



*Learning
to Respond
to Emerging
New Realities*

Messages from the
Universal House of Justice

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19 October 2005

The National Spiritual Assembly of
the Bahá'ís of the United States

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

As indicated in our message to you dated 21 July 1.1
2005, the Universal House of Justice was pleased to
learn of your interest in drawing upon the experi-
ence of the Bahá'í world in meeting the administrative
challenges associated with large-scale expansion.
At its request, the International Teaching Centre has
prepared the enclosed statement summarizing the les-
sons learned to date in this regard, which, it is hoped,
will assist you in your consultations on the subject.
In reviewing the points examined in this thoughtful
document, the House of Justice has taken the oppor-
tunity to consider a number of issues related to the
efforts of your community to pursue the aim of the
Five Year Plan. Deliberate steps have been taken by
your Assembly in recent months to focus the ener-
gies of the friends on the two movements that lie at
the heart of the Plan, and the prospects for further
impressive achievements by Ridván 2006 look bright.
To reinforce these positive developments and to assist
you in extending the scope of your determined efforts,
the House of Justice has instructed us to convey to you
the following comments.

The promising pattern of action emerging in 1.2
clusters throughout the world integrates individual ini-
tiative and community endeavor in order to embrace an
ever-wider circle of people and teach receptive souls.
This pattern appears wherever a sizable number of

individuals who are moving through the sequence of institute courses make a conscious effort to translate what they are learning into action, undertaking specific acts of service that challenge them to draw upon the knowledge and insights they are gaining and to sharpen the skills and abilities they are developing through the courses. One of the most noteworthy outcomes of the institute courses is the emergence of an ever-increasing number of tutors who, having themselves studied the courses and struggled to walk a path of service, engage others in the study of the sequence, instilling in them the same desire to arise and serve. In this way, a broad base is laid for universal participation, which remains one of the most fundamental goals of the Bahá'í community. You have, yourselves, witnessed this development in the few clusters that have reached an advanced stage of growth.

- 1.3 You have, likewise, observed how the conditions thus created in such clusters have made it possible to launch intensive programs of growth, in which large numbers of friends eagerly participate in the learning that takes place through successive cycles of activity seeking to integrate well-coordinated collective action with effective individual initiative. And you are equally aware of how interaction among three entities—the institute, the Auxiliary Boards, and the Area Teaching Committee—in close collaboration with responsive Local Spiritual Assemblies, can help carry the friends from one cycle to another and accelerate the learning process.
- 1.4 Having come to a good understanding of the dynamics of the development of human resources, the advancement of learning through progressive cycles of a growth program, and the requisite administrative action by institutions and agencies involved at the cluster level, you now need to help the American Bahá'í community focus its energies increasingly on fostering

them. If some two to three hundred clusters were to achieve the level of activity already reached in the Austin and Broward clusters, the present rate of enrollments could multiply tenfold. This is not an abstract possibility, but a practical objective that lies well within your grasp.

Commitment to establishing sound intensive programs of growth in a realistic number of clusters across the nation should provide the basis for addressing the many questions associated with the necessary adjustment of your administrative and financial affairs to meet the challenges of massive expansion. The situation today is not unlike the one you faced in the 1970s when, in the ferment of tumultuous social conditions, and as a result of fresh approaches to teaching, the membership of the American Bahá'í community tripled in only a few years. The demands of growth necessitated a dramatic change in the administration of the community, and a vastly augmented National Center emerged, one that served as a hub for a vibrant network of committees, departments, and programs. This administrative arrangement, complemented by a few modest enhancements, has served the community admirably for over three decades. The Universal House of Justice feels that an effort of similar magnitude may well be needed to put in place administrative mechanisms that will support the work of the community during the next stage of its development. In considering the nature of these mechanisms, you will want to bear certain points in mind. 1.5

With learning about the nature of growth unfolding so rapidly at the grassroots, programs related to the expansion and consolidation of the Faith can best be managed at the regional or cluster level to ensure they evolve in accordance with practical experience. The efforts of national agencies should be examined to determine whether they overlap with the responsibilities 1.6

granted to agencies at those levels. Where redundancies occur, the programs of national agencies may need to be modified significantly, or perhaps be eliminated altogether, so as to avoid creating confusion, diffusing focus, or dividing participation among an array of programs which, no matter how valuable in themselves, would end up at cross purposes, competing for the limited time and energies of the believers.

1.7 Consider, for example, the multiplication of children's classes. You have already made modifications to your institutional arrangements for this purpose, and these must be carefully monitored to ensure efficiency and effectiveness. The regional institutes are charged with responsibility for the implementation and management of the classes, and they require a wide degree of latitude to train the teachers, deploy resources, and collaborate with Local Spiritual Assemblies. The work of the regional institutes is being complemented by a national effort to provide curriculum and make available resource persons. However, if collaboration between the institutes and the National Children's Education and Research Center is not close, or if teachers in the clusters are directed from the national level, bypassing the institutes, the methodical expansion of classes for children, including the outreach to the wider community, will be severely impeded.

1.8 Likewise, the spiritual empowerment of junior youth and their older peers is best addressed by an institute working in the context of an intensive program of growth. An example is the Project Badi in Florida which involved some forty youth during July of this year. In a setting of this kind, training and practice are combined, enhancing the capacities of the youth. Not only do they contribute directly to the activities of a cycle of a growth program, but they return to their home communities transformed

by their summer experience, eager to serve in their schools and clusters throughout the year. This experience, if repeated over a series of summers, could well equip youth with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes required for a lifetime of effective action in the teaching field. Should the number of such projects multiply along with intensive programs of growth, it is not unreasonable to assume that the youth will take their rightful place in the forefront of the processes of the Plan, attract their peers to the Cause, and revitalize the community with an influx of young people. In such an effort, the basic sequence of institute courses constitutes the curriculum for the youth. Though certainly they will broaden their study of the Faith in a number of other ways, a parallel national program for their education would sap the strength of grassroots endeavors and leave them ineffectual.

Plans to reach specific populations—Hispanics, Muslims, etc.—with the Message of Bahá'u'lláh and bring them into the ranks of His followers, too, are most fruitful when they are administered and directed at the cluster level, close to where the learning is taking place. Such an approach seems to be confirmed by your experience with the national media campaign, the effectiveness of which improved markedly when it became more closely aligned with plans of action at the level of the cluster. 1.9

While certain national programs may require significant modification or, quite likely, be brought to a close, others may need to be reconceptualized so that they can better reinforce the processes unfolding at the cluster level. The work of agencies such as the Office of Education and Schools or the Office of Assembly Development may be enhanced by this kind of a review. Your deliberations in this respect may also need to extend to the mandate of the National Teaching Committee. Since the 1.10

establishment of the Regional Bahá'í Councils several years ago, your National Teaching Committee has conducted a range of formal studies on issues pertaining to the role of religion in the wider community, as well as on certain aspects of Bahá'í community life. In addition to this, however, increasing efforts have been made over the past year to evaluate the results of the Five Year Plan through case studies and the detailed analysis of data of various kinds. As the National Teaching Committee strengthens in this way its capacity to systematize the lessons being learned through the action and reflection of the friends in communities scattered across the country, it will be able to offer the knowledge gained to the institutions at all levels and lend further impetus to the movement of clusters nationwide.

1.11 All of this, of course, has implications for the disposition of your financial resources. The allocations you have provided this year to the Councils and regional institutes are highly commendable. Despite contributions made directly by the friends for the work at this level, where self-reliance in support of the material needs of activities and projects is most meritorious, the demands placed upon the National Fund are likely to increase further as the number of intensive programs of growth multiplies significantly. Yet, as noted in your comments to the Counsellors that accompanied your proposed budget for 2005–6, most of your resources are directed towards fixed expenses. As you consider the implications for change inherent in the structural adjustments discussed above, you will no doubt find the practical means to ensure the uninterrupted flow of funds required at the grassroots.

1.12 The American Bahá'í community stands at an important historical juncture. The insights emerging from its own experience, as well as the entire Bahá'í world, endow it with the capacity to reach unprecedented

levels of activity. The burden falls on you and the Counsellors to exercise wise leadership to ensure this capacity is fully developed. The Universal House of Justice will offer continued prayers at the Sacred Threshold on your behalf.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
Department of the Secretariat

ENCLOSURE

Impact of Growth on Administration Processes *Prepared by the International Teaching Centre*

July 2005

2.1 The dramatic progress achieved on all continents in the course of the Five Year Plan has been reflected in many aspects of the life of the Bahá'í community. The training institute process has continued to enhance the capacity of an increasing number of believers to promote the processes of expansion and consolidation. The enhanced sense of ownership and enthusiasm thus generated, reflected in a marked increase in individual initiative, has been especially evident in advanced clusters where the renewed teaching fervour of the friends is directed towards intensive programmes of growth.

2.2 One of the welcome results of this new vibrancy is that there is a growing contingent of believers involved in the work of the Cause, serving in numerous capacities within the framework of the Plan. Meanwhile an expanding community of interest is challenging the Bahá'í community to re-conceptualise its boundaries and cater to the requirements of an ever-swelling body of individuals walking together the path towards Bahá'u'lláh. The progress made has been reinforced by the emergence of a new culture of growth in the community.

2.3 As these developments have continued at an accelerating pace, several national communities have taken steps to reframe their administrative arrangements, so as to align them with the new requirements. Below is a review of some of the most salient aspects of the

developments which impinge on the administration of the processes of growth. This review reflects the experiences of communities in the advance guard of these processes. Whereas in some instances the changes have been relatively minor and adjustments easily made, in other cases they have necessitated a major rethinking of structures and practices.

Administering the process of growth at the cluster level

- 2.4 With the division of countries into small geographic areas, the cluster construct has created a new arena within which the teaching work can be organised on a manageable scale. Large-scale expansion in the past had proven difficult to sustain. Whilst this was principally owing to lack of a systematic process for raising human resources, there was also limited experience with managing the process of growth at the grass roots. In this context, the learning that has been achieved about the administration of growth at the cluster level constitutes one of the major accomplishments in the current Plan.
- 2.5 In its 9 January 2001 letter, the Universal House of Justice placed the locus of the cluster planning work on three entities at the cluster level: "The implementation of such a programme will require the close collaboration of the institute, the Auxiliary Board members and their assistants, and an Area Teaching Committee." In advanced clusters these entities are directly focused on the planning and execution of teaching plans, ensuring that the victories are immediately consolidated, learning is captured, and appropriate adjustments quickly made. Taken together, the three agencies constitute a strong infrastructure, making it possible for many decisions related to the process of growth to be made by those most intimately involved in their execution.

As the specific responsibilities of agencies operating at the cluster level became defined by the House of Justice, in several countries detailed documents that set out the scheme of coordination involving these agencies and their ancillary arms have been developed. Often modelled on the first such paper that was developed in India, these have assisted in clarifying roles and removing ambiguities. These documents have also formed the basis in these countries of the training and orientation of the members of the agencies, necessarily an ongoing process which continues to be refined in light of experience. 2.6

One instance of the training required by the Area Teaching Committee occurred in an advanced cluster in Mongolia. There, the sharp increase in new believers and the complexity of managing the consequent rise in consolidation activities highlighted the urgent need for training of the members of the Committee as well as of members of the Local Spiritual Assemblies in the cluster. The training included a range of important organisational capabilities—data collection and analysis, team building, and computer skills. The collaboration of the Committee, the institute coordinators, and the Auxiliary Board members has enabled this cluster to scale remarkable heights in expansion, consolidation, and human resource development. 2.7

A critically important aspect which cannot be deferred for long is the significant investment of time required from the cluster agencies, in particular the training institute coordinator and the secretary of the Area Teaching Committee—occasionally referred to as the cluster development facilitator. Experience is showing that where the number of core activities, the various campaigns related to the teaching work, and the tasks related to the collection of statistics, among other duties, reach a certain level of complexity, 2.8

part- and eventually full-time workers are required. In such instances, institute coordinators and development facilitators, functioning with increasing effectiveness, are proving indispensable to the greater mobilisation of the rank and file of the believers and the continuity of teaching and consolidation efforts.

2.9 The question is not initially related to whether such staff are remunerated—in many clusters the services of volunteers in these posts are being effectively harnessed. Rather, the issue is one of recognising that the management of the processes of growth requires intensive effort on the part of a dedicated team of individuals functioning in clearly defined spheres at the grass roots. Eventually, of course, it will not be possible for the work to be carried out on a purely voluntary basis and, in time, individuals will need to be employed. Where remuneration is required, new challenges arise related to the use of the funds, and the way in which they are to be generated within the cluster and augmented from outside as necessary. Another challenge is ensuring that a flexible approach is adopted to allow for various employment arrangements.

2.10 Another important consideration is that the sizeable enlargement of the community of interest is proving a spur to the friends and institutions to adopt approaches that minimise the demarcation between Bahá'ís and non-Bahá'ís. As core activities attract an increasing number of participants, the challenge is to meet their needs by making them feel at home within a Bahá'í environment. To administer this new element of the community requires intimate knowledge of their needs and application of systematic attention. It involves regularly communicating with them, engaging them in a single discourse, readily utilising their services and learning how to guide them to an ever increasing commitment to the Cause. All this is greatly facilitated by

having agencies that can function at the cluster level, for this is the arrowhead of learning about all aspects of the growth process. The cluster agencies can put in place the necessary elements such as creating a special newsletter aimed at the community of interest, engaging these new friends in the work of the cluster, or assisting Local Spiritual Assemblies to play their own part in this regard.

Involvement of Local Spiritual Assemblies

The role of the Local Spiritual Assembly is, like that of all other institutions, an evolutionary one, which will develop in relation to the processes of growth. Although observations in this area are still rather preliminary, certain broad conclusions are already discernible. Where Local Assemblies have acquired the new vision of growth and adjusted to the requirements of operating within the context of the cluster, they have greatly enhanced the teaching work. Conversely, where there has been resistance to the new realities, the process of growth has been adversely affected. 2.11

It is instructive to note the effective role that Local Spiritual Assemblies have played in many clusters. In several countries where Assemblies had a low level of functioning, a significant revival of Assemblies in advanced clusters has been observed. The believers are taking responsibility for the election of their Assembly and, once formed, the Assembly is assuming greater responsibility for the affairs of the Cause than ever before. 2.12

In other instances, particularly in the context of intensive programmes of growth, Local Assemblies with a high level of functioning are rising to the challenges created by the programme. Such Assemblies have effectively reinforced the cluster plan formulated by the 2.13

cluster agencies and assumed responsibility for certain elements of the endeavour within their own area. Given that the geographic scope of the planning involved often extends to several localities, a useful practice in the initial stages of development has been for the cluster agencies to share the proposed plan with the Local Spiritual Assemblies in the area. This approach can enhance the Assemblies' ability to lend their support to the programme, and encourages them to take steps to reinforce it in their localities. An example of where this is happening in many instances is the United States.

2.14 As teaching efforts and core activities have multiplied, Local Assemblies have been thrilled to see the opportunities created for serving the wider population. For example, an Assembly in whose area children's classes have multiplied in various neighbourhoods is delighted to know that the community in its charge is able to administer to a greater number of the children of the locality than it was ever possible before. Yet beyond the increased capacity for outreach, the positive effect on the quality of Bahá'í community life has also been reported and is reflected in the enhanced quality of its internal processes.

2.15 These conclusions are drawn in part from a survey conducted by the International Teaching Centre in about fifty advanced clusters throughout the world. The study which assessed the impact of the process of growth on several aspects of Bahá'í community life identified that 90 per cent of the surveyed clusters had experienced improvements in the Nineteen Day Feast, with nearly two-thirds of them also recording a rise in participation levels. Insights gained from conducting devotional gatherings are increasingly reflected in the spiritual programme of the Feast. According to the survey, even the consultative processes at all levels in the community—including Assembly meetings—

have improved in efficacy, becoming more purposeful, united, and focused. It has also been observed that in many instances contributions to the Bahá'í Fund have been positively impacted as levels of commitment and consciousness about its spiritual significance have increased. These successes are owed to the effect of the institute process which, fostering a deep spiritual transformation, has proven more effective in dealing with great numbers of people than most efforts at community and Spiritual Assembly development.

The survey indicated that the most significant initial contribution of Local Assemblies to the processes of growth was providing encouragement to the believers. This was particularly effective when an expansion of vision had resulted from the participation of Assembly members in the institute process as well as the study of Five Year Plan documents. Interactions with the cluster agencies were also identified as enabling Assemblies to make effective contributions. Such interactions often occur at the cluster level in the context of particular plans of action. Another effective approach to building unity of vision and action has been the convening of conferences for Local Assembly members. This approach has been employed in Canada where such gatherings held at the regional or cluster level by Regional Bahá'í Councils have done much to assist Local Assemblies to realign their administrative processes and priorities. 2.16

Beyond these considerations, the leadership role of the Spiritual Assemblies—be they national or local—is of profound importance. It has been observed in many clusters that the processes of growth are greatly enhanced where this leadership role is exercised through the Assemblies' constant effort to maintain the vision of growth before the believers, allowing for the two essential movements to impact priorities, avoiding unnecessary distractions, providing the necessary 2.17

resources, and reinforcing the plans and initiatives at the cluster level. Further, the dynamic force of individual example as the members of Assemblies themselves become personally involved in the cluster activities, actively supporting the efforts of the cluster agencies, is imperative.

Decentralisation and Regional Bahá'í Councils

2.18 Given the far-reaching developments occurring at the level of the cluster and as more intensive programmes of growth are launched, decentralisation of administrative processes becomes ever more important. Accordingly, the strengthening of Regional Bahá'í Councils, where these exist, takes on added significance. The main consideration is related to the devolution of the decision making process to the appropriate level of the Bahá'í administration. In practice, this principle applies both to the devolution of decision making by National Spiritual Assemblies to the regional level, and by the Regional Bahá'í Council to the cluster level. It is increasingly evident that where the framework of the Five Year Plan has been well understood by Regional Councils, through their stewardship of the expansion and consolidation processes in their regions, the aim of a significant advance in the process of entry by troops is becoming realised.

2.19 One approach to the question of decentralisation would be to focus on the relationship of the Councils with the Counsellors, the National Assembly, national committees, and offices of the National Centre, looking at the hierarchy of the various entities involved. However, more relevant to the relation between decentralisation and the aim of advancing the process of entry by troops would be a consideration of whether the administrative structures are consistent with and conducive to growth at the cluster level, particularly

large-scale growth. What many countries are learning is to construct the vision of administrative processes that affect growth from the cluster upwards, asking at each stage what arrangements will best advance the process of entry by troops in this new arena of action.

What is being learnt, then, is that an effective administration with regard to the teaching work is one that aims to release the power of individual initiative, providing the flow of resources and freedom of operation to the coordinating structures at the cluster level. Indeed, one national community which is undertaking a wide-ranging review of its administrative processes, India, began by considering the reality at the level of the cluster, and considered what processes would most effectively ensure the promotion of growth. For this purpose, administration was conceptualised as constituting the channels to facilitate a series of necessary flows—flows of guidance, direction, encouragement, human resources, literature, and information, including statistics. 2.20

The challenge of gathering accurate statistics is being addressed in many countries through the application of the Statistical Report Programme (SRP) devised by the Department of Statistics at the Bahá'í World Centre. What this programme facilitates is the gathering and analysis of key data that enable an accurate and timely picture of the development of the community to be built up. Aggregating the information at the cluster, region, and country levels, SRP provides an important tool for Bahá'í institutions in their decision making process, enabling the prioritisation of resources and lines of action at each level of the administration. Although initially the programme will require the investment of some effort to train a few individuals in its use and to enter the base data, once in place it is proving a valuable aid to the process of decentralisation. Countries that are already implementing the SRP package include some 2.21

with a substantial size of membership, such as Brazil, Colombia, Malaysia, and Zambia.

Impact on administrative processes at the national level

- 2.22 The ongoing process of decentralisation necessitated by the Five Year Plan carries with it profound implications for administration at the national and regional levels. As national communities review their administrative structures, it is heartening to note that in many instances they are doing so in anticipation of a community that is several fold larger in size. Such a perspective is necessitating a significant shift in resources to the regional and cluster levels, as well as inevitable concomitant changes in the size and structure of the National Office.
- 2.23 As stated above, in the vanguard of this administrative review is India where the institutions have, at the encouragement of the House of Justice, begun to reassess and modify the national administration in that country to become better equipped for sustaining and extending the remarkable growth that has been achieved. The challenge has been enthusiastically embraced and has already brought with it a reorganisation of the national treasury office, a restructuring of some of the national agencies, and a streamlining of the flow of information, including statistics.
- 2.24 One area that has required a fresh perspective in many countries is how the national budget reflects and reinforces the priorities of the Plan: human resource development and the advancement of clusters. Where the expansion and consolidation work effectively devolves upon the Councils, in some communities a substantial transfer of funds to these bodies has occurred, as well as an assessment of the resources

needed for sustaining intensive programmes of growth at the cluster level. New budget analyses and formulations have taken into account the decentralisation necessary to fulfil the singularly important aim of a significant advance in the process of entry by troops.

In the United Kingdom the National Assembly, 2.25 responding to the demands of the Plan, reassessed its staffing situation at the national level and managed through streamlining of functions and consolidation of posts to release the necessary funds to substantially increase the financial support for regional institutions. This step, begun in 2002, made it possible to appoint the first full-time regional training institute coordinator, and later to fund a second post, as well as providing the financial support for positions at the cluster level as these become necessary—measures which are making a direct and decisive impact on the impressive development of the process of growth in that country.

The statement in the document Building Momentum: 2.26 A Coherent Approach to Growth related to re-examining administrative approaches has led many national communities to undertake a process of reflection in light of the realities and requirements of promoting a culture of growth. In several cases the number of national committees has been radically reduced to ensure that the processes of growth receive the appropriate priority and that as many believers as possible are released to focus on the teaching work. Kenya and Germany are notable examples.

In several countries, the mandates of committees 2.27 whose functions directly impinge on the processes of growth—such as the National Teaching Committee, the National Child Education Committee, and the National Youth Committee—have been carefully reviewed not only to ensure alignment with the aims of the Plan

but also to examine whether any elements are already covered by other agencies, thus obviating the duplication of effort. In some cases these committees, once considered mandatory, have been deactivated where it has become clear that the essential aspects of their work are already being conducted by other agencies, such as Regional Bahá'í Councils, or training institutes. In Australia increased capacity at the grass roots made it possible for the responsibilities of the National Child Education Committee to be successfully devolved to the Regional Bahá'í Councils.

- 2.28 Clearly, questions related to the role of any particular committee must be decided on a case-by-case basis and no prescription can be provided that would fit every eventuality. Nevertheless, the principle that the new circumstances created by the Five Year Plan necessitate a reconsideration of administrative arrangements at the national level is increasingly being recognised in many countries.

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- 2.29 The emerging experience in the Bahá'í world, reflected in the foregoing observations, is an impressive fruit of the learning mode increasingly evident in every department of the life of the community. As the processes of growth gather pace, there is every expectation that administrative processes and structures will continue to evolve in response to the particular exigencies of each new stage.

5 January 2006

The National Spiritual Assembly of
the Bahá'ís of the United States

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

The Universal House of Justice was impressed by the spirit of your letter of 7 December 2005 from which it sensed the earnestness of your desire and effort to respond effectively to its comments on developments in your country, as conveyed in our letter of 19 October 2005, that indicate a need for adjustments to be made to your administrative structure. It is moved to offer a few comments, as follows, further to assist your thinking especially regarding decentralization in relation to the work of regional institutions. 3.1

The administration of teaching is preeminent among the categories of responsibility in which a National Spiritual Assembly exercises its authority to direct and coordinate the affairs of its community. The execution of this responsibility is of a different character, however, from that of, say, the administration of justice; for whereas the latter is properly concentrated in the activity of the Assembly, which must itself render judgments on cases submitted to it, the former is essentially concerned with efforts initiated and maintained at the base of the community and thus calls for a decentralized mode of management—a means of functioning that makes possible the mobilization of action among the generality of believers, whose individual initiatives must be accommodated in a coherent movement of teaching at the level of clusters. Where rapid 3.2

or substantial growth is occurring, such management ensures that due attention is given not only to executing the plan for expansion and consolidation, but also to addressing the needs of varying patterns of growth from one area to another, to coping with emerging new realities, as well as to applying the lessons of experience in rapidly changing situations. This closeness of attention is not possible from the top, whatever mechanisms may be set in place at the National Center. Particularly at this stage in the evolution of the Divine Plan, when the community must prepare administratively to accommodate entry by troops, your responsibility towards the expansion of the Faith demands a high degree of devolution of administrative authority to appropriate subsidiary institutions, so that the requisites for maintaining progressive activity in the clusters can be adequately met.

3.3 For example, in this context, all programmatic and administrative matters pertaining to growth of the Faith in its area are the proper concern of every Regional Bahá'í Council and are to be dealt with by it in accordance with the requirements for the execution of the Five Year Plan in your community. The Regional Councils are the executive instruments of the National Spiritual Assembly authorized to act on its behalf in devising and promoting programs dedicated to fulfilling the aim of advancing the process of entry by troops. The Councils direct and coordinate the work of cluster agencies, as well as ensure the collaborative involvement of Local Spiritual Assemblies in cluster and core activities.

3.4 In your letter several attempts at decentralization are mentioned that provide examples by which to illustrate a sense of the meaning of the foregoing paragraphs. You state that you have been working with Regional Councils to decentralize responsibility for your Spiritual Assembly development program. The

development of Assemblies in relation to the teaching work is progressing through their direct support for individual initiative and cluster activities, their interaction with institutions operating at the cluster level, and the guidance and support they receive from Regional Councils. The training provided through your National Office complements this process by concentrating on subjects that go well beyond matters of growth, touching on such sensitive and often problematic issues as personal status, family violence, and other questions of a judicial or administrative character. Therefore you are free to continue these efforts, which fall mainly into the category of the administration of justice that you have carried out so well in the past, without the need to transfer them to the Regional Councils. Naturally, in scheduling events for such training, you will no doubt want to coordinate with the Councils to ensure that there is no conflict with the work under way in the clusters.

The proposed changes in your administrative structure that address the education of children and junior youth provide another useful example. Your decision to conclude the training function of the National Children's Education and Research Center is a constructive step. At your request, the Regional Training Institutes will now provide training based on existing materials. The House of Justice feels that the Core Curriculum should be considered as a specialized branch, after Book 3 of the Ruhi Institute's main sequence of courses, that serves the needs of teachers of Bahá'í schools for children. However, in relation to the neighborhood children's classes, which are a natural outgrowth of Ruhi Institute Book 3 and the related branch being developed, you should not insist that the teachers of such classes be trained in the Core Curriculum, although many of them may wish to benefit from such training 3.5

later on. Moreover, it is understood you have materials that have been developed for junior youth and youth. Given the recent decision of the House of Justice as conveyed in its letter of 28 December 2005 to all National Spiritual Assemblies, special programs for junior youth need no longer be produced at the national level, but such material as may be available can be offered to the Regional Institutes as resources they may use at their own discretion. As for youth, every effort should be made to have them complete the basic sequence of courses to assist them to move to the forefront of the work in the clusters. Regarding your interest in obtaining information from the National Spiritual Assemblies of Brazil and India about the operations of a National Training Institute Board, the House of Justice feels that it is not necessary for you to establish such an agency in your country.

- 3.6 The House of Justice is especially pleased by the intensity of your determination to deal with the issues raised in the 19 October 2005 letter and looks forward to hearing of the further progress of your consultations.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
Department of the Secretariat

