailing modes of thought found to be badly wanting, the world is in desperate need of a shared ethic, a sure framework for addressing the crises that gather like storm clouds. The vision of Bahá’u’lláh challenges many of the assumptions that are allowed to shape contemporary discourse—for instance, that self-interest, far from needing to be restrained, drives prosperity, and that progress depends upon its expression through relentless competition.”

- The Universal House of Justice, 1 March 2017

Social Actions and justice

“Social justice will be attained only when every member of society enjoys a relative degree of material prosperity and gives due regard to the acquisition of spiritual qualities. The solution, then, to prevailing economic difficulties is to be sought as much in the application of spiritual principles as in the implementation of scientific methods and approaches. The family unit offers an ideal setting within which can be shaped those moral attributes that contribute to an appropriate view of material wealth and its utilization.

Referring to the exigencies of the material world, Bahá’u’lláh has affirmed that to every end has been assigned a means for its accomplishment. A natural conclusion to be drawn from reflection on this fundamental principle is that vigilance must be exercised in distinguishing “means” from “ends”; otherwise, what is intended as a mere instrument could easily become the very goal of an individual’s life. The acquisition of wealth is a case in point; it is acceptable and praiseworthy to the extent that it serves as a means for achieving higher ends—for meeting one’s basic necessities, for fostering the progress of one’s family, for promoting the welfare of society, and for contributing to the establishment of a world civilization. But to make the accumulation of wealth the central purpose of one’s life is unworthy of any human being.

An idea closely related to the above, and well in accord with the spirit of the Bahá’í teachings, is that the end does not serve to justify the means. However constructive and noble the goal, however significant to one’s life or to the welfare of one’s family, it must not be attained through improper means. Regrettably, a number of today’s leaders—political, social, and religious—as well as some of the directors of financial markets, executives of multinational corporations, chiefs of commerce and industry, and ordinary people who succumb to social pressure and ignore the call of their conscience, act against this principle; they justify any means in order to achieve their goals.”

- The Universal House of Justice, 2 April 2010

“Many would readily acknowledge that the acquisition of wealth should be governed by the requirements of justice, which, as a principle, can be expressed to varying degrees, on different levels. An employer and employee, for example, are bound by the laws and conventions that regulate their work, and each is expected to carry out his or her responsibilities with honesty and integrity. At another level, however, if the deeper implications of justice are to be realized, the other two preconditions to the legitimate acquisition of wealth mentioned above must be taken into account, and prevailing norms reassessed in their light. Here, the relationship between minimum wage and the cost of living merits careful evaluation—this, especially in light of the contribution workers make to a company’s success and their entitlement, as noted by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, to a fair share of the profits. The wide margin, often unjustifiable, between the production costs of certain goods and the price at which they are sold likewise requires

attention, as does the question of the generation of wealth through measures that “enrich the generality of the people”. What such reflection and inquiry will no doubt make abundantly clear is that certain approaches to obtaining wealth—so many of which involve the exploitation of others, the monopolization and manipulation of markets, and the production of goods that promote violence and immorality—are unworthy and unacceptable.”

-The Universal House of Justice, 2 April 2010

“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.”

-The Universal House of Justice, 21 December 2006

“...Bahá’u’lláh’s Tablets to the kings and rulers of the world, has come as a propitious reminder of the dire consequences of ignoring His warnings against injustice, tyranny and corruption. The violent shocks being inflicted on the consciousness of people everywhere emphasize the urgency of the remedy He has prescribed. We, the scattered bands of His loyal servants, have thus come again to a time of irresistible opportunities—opportunities to teach His Cause, to build up His wondrous System, to provide sacrificially the urgently needed material means on which the progress and execution of spiritual activities inevitably depend.”

-The Universal House of Justice, Ridván 2002

“A time of challenge for the stalwart upholders of the Cause of God has now come upon us at the very moment when the world is grappling with tremendous problems, moral, social, economic and ecological. The Bahá’í community has grown in size and influence to the point where it is put to the test on all sides and at all levels. The opportunities are immense but we now face the question of whether to push forward with all speed, or to hold back because the resources available to us are inadequate for the purpose.”

-The Universal House of Justice, 18 November 1991

“The House of Justice feels that the task before the Bahá’ís is to prepare the ground for the transition from the present system of national sovereignty to a system of world government. This requires a number of related activities which have been indicated in the goals of previous and present Plans of the community based on ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Tablets of the Divine Plan. The activities which will indirectly prepare the world to make the final stride include the following.”

-The Universal House of Justice, Department of the Secretariat, 10 March 1987

“With the entrenchment of this view, a paralyzing contradiction has developed in human affairs. On the one hand, people of all nations proclaim not only their readiness but their longing for peace and harmony, for an end to the harrowing apprehensions tormenting their daily lives. On the other, uncritical assent is given to the proposition that human beings are incorrigibly selfish and aggressive and thus incapable of erecting a social system at once progressive and peaceful, dynamic and harmonious, a system giving free play to individual creativity and initiative but based on cooperation and reciprocity.”

-The Universal House of Justice, October 1985

“Is it not an evidence of the justice of God that each of us, whether materially comfortable or struggling for physical survival, is assessed in terms of the efforts we have made to seize whatever opportunities existed in our lives, to develop and use our allotted talent, be it large or small? “Each shall receive his share from thy Lord,” is Bahá’u’lláh’s assurance. Thus, if we bestir ourselves, we will all have access to

the rewards of this life and the next.”

-The Universal House of Justice, 14 March 1985

“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 Universal House of Justice, 8 February 1970

Social and Economic Development

“Eventually the strength of the institute process in the village, and the enhanced capabilities it has fostered in individuals, may enable the friends to take advantage of methods and programmes of proven effectiveness, which have been developed by one or another Bahá’í-inspired organization and which have been introduced into the cluster at the suggestion of, and with support from, our Office of Social and Economic Development.”

-The Universal House of Justice, 28 December 2010

“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. By improving its coordinating capacity, the Office of Social and Economic Development will assist in building, as resources and opportunity permit, on the progress already made with hundreds of development projects around the world. In the arena of external affairs, efforts will be aimed at influencing the processes towards world peace, particularly through the community’s involvement in the promotion of human rights, the status of women, global prosperity, and moral development. In the pursuit of these themes, the Bahá’í International Community’s United Nations Office will seek ways to reinforce the ties between the Bahá’ís and the United Nations. Similarly, the Office of Public Information will assist the Bahá’í institutions to utilize these themes towards greater proclamation of the Faith. Defense of the rights of the Bahá’ís in Iran and increased efforts to emancipate the Faith in that country and other countries where it is proscribed will constitute a vital part of our dealings with governments and nongovernmental organizations. In all such respects the Bahá’í friends and institutions are urged to be alert to the importance of activities in external affairs and to give renewed attention to them.”

-The Universal House of Justice, Ridván 1996

“No occasion has more sharply conveyed this melancholy outlook than the recent World Summit for Social Development, the latest in a series of international gatherings of world leaders called by the United Nations. But however little may be the immediate influence of such events on the policies of governments, however much the vast majority of the world’s population may disregard or be unaware of them, their successive occurrence indicates to any Bahá’í observer a gradual movement towards the ultimate fulfillment of the will of Bahá’u’lláh that the rulers of nations meet to consult and decide on the outstanding issues confronting an increasingly global society.”

-The Universal House of Justice, Ridván 1995

“... Bahá’í projects of social and economic development have greatly multiplied and brought much credit to the community in the examples of the power of group initiative and voluntary consultative action that have been set in numerous places. Activities in this respect involved more than one thousand projects in the areas of education, agriculture, health, literacy, the environment and improvement of the status of women. In a number of instances the projects benefited from collaboration with or assistance from governments and international nongovernmental organizations, as, for example, the projects for the improvement of the status of women undertaken by five National Spiritual Assemblies with the financial assistance of the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), and those projects in other fields receiving assistance from the Canadian, Indian, German and Norwegian governments. Some projects have been so distinguished in their achievements as to be given public notice through the citations and awards of governments and international nongovernmental agencies.”

-The Universal House of Justice, Ridván 1992

“The application and development of the social aspects of the Teachings is dependent on the stage of growth of the Bahá’í community in each area, and on worldwide priorities. We are living in an age of transition, and as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explained, we must, in order to succeed in our aims, sacrifice the important for the most important. The House of Justice, for example, had to turn down the request of certain believers to establish Bahá’í schools in a Western country which already had a functioning state educational system; those Bahá’í funds which are available for educational projects must be spent on the establishment and running of schools in areas where there are large Bahá’í communities of poor people, with no adequate system of education available to them. In its answer, the House of Justice pointed out that if these friends, on their own initiative, wished to establish their own school, run on Bahá’í lines, and financially self-supporting, they were entirely free to do so. This highlights an aspect of the matter which is often overlooked. The social services of Bahá’ís are not restricted to what they do as a community. Every Bahá’í has a duty to work and earn his living, and in choosing a career a Bahá’í should consider not only its earning capacity but also the benefit of the work to his fellowmen. All over the world Bahá’ís are rendering outstanding services in this way.

When a Bahá’í community is very small, there is little that it can do to implement the social teachings of the Faith (beyond their impact on the behavior of individual believers), because such a community with the resources in funds and manpower at its disposal is but a drop in the ocean in comparison with the many large agencies, governmental and private, which are engaged in social improvement. When the Bahá’í community grows sufficiently large, however, its activities can and must proliferate and diversify. This development is already taking place in many parts of the world. In India, for example, the New Era School in Panchgani, which has been developing remarkably for a number of years, is closely associated with a rural development project in the villages close by that is having dramatically favorable results in the life of the villagers. In the province of Madhya Pradesh, where there are hundreds of thousands of Bahá’ís, the Rabbani School in Gwalior is educating children from the villages of the area in the Teachings of the Faith, in academic subjects and in agriculture, so that when they return to their home villages, these pupils not only promote the Faith but will influence their growth and development in every way. In Ecuador, as you no doubt know, the size of the Bahá’í community, scattered over inaccessible terrain in the high Andes, made it both necessary and possible some years ago to establish a Bahá’í radio station. “Radio Bahá’í,” as it is known, broadcasts not only about the Faith, but has programs concerning health, agriculture, literacy and so on. It has now become so well established and highly regarded that it has been able to apply for and receive a Canadian Government grant through C.I.D.A to finance the development of certain social service activities. Thus it can be seen that once the Bahá’í community

attains a certain stature it is able to work in fruitful collaboration with non-Bahá'í agencies in its social activities.

A further aspect of this kind of work is the collaboration between the Bahá'í International Community and the United Nations. Having consultative status with both ECOSOC and UNICEF, and long association with the Department of Public Information, the Bahá'í International Community is able to take part in conferences and consultations on many aspects of human development, both from the point of view of the Bahá'í Teachings and with the background of its extensive experience in meeting the problems of developing countries, such as illiteracy, the status of women, tribalism, racial prejudice, and so on."

-The Universal House of Justice, 3 January 1982

"One could say, however, that the Bahá'í communities could assist in social development from a very early stage in their development by supporting the activities of other groups who are, at this point, more numerous and powerful. To some extent this is true, provided that such involvement does not divert the efforts of the friends from the more fundamentally important teaching work or involve them in the disputes of non-Bahá'í rival groups."

-The Universal House of Justice, 3 January 1982

Sufferings in the World

"The world is clearly beset by ills and is groaning under the burden of appalling suffering. The trials of the innocent are indeed heartrending and constitute a mystery that the mind of man cannot fathom. Even the Prophets of God Themselves have borne Their share of grievous afflictions in every age. Yet in spite of the evidence of all this suffering, God's Manifestations, Whose lives and wisdom show Them to have been far above human beings in understanding, unitedly bear testimony to the justice, love and mercy of God.

To understand the condition of the world it is necessary to step back, so to speak, to gain a clearer view of the panorama of God's great redemptive Major Plan, which is shaping the destiny of mankind according to the operation of the divine Will. It should not be surmised that the calamitous events transpiring in all corners of the globe are random and lack purpose, though individually they may be difficult to comprehend. According to the words of our beloved Guardian: "The invisible hand is at work and the convulsions taking place on earth are a prelude to the proclamation of the Cause of God." We can confidently anticipate therefore, the arrival of the "new life-giving spring" once the destructive icy blasts of winter's tempests have run their course.

As Bahá'ís, we know that the "sovereign remedy" for each and every one of these ills lies in turning and submitting to the "skilled," the "all-powerful" and "inspired Physician." Bahá'u'lláh has assured us in His writings that God has not forsaken us. He is the All-Seeing and All-Knowing, the "prayer-hearing, prayer-answering God" to those who turn to Him in supplication, and He intervenes actively in human history by sending His Manifestations, Sources of knowledge and spiritual truth to "liberate the children of men from the darkness of ignorance" and to "ensure the peace and tranquillity of mankind." In this Age, God has determined to establish His everlasting Kingdom among men, and so, to this end, He sent us the spirit and message of the New Day through two successive Manifestations, Who alas, were rejected by the generality of people.

When we contemplate the fate of mankind, it is important to reflect on the very complex arena in which man plays out the drama of his existence. There are a number of elements involved. For example, man is a spiritual being located within the material creation; hence he is subjected to opposing forces, and has to live in accordance with values which refer to two worlds, the material world with all its imperfections and the spiritual world with its perfections. Tension derives from the fact that “In man there are two natures; his spiritual or higher nature and his material or lower nature. In one he approaches God, in the other he lives for the world alone.” Man’s actions then have both a material and spiritual consequence. While the material effect of his actions is usually clearly perceptible, their spiritual effect can only be determined by reference to spiritual principles revealed by the Manifestation of God. Suffering and trials, sent by God to test and perfect His creatures, are another integral part of life. They contain the potential for man’s progress or retrogression, depending on the individual’s response.”

-The Universal House of Justice, 14 March 1985

Wealth and Poverty

“To view the worth of an individual chiefly in terms of how much one can accumulate and how many goods one can consume relative to others is wholly alien to Bahá’í thought. But neither are the teachings in sympathy with sweeping dismissals of wealth as inherently distasteful or immoral, and asceticism is prohibited. Wealth must serve humanity. Its use must accord with spiritual principles; systems must be created in their light.”

- The Universal House of Justice, 1 March 2017

“...Beloved Friends: The extremes of wealth and poverty in the world are becoming ever more untenable. As inequity persists, so the established order is seen to be unsure of itself, and its values are being questioned. Whatever the tribulations that a conflicted world must confront in the future, we pray that the Almighty will help His loved ones to overcome every obstacle in their path and assist them to serve humanity. The larger the presence of a Bahá’í community in a population, the greater its responsibility to find ways of addressing the root causes of the poverty in its surroundings. Although the friends are at the early stages of learning about such work and of contributing to the related discourses, the community-building process of the Five Year Plan is creating everywhere the ideal environment in which to accrue knowledge and experience, gradually but consistently, about the higher purpose of economic activity. Against the background of the age-long work of erecting a divine civilization, may this exploration become a more pronounced feature of community life, institutional thought, and individual action in the years ahead.”

- The Universal House of Justice, 1 March 2017

“The legitimacy of wealth depends, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has indicated, on how it is acquired and on how it is expended. In this connection, He has stated that “wealth is praiseworthy in the highest degree, if it is acquired by an individual’s own efforts and the grace of God, in commerce, agriculture, crafts and industry”, if the measures adopted by the individual in generating wealth serve to “enrich the generality of the people”, and if the wealth thus obtained is expended for “philanthropic purposes” and “the promotion of knowledge”, for the establishment of schools and industry and the advancement of education, and in general for the welfare of society.”

-The Universal House of Justice, 2 April 2010

“In your letter of 11 September you say that the questions of how to help the Third World or the poor who are suffering under calamities are much discussed in your community and you wish to know whether to

create a special fund for such needs, to ask for special contributions from time to time, or whether there are other ways in which you could help.

It is understandable that Bahá'ís who witness the miserable conditions under which so many human beings have to live, or who hear of a sudden disaster that has struck a certain area of the world, are moved to do something practical to ameliorate those conditions and to help their suffering fellow-mortals.

There are many ways in which help can be rendered. Every Bahá'í has the duty to acquire a trade or profession through which he will earn that wherewith he can support himself and his family; in the choice of such work he can seek those activities which are of benefit to his fellowmen and not merely those which promote his personal interests, still less those whose effects are actually harmful.

There are also the situations in which an individual Bahá'í or a Spiritual Assembly is confronted with an urgent need which neither justice nor compassion could allow to go unheeded and unhelped. How many are the stories told of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in such situations, when He would even take off a garment He was wearing and give it to a shivering man in rags.

But in our concern for such immediate obvious calls upon our succor we 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.”

-The Universal House of Justice, 19 November 1974

“With regard to the harmony of science and religion, the Writings of the Central Figures and the commentaries of the Guardian make abundantly clear that the task of humanity, including the Bahá'í community that serves as the “leaven” within it, is to create a global civilization which embodies both the spiritual and material dimensions of existence. The nature and scope of such a civilization are still beyond anything the present generation can conceive. The prosecution of this vast enterprise will depend on a progressive interaction between the truths and principles of religion and the discoveries and insights of scientific inquiry. This entails living with ambiguities as a natural and inescapable feature of the process of exploring reality. It also requires us not to limit science to any particular school of thought or methodological approach postulated in the course of its development. The challenge facing Bahá'í thinkers is to provide responsible leadership in this endeavor, since it is they who have both the priceless insights of the Revelation and the advantages conferred by scientific investigation.”

-The Universal House of Justice, 19 May 1995

“In the wake of such horrendous disruptions, there have been unexampled advances in the realms of science, technology and social organization; a veritable explosion of knowledge; and an even more remarkable burgeoning in the awakening and rise of masses of humanity which were previously presumed to be dormant. These masses are claiming their rightful places within the community of nations which has greatly expanded. With the simultaneous development of communications at the speed of light and transportation at the speed of sound, the world has contracted into a mere neighborhood in which people are instantly aware of each other's affairs and have immediate access to each other. And yet, even with such miraculous advances, with the emergence of international organizations, and with valiant attempts and brilliant successes at international cooperation, nations are at woeful odds with one another, people are convulsed by economic upheavals, races feel more alienated than before and are filled with mistrust, humiliation and fear.”

-The Universal House of Justice, 26 November 1992

World Crisis

“Flaws in the prevailing order are conspicuous in the inability of sovereign states organized as United Nations to exorcise the specter of war, the threatened collapse of the international economic order, the spread of anarchy and terrorism, and the intense suffering which these and other afflictions are causing to increasing millions. Indeed, so much have aggression and conflict come to characterize our social, economic and religious systems, that many have succumbed to the view that such behavior is intrinsic to human nature and therefore ineradicable.”

-The Universal House of Justice, October 1985

“However vital a force religion has been in the history of mankind, and however dramatic the current resurgence of militant religious fanaticism, religion and religious institutions have, for many decades, been viewed by increasing numbers of people as irrelevant to the major concerns of the modern world. In its place they have turned either to the hedonistic pursuit of material satisfactions or to the following of man-made ideologies designed to rescue society from the evident evils under which it groans. All too many of these ideologies, alas, instead of embracing the concept of the oneness of mankind and promoting the increase of concord among different peoples, have tended to deify the state, to subordinate the rest of mankind to one nation, race or class, to attempt to suppress all discussion and interchange of ideas, or to callously abandon starving millions to the operations of a market system that all too clearly is aggravating the plight of the majority of mankind, while enabling small sections to live in a condition of affluence scarcely dreamed of by our forebears.”

-The Universal House of Justice, October 1985

“Every discerning eye clearly sees that the early stages of this chaos have daily manifestations affecting the structure of human society; its destructive forces are uprooting time-honored institutions which were a haven and refuge for the inhabitants of the earth in bygone days and centuries, and around which revolved all human affairs. The same destructive forces are also deranging the political, economic, scientific, literary, and moral equilibrium of the world and are destroying the fairest fruits of the present civilization. Political machinations of those in authority have placed the seal of obsolescence upon the root principles of the world’s order. Greed and passion, deceit, hypocrisy, tyranny, and pride are dominating features afflicting human relations. Discoveries and inventions, which are the fruit of scientific and technological advancements, have become the means and tools of mass extermination and destruction and are in the hands of the ungodly. Even music, art, and literature, which are to represent and inspire the noblest sentiments and highest aspirations and should be a source of comfort and tranquillity for troubled souls, have strayed from the straight path and are now the mirrors of the soiled hearts of this confused, unprincipled, and disordered age. Perversions such as these shall result in the ordeals which have been prophesied by the Blessed Beauty in the following words: “... the earth will be tormented by a fresh calamity every day and unprecedented commotions will break out.” “The day is approaching when its [civilization’s] flame will devour the cities.”

-The Universal House of Justice, 10 February 1980

“Among the many evidences which reveal this process may be cited, on the one hand, the continual increase of lawlessness, terrorism, economic confusion, immorality and the growing danger from the proliferation of weapons of destruction, and on the other, the worldwide, divinely propelled expansion, consolidation and rapid emergence into the limelight of world affairs of the Cause itself, ...”

-The Universal House of Justice, Ridván 1983

a) Racism

“Racism, one of the most baneful and persistent evils, is a major barrier to peace. Its practice perpetrates too outrageous a violation of the dignity of human beings to be countenanced under any pretext. Racism retards the unfoldment of the boundless potentialities of its victims, corrupts its perpetrators, and blights human progress. Recognition of the oneness of mankind, implemented by appropriate legal measures, must be universally upheld if this problem is to be overcome.”

-The Universal House of Justice, October 1985

b) Nationalism

“Unbridled nationalism, as distinguished from a sane and legitimate patriotism, must give way to a wider loyalty, to the love of humanity as a whole. Bahá’u’lláh’s statement is: “The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens.” The concept of world citizenship is a direct result of the contraction of the world into a single neighborhood through scientific advances and of the indisputable interdependence of nations. Love of all the world’s peoples does not exclude love of one’s country. The advantage of the part in a world society is best served by promoting the advantage of the whole. Current international activities in various fields which nurture mutual affection and a sense of solidarity among peoples need greatly to be increased.”

-The Universal House of Justice, October 1985

c) Religious Strife

“Religious strife, throughout history, has been the cause of innumerable wars and conflicts, a major blight to progress, and is increasingly abhorrent to the people of all faiths and no faith. Followers of all religions must be willing to face the basic questions which this strife raises, and to arrive at clear answers. How are the differences between them to be resolved, both in theory and in practice? The challenge facing the religious leaders of mankind is to contemplate, with hearts filled with the spirit of compassion and a desire for truth, the plight of humanity, and to ask themselves whether they cannot, in humility before their Almighty Creator, submerge their theological differences in a great spirit of mutual forbearance that will enable them to work together for the advancement of human understanding and peace.”

-The Universal House of Justice, October 1985

d) Weapons of Mass Destruction

“Banning nuclear weapons, prohibiting the use of poison gases, or outlawing germ warfare will not remove the root causes of war. However important such practical measures obviously are as elements of the peace process, they are in themselves too superficial to exert enduring influence. Peoples are ingenious enough to invent yet other forms of warfare, and to use food, raw materials, finance, industrial power, ideology, and terrorism to subvert one another in an endless quest for supremacy and dominion. Nor can the present massive dislocation in the affairs of humanity be resolved through the settlement of specific conflicts or disagreements among nations. A genuine universal framework must be adopted.”

-The Universal House of Justice, October 1985

e) Inequality of Man and Women

“The emancipation of women, the achievement of full equality between the sexes, is one of the most important, though less acknowledged prerequisites of peace. The denial of such equality perpetrates an injustice against one half of the world’s population and promotes in men harmful attitudes and habits that are carried from the family to the workplace, to political life, and ultimately to international relations. There are no grounds, moral, practical, or biological, upon which such denial can be justified. Only as women are welcomed into full partnership in all fields of human endeavor will the moral and

psychological climate be created in which international peace can emerge.”

-The Universal House of Justice, October 1985

World Order

“The second fundamental principle which enables us to understand the pattern towards which Bahá’u’lláh wishes human society to evolve is the principle of organic growth which requires that detailed developments, and the understanding of detailed developments, become available only with the passage of time and with the help of the guidance given by that Central Authority in the Cause to whom all must turn. In this regard one can use the simile of a tree. If a farmer plants a tree, he cannot state at that moment what its exact height will be, the number of its branches or the exact time of its blossoming. He can, however, give a general impression of its size and pattern of growth and can state with confidence which fruit it will bear. The same is true of the evolution of the World Order of Bahá’u’lláh.”

-The Universal House of Justice, 27 April 1995

“In striving to attain a “clearer and fuller understanding” of the World Order of Bahá’u’lláh, we need to contemplate the operation of the Bahá’í principles of governance and social responsibility as they persist through changing sets of conditions, from the present time when the Bahá’í community constitutes a small number of people living in a variety of overwhelmingly non-Bahá’í societies, to the far different situation in future centuries when the Bahá’ís are becoming, and eventually have become, the vast majority of the people.

The Administrative Order is certainly the nucleus and pattern of the World Order of Bahá’u’lláh, but it is in embryonic form, and must undergo major evolutionary developments in the course of time. Certain passages in the writings on this subject establish matters of principle, certain ones describe the ultimate goal of the Most Great Peace, and certain of them relate to stages of development on the way to the attainment of that goal.”

-The Universal House of Justice, 27 April 1995

“In answer to those who raise objections to this vision of a worldwide commonwealth inspired by a Divine Revelation, fearing for the freedom of minority groups or of the individual under such a system, we can explain the Bahá’í principle of upholding the rights of minorities and fostering their interests. We can also point to the fact that no person is ever compelled to accept the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh and moreover, unlike the situation in certain other religions, each person has complete freedom to withdraw from the Faith if he decides that he no longer believes in its Founder or accepts His Teachings. In light of these facts alone it is evident that the growth of the Bahá’í communities to the size where a non-Bahá’í state would adopt the Faith as the State Religion, let alone to the point at which the State would accept the Law of God as its own law and the National House of Justice as its legislature, must be a supremely voluntary and democratic process.”

-The Universal House of Justice, 27 April 1995

“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.

The House of Justice appreciates your concern about such a fundamental issue, and asks us to assure you of its prayers in the Holy Shrines for the confirmation of your services to the Cause of God.”

-The Universal House of Justice, 27 April 1995

“Among the favorable signs are the steadily growing strength of the steps towards world order taken initially near the beginning of this century in the creation of the League of Nations, succeeded by the more broadly based United Nations Organization; the achievement since the Second World War of independence by the majority of all the nations on earth, indicating the completion of the process of nation building, and the involvement of these fledgling nations with older ones in matters of mutual concern; the consequent vast increase in cooperation among hitherto isolated and antagonistic peoples and groups in international undertakings in the scientific, educational, legal, economic and cultural fields; the rise in recent decades of an unprecedented number of international humanitarian organizations; the spread of women’s and youth movements calling for an end to war; and the spontaneous spawning of widening networks of ordinary people seeking understanding through personal communication.”

-The Universal House of Justice, October 1985

“There is, however, a paralysis of will; and it is this that must be carefully examined and resolutely dealt with. This paralysis is rooted, as we have stated, in a deep-seated conviction of the inevitable quarrelsomeness of mankind, which has led to the reluctance to entertain the possibility of subordinating national self-interest to the requirements of world order, and in an unwillingness to face courageously the far-reaching implications of establishing a united world authority. It is also traceable to the incapacity of largely ignorant and subjugated masses to articulate their desire for a new order in which they can live in peace, harmony and prosperity with all humanity.

The tentative steps towards world order, especially since World War II, give hopeful signs. The increasing tendency of groups of nations to formalize relationships which enable them to cooperate in matters of mutual interest suggests that eventually all nations could overcome this paralysis. The Association of South East Asian Nations, the Caribbean Community and Common Market, the Central American Common Market, the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance, the European Communities, the League of Arab States, the Organization of African Unity, the Organization of American States, the South Pacific Forum—all the joint endeavors represented by such organizations prepare the path to world order.”

-The Universal House of Justice, October 1985

“We have no doubt that the Bahá’í world community will accomplish all these tasks and go forward to new achievements. The powers released by Bahá’u’lláh match the needs of the times. We may therefore be utterly confident that the new throb of energy now vibrating throughout the Cause will empower it to meet the oncoming challenges of assisting, as maturity and resources allow, the development of the social and economic life of peoples, of collaborating with the forces leading towards the establishment of order in the world, of influencing the exploitation and constructive uses of modern technology, and in all these ways enhancing the prestige and progress of the Faith and uplifting the conditions of the generality of mankind.”

-The Universal House of Justice, Ridván 1983

Appendix

This document prepared by the Office of Social and Economic Development at the Bahá'í World Centre approved by the Universal House of Justice and is related to the subject of economic activities. It is an important document that I had to add it to this compilation.

The Universal House of Justice

Department of the Secretariat

26 November 2012

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

Enclosed is a statement prepared by the Office of Social and Economic Development at the Bahá'í World Centre on the subject of social action, which has been approved by the Universal House of Justice for distribution. We have been asked to provide you with a copy and to commend it to your study. As you will see, the statement offers a brief overview of the involvement of the Bahá'í community in the area of social and economic development, placing it in the context of current activity at the level of the cluster. In this connection, the House of Justice has requested us to make clear that the distribution of the document should not be seen as a call for widespread action in this area; it is intended as an instrument to raise further consciousness about the nature of social action and some of the methods it employs. The opening paragraph of the statement sets out the conditions, as explained by the House of Justice, that make engagement in this sphere of endeavour propitious.

You are encouraged to share the document with those friends and agencies in your communities you feel would do well to become acquainted with its content. For your information, the International Teaching Centre, at the request of the House of Justice, will be advising the Continental Counsellors to provide the

statement to all members of the Auxiliary Boards for the Propagation and Protection of the Faith, that they might study it thoroughly and stand ready to lend the necessary assistance to the friends in clusters where the institute process is strong and human resources adequately abundant to support activity in this arena.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

SOCIAL ACTION

A paper prepared by the Office of Social and Economic Development at the Bahá'í World Centre

26 November 2012

In its Ridván 2010 message, the Universal House of Justice called on the Bahá'ís of the world to reflect on the contributions that their growing, vibrant communities will make to the material and spiritual progress of society. In this connection, the House of Justice made reference to the process of community building set in motion in so many clusters across the globe by the core activities associated with the current series of global Plans. “A rich tapestry of community life”, it was noted, “begins to emerge in every cluster as acts of communal worship, interspersed with discussions undertaken in the intimate setting of the home, are woven together with activities that provide spiritual education to all members of the population—adults, youth and children.” “Social consciousness is heightened naturally as, for example,” the message went on to explain, “lively conversations proliferate among parents regarding the aspirations of their children and service projects spring up at the initiative of junior youth.” The House of Justice then made the following statement: “Once human resources in a cluster are in sufficient abundance, and the pattern of growth firmly established, the community’s engagement with society can, and indeed must, increase.” Later in the same message, the House of Justice defined the sphere of social action in these terms:

Most appropriately conceived in terms of a spectrum, social action can range from fairly informal efforts of limited duration undertaken by individuals or small groups of friends to programmes of social and economic development with a high level of complexity and sophistication implemented by Bahá'í-inspired organizations. Irrespective of its scope and scale, all social action seeks to apply the teachings and principles of the Faith to improve some aspect of the social or economic life of a population, however modestly.

To contribute to discussions under way at all levels of the Bahá'í community about the nature of its involvement in social action, we have prepared this paper on the basis of experience gained over the years in the area of social and economic development. The insights presented are drawn from relatively complex development endeavours, yet they shed light on the character of initiatives across the entire spectrum, as all instances of social action, irrespective of size, rely on a shared set of concepts, principles, methods, and approaches.

I. The Bahá'í world's involvement in social and economic development

The endeavours of the worldwide Bahá'í community can be seen in terms of a number of interacting processes—the spiritual enrichment of the individual, the development of local and national communities, the maturation of administrative institutions, to mention but a few—which trace their origins back to the time of Bahá'u'lláh Himself and which gathered strength during the ministries of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi. Under the guidance of the Universal House of Justice, these processes have continued to advance steadily: the scope of their influence has gradually been extended and new dimensions added to their operation. Social and economic development is among them. This particular process, pursued most notably through a variety of educational activities down the years, received considerable impetus in 1983, when the House of Justice, in a message dated 20 October, asked for “systematic attention” to be given to this area of activity following the rapid expansion of the Bahá'í community during the 1970s.

The 1983 message emphasized that progress in the development field would depend largely on natural stirrings at the grassroots of the community. It also announced the establishment of the Office of Social and Economic Development (OSED) at the Bahá'í World Centre to “promote and coordinate the activities of the friends” in this field. Bahá'ís in every continent sought to respond to the call raised in the message in a number of ways, and the ensuing ten years constituted a period of experimentation, characterized simultaneously by enthusiasm and hesitation, thoughtful planning and haphazard action, achievements and setbacks. While most projects found it difficult to escape the patterns of development practice prevalent in the world, some offered glimpses of promising paradigms of action. From this initial decade of diverse activity, then, the Bahá'í community emerged with the pursuit of social and economic development firmly established as a feature of its organic life and with enhanced capacity to forge over time a distinctly Bahá'í approach.

In September 1993, the document “Bahá'í Social and Economic Development: Prospects for the Future”, prepared at the World Centre, was approved by the Universal House of Justice for use by OSED in orienting and guiding the work in this area. It set the stage for the next ten years of activity and beyond. Drawing on the significant body of experience that had accumulated over the preceding decade, the document elaborated several features common to all such efforts. Awareness worldwide of the nature of Bahá'í social and economic development grew significantly during this period as a result, and a highly consistent, much more systematic approach began to take shape. The vision that emerged at the time called for the promotion of development activities at different levels of complexity. Most central to this vision was the question of capacity building. That activities should start on a modest scale and only grow in complexity in keeping with available human resources was a concept that gradually came to influence development thought and practice.

In 2001, the Universal House of Justice introduced to the Bahá'í world the concept of a cluster—a geographic construct, generally defined as a group of villages or as a city with its surrounding suburbs, intended to assist in planning and implementing activities associated with community life. This step was made possible by the establishment of training institutes at the national and regional levels during the 1990s, which employed a system of distance education to reach large numbers with a sequence of courses designed to increase capacity for service. The House of Justice encouraged the Bahá'í world to extend this system progressively to more and more clusters in order to promote their steady progress, laying first the strong spiritual foundations upon which a vibrant community life is built. Efforts in a cluster were initially to focus on the multiplication of certain core activities, open to all of the inhabitants, but with a view to developing the collective capacity needed to address in due time various aspects of the social and economic life of the population as well.

In the decade that followed, then, social action would increasingly come to be conceived within the context of the cluster. The conception of grassroots social action that began to emerge was thus able to assume a much more pronounced collective dimension than had been previously articulated. During the same period, notable progress was also being made by OSED in its attempts to help systematize the experience of especially promising programmes and to learn about structures and methods required to

enable communities around the world not only to benefit from them but to contribute to their further advancement. Today, in the establishment of continental and subcontinental offices—each serving either a network of sites for the dissemination of learning about the junior youth spiritual empowerment programme or a group of Bahá'í-inspired organizations dedicated to the promotion of some other educational programme—can be seen the first fruits of OSED's efforts to raise up structures across the globe to enhance collective capacity for this purpose. Underscoring the importance of what has been achieved so far, the Universal House of Justice wrote in its message dated 28 December 2010:

Eventually the strength of the institute process in the village, and the enhanced capabilities it has fostered in individuals, may enable the friends to take advantage of methods and programmes of proven effectiveness, which have been developed by one or another Bahá'í-inspired organization and which have been introduced into the cluster at the suggestion of, and with support from, our Office of Social and Economic Development.

Accomplishments over the past three decades in the area of social and economic development, then, combined with the consistent rise in human resources in clusters everywhere, have brought the Bahá'í world to a new stage in its efforts to engage in grassroots social action.

II. A framework for collective learning

The mode of operation adopted in the area of social and economic development, in common with other areas of Bahá'í activity, is one of learning in action. When efforts are carried out in a learning mode—characterized by constant action, reflection, consultation, and study—visions and strategies are re-examined time and again. As tasks are accomplished, obstacles removed, resources multiplied, and lessons learned, modifications are made in goals and methods. The learning process, which is given direction through appropriate institutional arrangements, unfolds in a way that resembles the growth and differentiation of a living organism. Haphazard change is avoided, and continuity of action maintained.

On several occasions, the Universal House of Justice, referring to the way in which those serving at the level of the cluster will be drawn further and further into the life of society, has indicated: “In the approaches you take, the methods you adopt, and the instruments you employ, you will need to achieve the same degree of coherence that characterizes the pattern of growth presently under way.” How the first stirrings in the area of social action will manifest themselves in cluster after cluster where the dual process of expansion and consolidation is robust, the extent to which cultivation and direction from the institutions will be required, and the ways in which endeavours of social action will strengthen the fabric of community life—these are among the issues that will be the subject of an increasingly intense process of learning in the coming years.

Achieving progressively higher degrees of coherence both within and among the broad interconnected fields of endeavour in which the Bahá'í community is engaged is clearly a vital concern. It suggests that areas of activity are to be complementary, integrated, and mutually supportive. Further, it implies the existence of a common, overarching framework that gives shape to activities and which evolves and becomes more elaborate as experience accumulates. The expression of the divers elements of the framework will not, of course, be uniform in all spheres of action. In relation to any given area of activity, some elements move to the fore, while others act only in the background. The next three sections of this document describe a few of these, identified over many years of experience, as they find expression in social action.

Among the elements most relevant to social action are statements that define the character of progress—that civilization has both a material and a spiritual dimension, that humanity is on the threshold of its collective maturity, that there are destructive and constructive forces operating in the world which serve to propel humanity along the path towards its full maturity, that the relationships necessary to sustain society must be recast in the light of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation, that the transformation required must

occur simultaneously within human consciousness and the structure of social institutions. Such statements shed light on the nature of Bahá'í development efforts, a topic taken up in Section III of the document.

Other elements that speak to the nature of social action are derived from a particular perspective on the role of knowledge in the development of society. The complementarity of science and religion, the imperative of spiritual and material education, the influence of values inherent to technology on the organization of society, and the relevance of appropriate technology to social progress are among the issues involved. Views related to the generation and application of knowledge have implications not only for the nature of development but also for the question of methodology, which is the theme of Section IV. Implicit in the discussions of Sections III and IV is yet another set of elements of the framework, namely, those statements that analyse concepts such as individualism, power, authority, personal comfort, selfless service, work, and excellence.

Finally, at the heart of the conceptual framework for social action lie elements that describe beliefs about fundamental issues of existence, such as the nature of the human being, the purpose of life, the oneness of humanity, and the equality of men and women. While for Bahá'ís these touch on immutable convictions, they are not static—the way in which they are understood and find expression in various contexts evolves over time. Many of these convictions underlie the discussion elaborated throughout the document; a few are explicitly addressed in Section V to illustrate their implications for development work.

III. The nature of Bahá'í social and economic development

Bahá'í activity in the field of social and economic development seeks to promote the well-being of people of all walks of life, whatever their beliefs or background. It represents the efforts of the Bahá'í community to effect constructive social change, as it learns to apply the teachings of the Faith, together with knowledge accumulated in different fields of human endeavour, to social reality. Its purpose is neither to proclaim the Cause nor to serve as a vehicle for conversion. What follows below is a discussion of some of the elements of the conceptual framework that help to define its nature.

(i) Coherence between the spiritual and the material

An exploration of the nature of social action, undertaken from a Bahá'í perspective, must necessarily place it in the broad context of the advancement of civilization. That a global civilization which is both materially and spiritually prosperous represents the next stage of a millennia-long process of social evolution provides a conception of history that endows every instance of social action with a particular purpose: to foster true prosperity, with its spiritual and material dimensions, among the diverse inhabitants of the planet. A concept of vital relevance, then, is the imperative to achieve a dynamic coherence between the practical and spiritual requirements of life. 'Abdu'l-Bahá states that while “material civilization is one of the means for the progress of the world of mankind,” until it is “combined with Divine civilization, the desired result, which is the felicity of mankind, will not be attained”. He continues:

Material civilization is like a lamp-glass. Divine civilization is the lamp itself and the glass without the light is dark. Material civilization is like the body. No matter how infinitely graceful, elegant and beautiful it may be, it is dead. Divine civilization is like the spirit, and the body gets its life from the spirit, otherwise it becomes a corpse. It has thus been made evident that the world of mankind is in need of the breaths of the Holy Spirit. Without the spirit the world of mankind is lifeless, and without this light the world of mankind is in utter darkness.

To seek coherence between the spiritual and the material does not imply that the material goals of development are to be trivialized. It does require, however, the rejection of approaches to development which define it as the transfer to all societies of the ideological convictions, the social structures, the economic practices, the models of governance—in the final analysis, the very patterns of life—prevalent in certain highly industrialized regions of the world. When the material and spiritual dimensions of the life of a community are kept in mind and due attention is given to both scientific and spiritual knowledge,

the tendency to reduce development to the mere consumption of goods and services and the naive use of technological packages is avoided. Scientific knowledge, to take but one simple example, helps the members of a community to analyse the physical and social implications of a given technological proposal—say, its environmental impact—and spiritual insight gives rise to moral imperatives that uphold social harmony and that ensure technology serves the common good. Together, these two sources of knowledge tap roots of motivation in individuals and communities, so essential in breaking free from the shelter of passivity, and enable them to uncover the traps of consumerism.

Although the relevance of scientific knowledge to development efforts is readily acknowledged in the world at large, there appears to be less agreement on the part to be played by religion. Too often views about religion carry with them notions of division, strife, and repression, creating a reluctance to turn to it as a source of knowledge—even among those who question the adequacy of entirely materialistic approaches. Interestingly, the high esteem in which science is held does not necessarily imply that its practice and purpose are well understood. Its underlying meaning, too, is surrounded by misconception. Not infrequently it is conceived in terms of the application of certain techniques and formulas, which, as if by magic, lead to this or that effect. It is not surprising, then, that what is considered to be religious knowledge is not in harmony with science, and much of what is propagated in the name of science denies the spiritual capacities cultivated by religion.

Social action, of whatever size and complexity, should strive to remain free of simplistic and distorted conceptions of science and religion. To this end, an imaginary duality between reason and faith—a duality that would confine reason to the realm of empirical evidence and logical argumentation and which would associate faith with superstition and irrational thought—must be avoided. The process of development has to be rational and systematic—incorporating, for example, scientific capabilities of observing, of measuring, of rigorously testing ideas—and at the same time deeply aware of faith and spiritual convictions. In the words of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá: “faith compriseth both knowledge and the performance of good works.” Faith and reason can best be understood as attributes of the human soul through which insights and knowledge can be gained about the physical and the spiritual dimensions of existence. They make it possible to recognize the powers and capacities latent in individuals and in humanity as a whole and enable people to work for the realization of these potentialities.

(ii) Participation

A civilization befitting a humanity which, having passed through earlier stages of social evolution, is coming of age will not emerge through the efforts exerted by a select group of nations or even a network of national and international agencies. Rather, the challenge must be faced by all of humanity. Every member of the human family has not only the right to benefit from a materially and spiritually prosperous civilization but also an obligation to contribute towards its construction. Social action should operate, then, on the principle of universal participation.

Issues related to participation have been discussed at length in development literature. Yet, in both theory and practice, this vital principle has often been approached at the level of technique—for example, through the utilization of surveys and focus groups. Such tools, of course, have their merits, as do more ambitious efforts intended to increase participation in political processes or to offer training to the beneficiaries of services delivered by one or another governmental or non-governmental agency. Still, these measures seem to fall short of the kind of participation envisioned above. What appears to be called for in any given region, microregion or cluster is the involvement of a growing number of people in a collective process of learning, one which is focused on the nature and dynamics of a path that conduces to the material and spiritual progress of their villages or neighbourhoods. Such a process would allow its participants to engage in the generation, application, and diffusion of knowledge, a most potent and indispensable force in the advancement of civilization.

In this connection, it is important to realize that the application and propagation of existing knowledge is invariably accompanied by the generation of new knowledge—much of which takes the form of insights acquired through experience. Here the systematization of learning is crucial. As a group of people working at the grassroots begins to gain experience in social action, the first lessons learned may consist of little more than occasional stories, anecdotes, and personal accounts. Over time, patterns tend to emerge which can be documented and carefully analysed. To facilitate the systematization of knowledge, appropriate structures have to be put in place at the local level, among them institutions and agencies invested with authority to safeguard the integrity of the learning process and to ensure that it is not reduced to opinion or the mere collection of various experiences—in short, to see to it that veritable knowledge is generated. In this regard, the authority invested in the institutions of the Administrative Order working at the grassroots to harmonize individual volition with collective will endows the Bahá'í community with a remarkable capacity to nurture participation.

No matter how essential, a process of learning at the local level will remain limited in its effectiveness if it is not connected to a global process concerned with the material and spiritual prosperity of humanity as a whole. Structures are required, then, at all levels, from the local to the international, to facilitate learning about development. At the international level, such learning calls for a degree of conceptualization that takes into account the broader processes of global transformation under way and which serves to adjust the overall direction of development activities accordingly. In this respect, OSED sees itself as a learning entity dedicated to the systematization of a growing worldwide experience made possible by the participation of increasing numbers of individuals, agencies, and communities. As this participation widens, the Office strives to develop its own capacity to observe activity at the grassroots, to identify and analyse patterns that emerge under one or more sets of circumstances, and to disseminate the knowledge thus generated, strengthening structures for this purpose and lending impetus to the process of learning at all levels. The approach to development that comes into focus, then, defies categorization into either “top-down” or “bottom-up”; it is one, rather, of reciprocity and interconnectedness.

(iii) Capacity building

When development is seen in terms of the participation of more and more people in a collective process of learning, then the concept of capacity building assumes particular importance. Thus, while any instance of social action would naturally aim at improving some aspect of the life of a population, it cannot focus simply on the provision of goods and services—an approach to development so prevalent in the world today, one which often carries with it attitudes of paternalism and which employs methods that disempower those who should be the protagonists of change. Setting and achieving specific goals to improve conditions is a legitimate concern of social action; yet, far more essential is the accompanying rise in the capacity of the participants in an endeavour to contribute to progress. Of course, the imperative to build capacity is not only relevant to the individual, important though that may be; it is equally applicable to institutions and the community, the other two protagonists in the advancement of civilization.

At the level of the individual, the influence of the training institute is vital. As it helps to equip individuals with the spiritual insights and knowledge, the qualities and attitudes, and the skills and abilities needed to carry out acts of service integral to Bahá'í community life, the institute creates a pool of human resources that makes it possible for endeavours of social and economic development to flourish. The participants in such endeavours are able to acquire, in turn, knowledge and skills pertinent to the specific areas of action in which they are engaged—health, agricultural production, and education, to name but a few—while continuing to strengthen those capacities already cultivated by the institute, for instance, fostering unity in diversity, promoting justice, participating effectively in consultation, and accompanying others in their efforts to serve humanity.

Similarly, the question of institutional capacity requires due attention. As the institutions of the Faith gain experience, particularly in the context of their efforts to ensure that the provisions of the global Plans are met, they become increasingly adept at offering assistance, resources, encouragement, and loving

guidance to appropriate initiatives; at consulting freely and harmoniously among themselves and with people they serve; and at channelling individual and collective energies towards the transformation of society. So, too, must every effort pursued in the sphere of social action consider the question of institutional capacity. After all, even the smallest group of individuals labouring at the grassroots must be able to maintain a consultative environment characterized by qualities of honesty, fairness, patience, tolerance, and courtesy. At a higher level of complexity, an organization dedicated to social action needs to develop the capacity to read society and identify the forces operating within it, to translate a vision of progress into projects and distinct, interconnected lines of action, to manage financial resources, and to interact with both governmental and non-governmental agencies.

The building of capacity in individuals and institutions goes hand in hand with the development of communities. In villages and neighbourhoods throughout the world, Bahá'ís are engaged in activities that enrich the devotional character of their communities, that tend to the spiritual education of children, that enhance the spiritual perception of junior youth and strengthen their powers of expression, and that enable increasing numbers to explore the application of the teachings of the Faith to their individual and collective lives. A process of community development, however, needs to reach beyond the level of activity and concern itself with those modes of expression and patterns of thought and behaviour that are to characterize a humanity which has come of age. In short, it must enter into the realm of culture. Viewed in this light, social action can become an occasion to raise collective consciousness of such vital principles as oneness, justice, and the equality of women and men; to promote an environment distinguished by traits such as truthfulness, equity, trustworthiness, and generosity; to enhance the ability of a community to resist the influence of destructive social forces; to demonstrate the value of cooperation as an organizing principle for activity; to fortify collective volition; and to infuse practice with insight from the teachings. For, in the final analysis, many of the questions most central to the emergence of a prosperous global civilization are to be addressed at the level of culture.

What seems necessary to acknowledge here is that the increase of capacity in each of these three protagonists does not occur in isolation; the development of any one is inextricably linked to the progress of the other two. The following statement of Shoghi Effendi speaks to this point:

We cannot segregate the human heart from the environment outside us and say that once one of these is reformed everything will be improved. Man is organic with the world. His inner life moulds the environment and is itself also deeply affected by it. The one acts upon the other and every abiding change in the life of man is the result of these mutual reactions.

(iv) Degrees of complexity

That the development process is inherently complex is undeniable. It can involve activity in areas such as agriculture and animal husbandry, manufacturing and marketing, the management of funds and natural resources, health and sanitation, education and socialization, communication and community organization. The knowledge that must be brought to bear on the development concerns of the communities of the world, then, does not fit into a single area or discipline. Interdisciplinary and multisectoral action is clearly called for. Yet the capacity to pursue such coordinated action will only appear in the Bahá'í community over the course of decades, as will the capacity to address development issues at increasingly higher levels of complexity and effectiveness.

Social action can range from fairly informal efforts of limited duration undertaken by small groups of individuals to programmes of social and economic development with some level of complexity and sophistication implemented by Bahá'í-inspired organizations. Experience makes clear that the interplay of processes that give rise to social action does not lend itself to a single formulaic description. Irrespective of circumstances, however, the scope and complexity of social action at any given moment must be commensurate with the human resources available in a community to carry it forward. What is more,

ownership of the undertaking rests with the community itself, which suggests the existence of a certain degree of collective will.

Efforts, whatever their specific nature, generally begin on a modest scale. Often, in a locality where the educational activities of the training institute are firmly established and a pronounced sense of community exists, the first stirrings of heightened social awareness can be observed in the emergence of a small group which, addressing a particular social and economic reality, initiates a simple set of appropriate actions. While some efforts of this kind will naturally come to a close when their objectives have been met, others will continue. Insistence on perpetuating or even expanding every initiative, whether in terms of number of participants, expenditure, geographical coverage or complexity of work, is counterproductive. Yet there may be circumstances in which efforts will, through a continuous process of consultation, action, and reflection, give rise to an endeavour of a more sustained nature. What is important in such cases is that those involved be allowed to increase the range of their activities in an organic fashion, without undue pressure from opinions that are often based solely on theoretical considerations. The process moves forward in a flexible way as they reflect on the results of experience. The Local Spiritual Assembly, of course, serves as the voice of moral authority to make certain that, as small groups of individuals strive to improve conditions, the integrity of their endeavours is not compromised. It also remains ever vigilant, ensuring that efforts do not run counter to the overall direction in which the community is moving.

At some point, members of the community may also be able to take advantage of educational programmes promoted by a Bahá'í-inspired organization operating in the region, supported by OSED. The steady expansion of such a programme in the community will serve to increase its human resources and to reinforce organizational structures that sustain ongoing work. Eventually many of those who benefit from such programmes will, in turn, bend their energies towards the implementation of the kind of grassroots social action mentioned above. Yet, here again, whatever the ultimate vision, care is taken to begin work in a single area of action and to expand activities gradually over time. A community school, for example, can in principle become a centre for activities such as agricultural production, health education, and family counselling. But, in most cases, it is advisable for it to start simply as a school, focusing all of its resources on the children it proposes to serve.

In this respect, OSED's efforts to strengthen the institutional capacity of Bahá'í-inspired organizations take on significance, and a few words should be added here about the appearance of such organizations worldwide. Whether in the practice of their professions, in the discharge of occupational responsibilities, or in dealings of other kinds, all Bahá'ís derive inspiration from the teachings and principles of the Faith and endeavour to reflect their high standards in day-to-day interactions. Further, given the nature of the field of development, a number of Bahá'ís will choose to associate themselves with one or another national or international agency working for the good of humankind and will, to the extent possible, bring Bahá'í teachings to bear on their operations. In this sense their efforts are inspired by the Faith. Yet, in the context of the work of the Bahá'í community itself, the term has come to be used in a very specific way. Typically brought into being by a small group of believers, a Bahá'í-inspired organization—while remaining under the general guidance and moral authority of Bahá'í institutions—can pursue a range of development initiatives in a region with a degree of latitude in administering its daily affairs. When such an organization is established, emphasis is naturally placed on the quality of its activities; clarity about an optimal size is gradually achieved as the notion that “bigger is better” is set aside. Bahá'í institutions and agencies, including OSED, provide encouragement and direction and, where appropriate, channel resources to these organizations. A small handful of these have, over many years, evolved into fully fledged development organizations with the capacity to engage in relatively complex areas of activity and to establish working relations with the agencies of government and civil society.

However useful the concept of a Bahá'í-inspired organization may be, its application under diverse circumstances requires careful consideration. The way that such an organization emerges from the life of a region and contributes to its progress is of paramount importance. Its establishment cannot be haphazard, nor can its creation proceed solely from the longing of two or three individuals to fulfil a

personal, albeit altruistic, desire. A Bahá'í-inspired organization operating in a region derives meaning, in part, from its relationship to other activities; it is one of several interacting endeavours through which consistent progress is achieved. The value of such organizations in the different regions of the world to the development work is evident. Yet, the transformative power of thousands upon thousands of simple actions undertaken at the grassroots tied together in a common framework should not be underestimated.

(v) Flow of resources

All Bahá'í activity is carried forward in light of a fundamental belief in the oneness of humankind. All contribute their talents and resources to the advancement of a common purpose, and all share in the joy of progress. Clearly, then, the emphasis placed on local action should not be construed as favouring isolation.

Social and economic development requires the flow of resources, both material and intellectual. Bahá'í communities are linked by institutions and agencies at the local, regional, national, continental, and international levels, each committed to upholding the principle of the oneness of humankind. These institutional arrangements allow for resources to flow in a structured and systematic manner, and communities in rural areas as well as in highly industrialized regions benefit equally from them. The practice of dividing the world into dichotomous groups of “the developed” and “the underdeveloped”, of “the advanced” and “the backward”, is foreign to Bahá'í efforts in the field of development—indeed, to all Bahá'í endeavours.

However, it should be acknowledged plainly that poverty cannot be alleviated without a just distribution of material wealth among the peoples of the world. In fact, the institution of Ḥuqúqu'lláh provides a powerful means for fostering the prosperity of humankind. As they observe the law of Ḥuqúqu'lláh, which requires them to offer a percentage of their excess wealth, Bahá'ís across the globe understand that, by placing funds at the disposal of the Universal House of Justice, they are facilitating the transfer of material resources in ways that promote the welfare of society. At this point, the amounts available fall far short of the needs of the vast regions of the planet that lack the requisite financial means. Nevertheless, the observance of this law makes it possible for the House of Justice to provide funds to development projects under way in all continents.

Apart from the funds accessible through the institution of Ḥuqúqu'lláh and regular contributions made to other institutions, including those earmarked specifically for social action, efforts in the area of social and economic development can tap into resources available from governments and donor agencies. Yet, irrespective of their sources, in no way do such funds set the agenda for development efforts in the communities that accept assistance. The relationship of dependence so prevalent in the world today, whereby certain regions are beholden to others for access to resources, is unacceptable.

“Social change”, the Universal House of Justice made clear in its Riḍván 2010 message, “is not a project that one group of people carries out for the benefit of another”, and in general Bahá'ís from one area do not establish development projects for others. The movement of individuals from community to community, and across borders, does occur however, and here every Bahá'í is guided by the words of Bahá'u'lláh: “Shut your eyes to estrangement, then fix your gaze upon unity.” When Bahá'ís move residence or travel to another place in the context of some work, they form part of the collectivity of their new local communities, and all the others also see them as such. They now come under the guidance of local institutions, which are responsible for facilitating the flow of knowledge and for channelling the energies of every member of their communities; the idea of an expert from outside being allowed to impose his or her professional aspirations on the local population is thus avoided.

In the efforts of Bahá'ís everywhere, then, can be seen the emergence of a global community which, connected through its institutions, is striving to establish a pattern of activity that gives due respect to local autonomy without creating a sense of isolation from the whole, that attaches importance to material

means without allowing them to become instruments of control, that provides for the flow of knowledge without introducing paternalistic attitudes, that strengthens capacity in individuals without any regard for their economic background. While vigorously engaged in activities to improve their immediate surroundings, Bahá'ís feel part of a process of development that is global in scope and influence.

IV. The methodology of Bahá'í social and economic development

In addition to those elements of the conceptual framework that define the nature of Bahá'í development efforts, there are a number of concepts which shed light on the methods to be adopted. That the collective investigation of reality can best be undertaken in an atmosphere which encourages detachment from personal views, that such an ongoing investigation should give due importance to valid empirical information, that mere opinion should not be raised to the status of fact, that conclusions should correspond to the complexity of the issues at hand and not be broken up into a series of simplistic points, that the articulation of observations and conclusions should be presented in precise and dispassionate language, that progress in every area of endeavour is contingent upon the creation of an environment where powers are multiplied and manifest themselves in unified action—general concepts such as these, drawn from both science and religion, inform the specific methodological perspective discussed below.

(i) Reading society and formulating a vision

As mentioned earlier, endeavours in the sphere of social action frequently take the form of modest acts carried out by small groups of individuals residing in a locality. In a sense, these stirrings at the grassroots can be considered responses to readings of social reality, even though they are seldom expressed explicitly as such at that level. For more elaborate endeavours of social and economic development, reading society with higher and higher degrees of accuracy has to become an explicit element of the methodology of learning.

Every development effort can be said to represent a response to some understanding of the nature and state of society, its challenges, the institutions operating in it, the forces influencing it, and the capacities of its peoples. To read society in this way is not to explore every detail of the social reality. Nor does it necessarily involve formal studies. Conditions need to be understood progressively, both from the perspective of a particular endeavour's purpose and in the context of a vision of humanity's collective existence. Indeed, it is vital that the reading of society be consistent with the teachings of the Faith. That the true nature of a human being is spiritual, that every human being is a "mine rich in gems" of limitless potential, that the forces of integration and disintegration each in their own way are propelling humanity towards its destiny are but a few examples of teachings that would shape one's understanding of social reality. Bahá'í-inspired organizations supporting relatively complex lines of action need to continually refine their reading of society, using the methods of science to the best of their abilities.

It is important to note that reading the social reality of a population from within is different than studying it as an outsider. In instances where the population in question is relatively poor in material resources, outsiders with access to greater means frequently see only deprivation—the wealth of talent in the population, the aspirations of its members, and their capacity to arise and become the protagonists of change may all be overlooked. Furthermore, external observers of poverty are all too often unaware of the tendency to allow their own feelings of pity, fear, indignation or ambivalence to affect their reading of society and to base their proposed solutions on the value they place on their own experiences. However, when an effort is participatory, in the sense that it seeks to involve the people themselves in the generation and application of knowledge, as all forge together a path of progress, dualities such as "outsider-insider" and "knowledgeable-ignorant" quickly disappear.

According to their reading of society, those engaged in social action form and refine a vision of their work within the social space available to them. The word "vision" here does not simply mean a set of goals or a description of an idealized future condition. Particularly when a Bahá'í-inspired organization is involved, a vision has to express a general idea of how goals are to be achieved: the nature of the strategies to be devised, the approaches to be taken, the attitudes to be assumed, and even an outline of

some of the methods to be employed. The vision of work articulated by such an organization is never complete; it has to become more and more precise, be able to accommodate constantly evolving and ever more complex action, and attain increasingly high levels of accuracy in its operation.

(ii) Consultation

If learning in action is to be the primary mode of operation in the area of social and economic development, the Bahá'í principle of consultation needs to be fully appreciated. Whether concerned with analysing a specific problem, attaining higher degrees of understanding on a given issue, or exploring possible courses of action, consultation may be seen as collective search for truth. Participants in a consultative process see reality from different points of view, and as these views are examined and understood, clarity is achieved. In this conception of the collective investigation of reality, truth is not a compromise between opposing interest groups. Nor does the desire to exercise power over one another animate participants in the consultative process. What they seek, rather, is the power of unified thought and action.

In the context of social action, the principle of consultation is expressed in a variety of forms, each appropriate to the space within which it occurs. Often, when a small group is engaged in an endeavour, every matter of concern is the subject of consultation. Yet, within an organization, the principle will find expression in different ways. What should be noted in this connection is that, at times, consultation is undertaken between those regarded as equals with the aim of reaching a joint decision, as in the case of the deliberations of a Spiritual Assembly. Under other circumstances, it takes the form of a discussion, as may be necessary, to draw out thoughts and information towards the enrichment of common understanding, but with the decision being made by those with authority. It is this latter form that would distinguish the operations of a Bahá'í-inspired organization, where a degree of individual or group authority is given to those on whom responsibility has been conferred.

Clearly, then, not every person within an organization will participate equally in making every decision. Responsibility needs to be appropriately structured and defined. For example, there will be many spaces in which individuals involved in a particular component of the work will have the opportunity to share insights, reach higher levels of understanding, and make certain decisions pertaining to their area of functioning. In the case of an organization with a board and an executive director, they will often take decisions without the need to consult with every member of the organization. But theirs is also the responsibility to create an atmosphere in which relevant information and knowledge flow openly and in which the results of consultation in all the spaces of the organization are conveyed in ways that promote understanding and consensus among its members.

Beyond such considerations, a consultative spirit pervades the interactions of those engaged in social action, of whatever size and complexity, and the population they serve. This does not imply that formal mechanisms are necessarily in place for this purpose. It suggests, rather, that the aspirations of the people, their observations and ideas, are ever present and are consciously incorporated into plans and programmes.

(iii) Action and reflection on action

At the heart of every development endeavour is consistent, systematic action. Action, however, needs to be accompanied by constant reflection to ensure that it continues to serve the aims of the endeavour. Development strategies that are formulated simply in terms of projects with well-stated goals, followed by evaluation of how and why they were or were not achieved, have limitations. An approach to development defined in terms of learning does, at times, admit formal evaluation. Yet, it depends far more on structured reflection woven into a pattern of action, through which questions can emerge and methods and approaches be adjusted.

Given the multitude of humanity's needs and the enthusiasm with which programmes inspired by the teachings of the Faith are frequently received, it can be tempting for a Bahá'í-inspired organization to try

to pursue every opportunity and become engaged in frenetic action. Learning to be systematic and focused is a challenge that all those involved in development efforts, from a small group to the community itself, have to meet.

A notion that has proven useful in this respect is that of a line of action. A line of action is conceived as a sequence of activities, each of which builds on the previous one and prepares the way for the next. Endeavours often begin with a single line of action, but gradually a number of interrelated lines emerge, constituting a whole area of action. For example, to be effective, even an effort at the grassroots focusing solely on the area of child education needs to simultaneously follow such lines of action as the training of teachers and consciousness-raising in the community about education, as well as attending to the teaching-learning experience.

Focused, systematic thinking and persistent, meticulous labour do not, of course, detract from the spirit of service that animates social action. While paying attention to the smallest practical details, one can be occupied with the most profound spiritual matters. A distinguishing feature of any Bahá'í endeavour has to be the emphasis it places on the spirit with which action is undertaken. This requires from the participants purity of motive, rectitude of conduct, humility, selflessness, and respect for human dignity. As Bahá'u'lláh states:

One righteous act is endowed with a potency that can so elevate the dust as to cause it to pass beyond the heaven of heavens. It can tear every bond asunder, and hath the power to restore the force that hath spent itself and vanished.

(iv) Utilizing material means

To accomplish their aims, endeavours in the area of social action require material means. There is a tendency among many organizations in the world—including those working to achieve praiseworthy ends—to measure success principally in terms of the amount of money received and spent. Bahá'í development efforts are expected to set aside such criteria. In modest instances of social action, resources are typically contributed by the community. A more complex endeavour will have to acquire greater capacity to draw upon and utilize funds. In the case of a Bahá'í-inspired organization, this may extend, as mentioned earlier, to receiving grants from donor agencies. Here great care is required to ensure that, in attempting to secure funds, an organization is not distracted from its primary purpose: capacity building within a given population.

However modest the amounts expended may be, it is vital that a system be put in place to oversee the proper management of finances. The integrity of an endeavour is, of course, secured by the trustworthiness and honesty of its participants. Yet, a proven system of financial management within an organization serves to protect against an atmosphere of carelessness and imprecision that can open the door to temptation.

In addition to a sound financial system, the question of efficiency needs attention. What should be avoided are limited conceptions of efficiency, for instance, those that consider only the relation of output to material input, even when the latter includes some quantitative measure of effort. A more sophisticated understanding of efficiency seems to be required. With regard to input, for example, work that is motivated by a spirit of service and an inner urge to excel clearly has a different value than work that is used as a vehicle to advance one's personal interests. As to results, to give another example, the accomplishment of a particular task—say, the construction of a small facility for a school—may be far less important than the development of the participants' capacity to cooperate and engage in unified action.

There is also a wealth of spiritual and intellectual resources upon which endeavours can draw, whatever the material resources available. A number of these are mentioned in the Bahá'í writings, such as

“unrelaxing resolve and harmonious cooperation”, “energy, loyalty and resourcefulness”, “determination”, “spirit of absolute consecration”, “organizing ability”, “zeal”, “tenacity, sagacity and fidelity”, “single-minded devotion”, “absolute dedication”, “perseverance”, “vigour”, “courage”, “audacity”, “consistency”, “tenacity of purpose”, “tenacity of resolution”, and “unrelaxing vigilance”. What the Bahá’í community has so far achieved in the work of expansion and consolidation with limited material means is a testimony to the efficacy of these spiritual resources, which should be increasingly extended to the sphere of social action.

Those involved in social action also need to be constantly aware of the solemn responsibility for the money that has been placed at their disposal. In this connection, it is helpful to keep in mind the attitude Bahá’ís evince in relation to the sacred funds of the Faith—contributions are offered liberally, joyfully, and sacrificially, and institutions observe prudence and a high degree of economy in the expenditure of that money.

V. Guiding principles

Social action, it has been suggested in this paper, is to be carried out in the context of a much larger enterprise—namely, the advancement of a civilization that ensures the material and spiritual prosperity of the entire human race. The fundamental teachings of the Faith that will inspire this civilization, some of which have been mentioned in these pages, need to find expression in the sphere of social action. Clearly, the application of the requisite principles to the social and material progress of communities involves a vast process of learning.

In general, a challenge for any instance of social action is to ensure consistency—among the explicit and implicit convictions which underpin an initiative, the values promoted by it, the attitudes adopted by its participants, the methods they employ, and the ends they seek. Achieving consistency between belief and practice is no small task: a deep-seated recognition of the oneness of humanity should prevent all efforts from fostering disunity, isolation, separateness or competition; an unshakeable conviction in the nobility of human beings, capable of subduing their lower passions and evincing heavenly qualities, should serve to protect against prejudice and paternalism, both of which violate the dignity of people; an immutable belief in justice should guide an endeavour to allocate resources according to the real needs and aspirations of the community rather than the whims and wishes of a privileged few; the principle of the equality of women and men should open the way not only for women to assume their role as protagonists of development and benefit from its fruits but also for the experience of that half of the world’s population to be given more and more emphasis in development thought. These few examples illustrate how closely spiritual principles are to guide development practice.

If contradictions are to be avoided, the participants in an endeavour need to become increasingly aware of the environment within which their work advances. On the one hand, they are to freely draw insights from the range of philosophies, academic theories, community programmes and social movements within that environment and to keep current with the technological trends that influence progress. On the other hand, they should remain watchful lest they allow the teachings to be bent into conformity with this or that ideology, intellectual fad or fashionable practice. In this connection, the capacity to measure the value of prevalent approaches, ideas, attitudes, and methods in the balance of the Faith is vital. This capacity enables one, for example, to uncover the aggrandizement of self so often lying behind initiatives that are nominally concerned with empowerment, to discern the tendency of certain development efforts to foist upon the poor an entirely materialistic worldview, to perceive the subtle ways in which competitiveness and greed can be promoted in the name of justice and prosperity, and ultimately to abandon the notion that one or another theory or movement which may fleetingly acquire some prominence in the wider society can provide a shortcut to meaningful change. The following passage written by the Universal House of Justice provides guidance in this connection:

Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation is vast. It calls for profound change not only at the level of the individual but also in the structure of society. "Is not the object of every Revelation", He Himself proclaims, "to effect a transformation in the whole character of mankind, a transformation that shall manifest itself, both outwardly and inwardly, that shall affect both its inner life and external conditions?" The work advancing in every corner of the globe today represents the latest stage of the ongoing Bahá'í endeavour to create the nucleus of the glorious civilization enshrined in His teachings, the building of which is an enterprise of infinite complexity and scale, one that will demand centuries of exertion by humanity to bring to fruition. There are no shortcuts, no formulas. Only as effort is made to draw on insights from His Revelation, to tap into the accumulating knowledge of the human race, to apply His teachings intelligently to the life of humanity, and to consult on the questions that arise will the necessary learning occur and capacity be developed.