

[AUTHORIZED TRANSLATION FROM PERSIAN]

8 May 2017

To the Bahá'ís of Iran

Dearly loved Friends,

As the ninth year of the imprisonment of the former members of the Yarán draws to an end, they continue to be deprived of their basic human rights. Vast numbers of people in Iran and throughout the world look forward to the conclusion of this prolonged and illegal confinement. Although some of those who were imprisoned for serving the Bahá'í Institute for Higher Education have been released after completing years of unjust sentences, others remain in prison. And still others continue to be jailed for various contrived reasons. Promoters of education and learning, who view the establishment and continuous functioning of the Institute as one of the most brilliant examples of constructive resilience, demand an end to the deprivation from access to education suffered by the Bahá'í youth of Iran.

In reality all of you, whether veteran Bahá'ís or new believers, are subject in some way to injustice and cruelty, to oppression and tyranny, at the hands of the ignorant and the prejudiced. The policy of economic strangulation directed against you is executed under various pretexts. The humiliation of Bahá'í schoolchildren and expulsion of university students continues unabated. The malicious attacks upon Bahá'í homes, followed by the confiscation of property, the arrests of individuals, the demands for heavy bail, and the issuing of baseless verdicts in the courts, are unceasing. At the same time extensive negative propaganda, spread through officially controlled media and defamatory films designed to inflame the public mind against a portion of the citizens of the country, is constantly increasing. This prejudice and inequity towards law-abiding citizens is routinely perpetrated by some of the officials who claim to be proponents of Islamic justice.

The specious character of the oppressors' claims is now clear and evident to all. Some of the events of the past year have left no doubt in the minds of the people of Iran and beyond, that the rigid fanaticism and worldly considerations of some among the religious leaders are the real motive for all the opposition and oppression against the Bahá'ís. The representatives of the country on the international stage are no longer able to deny that these acts of discrimination are in response to matters of belief and conscience. Officials, lacking any convincing explanation for their irrational conduct and unconcerned at the damage done by their narrow policies to the name and credibility of the country, find themselves unable even to give a plausible answer to why they are so apprehensive about the existence of a dynamic Bahá'í community in that land.

The wide-ranging activities of large numbers of people in thousands of localities throughout the world over the next few months will be a demonstration of joy and devotion in recognition of the two hundredth anniversary of the Birth of Bahá'u'lláh. It will also be a

reflection of hope and confidence in the process of building vibrant communities in His Name. Your compatriots, upon hearing this news, will come to learn that although the Bahá'ís in the land of the birth of this Faith are subjected to such intense prejudice, the Bahá'í vision and principles are greatly admired and appreciated throughout the rest of the world. One example of this appreciation is the recent message from the President of one of the most populous countries of the world who, at the start of the bicentenary year, has publicly invited the citizens of his country to reflect on the life of Bahá'u'lláh and on His unifying teachings. The esteem of the peoples of the world for the goals and teachings of this world-embracing spiritual movement that arose from Iran is, no doubt, a source of pride for all pure-hearted Iranians.

Beloved friends: those intoxicated by the ephemeral power of this world and unaware of the spiritual potency of the dawn-tide supplications of the oppressed and of the heartbreaking sighs of the wronged have vainly imagined that they will ultimately succeed in crushing the community of the Most Great Name in that land. Yet, observe how in the past few decades, and particularly in the last ten years, the awakening of the people of Iran to the reality of the Bahá'í community in their midst and the situation that confronts it, their sympathy for the injustices you have experienced, and their solidarity with you in building a diverse and united society have created precious opportunities for collaboration. With faith, then, in the divinely ordained decrees and confidence in the compelling power of the Will of God, and with inspiration from the Bahá'í Writings, sustain your efforts in the promotion of fellowship and brotherhood which are the true foundations for the progress and glory of Iran and be assured of the continuous outpouring of divine confirmations and the coming of the blessed day of freedom and tranquillity.

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]