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To the Bahá'ís of Canada

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

Following the celebration of the bicentenary of the Birth of the Báb, the Universal House of Justice wrote: “The measure of what you have achieved—not only in the last few weeks, but during a two-year period of remarkable advance now brought to a stunning climax—compels us to address you who are the visible hosts of a movement that has proved itself irrepressible.”ⁱ As the National Spiritual Assembly and the Counsellors gratefully reflected on Canada’s part in those worldwide achievements, we saw a community that has not only flung open its doors to the diverse peoples of this nation, inviting them to the threshold of oneness, but which is itself being molded and shaped by the processes of growth gaining momentum.

The story that is unfolding has in many ways been penned by none other than ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Whose visit to North America and subsequent Tablets of the Divine Plan united the peoples of this continent in a common vision. This vision extended beyond the small band of believers who welcomed Him, to embrace the diverse peoples of the continent whose destiny He declared glorious. On 26 March 2016, the anniversary date of the first of these Tablets and a few short weeks before the launch of the current Five Year Plan, the Universal House of Justice wrote to “the chosen recipients of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Tablets of the Divine Plan, the Bahá’ís of the United States and the Bahá’ís of Canada”:

You have already accomplished that which is worthy of the gratitude and admiration of the entire Bahá'í world, but your mission is far from complete. After a century of resolute action, you should, more than ever before, be able to discern the straight path traced by heavenly inspiration across the many stages of the Divine Plan since its systematic execution began in 1937, and thus grasp the full implications of the latest stage about to open.

The letter continued that the “tasks confronting you are not identical with those of an earlier age” and noted that the worldwide spread of the Faith had been largely accomplished. With our sister communities around the world, we stood “ready to face the sterner challenges that lie ahead”. What would be a sterner challenge than the diffusion of the Faith around the entire planet, we might have asked? “The movement of your clusters to the farthest frontiers of learning will usher in the time anticipated by Shoghi Effendi at the start of your collective exertions, when the communities you build will directly combat and eventually eradicate the forces of corruption, of moral laxity, and of ingrained prejudice eating away at the vitals of society.”ⁱⁱⁱ

Even a brief glance at the bicentenary celebrations across the country makes it abundantly clear: the narrative of this land begun by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is unfolding before our eyes. Over 30,000 souls commemorated the bicentenary of the birth of the Báb, in some 1200 celebrations small and large, intimate and grand. Of even greater significance was that these celebrations were not isolated events: they were intimately knit into a pattern of community-building activity that has moved clusters at every stage of development along a path towards the “farthest frontiers of learning”. Over the last year in North America, the number of core activities rose by close to 50%, representing thousands of new spaces where deep and meaningful conversation is forging bonds of friendship that are manifest in service. The total number of such activities in North America has grown to at least 15,000 devotional gatherings, study circles, junior youth groups and children’s classes, with 3,400 of these in Canada: a rise of 600 in this country within just six months. Of Canada’s 141 clusters, 119 have established a programme of growth, with 59 of those having moved past the second milestone to become intensive programmes of growth. Of those 59, 14 clusters have more than 100 core activities and are working with larger numbers, with Surrey-Delta-White Rock the most

recent cluster to pass that threshold. This surge in purposeful and systematic activity has created the perfect conditions for the movement of all Canada's clusters along the continuum of growth. This surge, sacred in its nature, has drawn tens of thousands of souls closer to their Creator and ignited in their hearts a longing for transformation, for service. It has created a collective movement among youth and children, among families, among neighbours and neighbourhoods, that is indeed irrepressible.

In the final months of the Plan, we have no doubt that Canada's goal of establishing an intensive programme of growth in 119 clusters will be won. Tens of those clusters will be working with the larger numbers that begin to affect the culture, the very spirit of a place.

It was to this end that the National Assembly wrote to the friends in April 2018, with two calls to service: to a new intensity on the part of all the friends, and to the youth and young adults a special call to set aside time for periods of service in their own clusters or as pioneers to another. In the remaining months of the Five Year Plan, each hour of which continues to be endowed with special potency, with spiritual powers we can but barely imagine, the National Assembly once more raises this call. In these days when the peril of the world cannot be denied, may the Canadian community embark on this final stretch clear-sighted, focussed, confident, assured, each soul with a plan in hand to use the precious gift of time—daily moments, weekends, school breaks, summer vacations—according to their circumstances and opportunities.

These opportunities will vary from community to community, from home to home. Yet, the House of Justice speaks of how everywhere, in every circumstance, an expanding nucleus can engage a growing number of people in a deepening conversation about the application of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation.

Before long, there forms a nucleus of friends in a cluster who are working and consulting together and arranging activities. For the process of growth to advance further, the number of people sharing this commitment must rise, and their capacity for undertaking systematic action within the framework of the Plan must correspondingly increase. And similar to the development of a living organism, growth can occur quickly when the right conditions are in place.

Foremost among these conditions is an institute process gaining in strength, given its centrality to fostering the movement of populations.ⁱⁱⁱ

As the friends work together to create spaces in which such discussions are nurtured and structured, the number of those interacting with the Revelation and reconnecting with their Creator rises. To build capacity to create such spiritually-charged environments and to channel the longing to serve that is ignited therein, are among the aims of the training institute. In turn, the institute strengthens as we learn to invite many more to participate as protagonists, as builders of communities. In this way, a “broader cross section of the population is being engaged in conversations, and activities are being opened up to whole groups at once—bands of friends and neighbours, troops of youth, entire families—enabling them to realize how society around them can be refashioned.”^{iv}

Among those reading this message will be the friends gathered at Canada's unit conventions. We raise these questions for your consideration and that of the delegates to the National Convention that you will be electing.

- In their letter dated 8 November 2019, the Universal House of Justice spoke of the bicentenary: “Celebrations within families and among families featured prominently; gatherings organized by youth for their peers were likewise a strength.” “Festivities were given added depth through conversations on the needs of society, often begun by the parents of young children.” What was your experience of this strength, and how did you connect the celebration to an ongoing conversation? How were the youngest ones involved, and how have you continued to engage entire families?

- “And the way that each avenue of activity became a natural invitation to engage with the institute was especially noticeable.” What did you see in this regard? What are the next steps?
- In the Tablets of the Divine Plan, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá spoke of some of the conditions that foster growth: firmness in the Covenant, fellowship, love, unity and a focus on teaching. What is being learned about supporting and assisting each other on this path?
- As the institute process is offered for all ages, and participants number in the hundreds, the need for facilities and staff for programs asserts itself. At last year’s National Convention, inspired by the consultation of the delegates, the National Assembly increased the total expenditure budget to \$10.2 million, to meet the needs of the hour. How can the goal of universal participation in generating these resources be advanced?
- Finally, the special role of the young in this movement has been embraced by the entire community. What concrete measures can be taken to further support the youth in their sacred work of carrying the Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh to the children of Canada, to junior youth, to their youthful peers and to their siblings, parents and grandparents?

A mighty task awaits, calling for prayerful, inspired and systematic action on the part of individuals, communities and institutions alike. This next stage builds not only on such recent achievements as we have seen surrounding the bicentenary celebrations, but on a legacy that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá so powerfully described in the Tablets of the Divine Plan. It continues a movement that began with His travels to North America and the movement of His pen in the Tablets. A small number of heroes and heroines who loved Him arose to bring His vision to life, a band whose numbers have now risen to hundreds of thousands.

At the beginning of the Plan, the House of Justice wrote to the Bahá'ís of the United States and the Bahá'ís of Canada, a joyful and sobering call:

This is a time for jubilation. Take pride in the sacrifices and victories of so many devoted souls who arose in response to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s call. With the same spirit of renunciation shown by your predecessors, cast away the idle fancies and distractions of a world that has lost its way that you may consecrate yourselves in the next five years to the priceless opportunities and inescapable obligations of the latest stage of a spiritual enterprise on which the fate of humanity ultimately depends.^v

In the fleeting months that remain, your consecrated efforts are in our ardent, loving prayers.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY
OF THE BAHÁ'ÍS OF CANADA



Karen McKye, Secretary

ⁱ 8 November 2019, The Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of the world

ⁱⁱ 26 March 2016, The Universal House of Justice to the chosen recipients of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Tablets of the Divine Plan, the Bahá'ís of the United States and the Bahá'ís of Canada

ⁱⁱⁱ 29 December 2015, The Universal House of Justice to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors

^{iv} Ibid

^v 26 March 2016, The Universal House of Justice to the chosen recipients of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Tablets of the Divine Plan, the Bahá'ís of the United States and the Bahá'ís of Canada