

From a letter of the Universal House of Justice dated 13 January 2015 to an individual

The Universal House of Justice has received your email letter of 7 August 2014, in which you seek guidance regarding the response of Bahá'ís to conflicts, such as that in the Middle East, and the humanitarian concerns they cause, and has asked that we convey the following.

The heart of a Bahá'í cannot but be distressed when contemplating the desperate state of global affairs. The friends must remember, however, that the conflicts, injustices, and suffering they observe are symptoms of the disintegration of the old world order. Ultimately, political affairs must be reordered and the lesser peace established, for humanity is a single entity and the best interests of any part are inextricably bound up with the best interests of the whole. Yet, so long as particular nations, peoples, and political factions pursue their own interests, whether by political, economic, or military means and often at the expense of others, the great challenges facing humanity will remain insoluble. While each side portrays its position in terms of what is just and right, using whatever means available to gain public favor — especially the media and global forums — Bahá'ís must be careful not to be drawn into such arguments, for they are the well-wishers of all peoples and nations. “Let them refrain from associating themselves, whether by word or by deed, with the political pursuits of their respective nations, with the policies of their governments and the schemes and programs of parties and factions”, Shoghi Effendi stated. “In such controversies they should assign no blame, take no side, further no design, and identify themselves with no system prejudicial to the best interests of that world-wide Fellowship which it is their aim to guard and foster.”

In regard to the political events occurring in the Holy Land, the attitude of the Bahá'í community is succinctly stated by Shoghi Effendi in a letter dated 14 July 1947 to the chairman of the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine, which may be found on pages 287–88 of Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánum's *The Priceless Pearl* (London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1969, 2000 printing).

You ask why, in connection with certain political conflicts, Bahá'ís do not at least become involved at a humanitarian level. Generally speaking, Bahá'í involvement in humanitarian assistance is provided by the community where believers reside, and, as you are no doubt aware, there is no community of believers in Israel, only volunteers serving for temporary periods at the Bahá'í World Centre. To the extent possible, the World Centre supports activities in the Holy Land related to promoting a spirit of mutual respect and cooperation among the country's religious communities. The contribution in Haifa to building good relations among the city's religious and ethnic groups goes back to the time of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and is well known. It is interesting to note that Haifa is regarded as the city that has the most harmonious relations among the diverse citizenry of the land.

As to your question whether Bahá'í institutions may take action in relation to the oppression of others, such as various groups in Iran, Bahá'í institutions can, and do, take part in activities that defend the human rights of others. For example, the Bahá'í International Community has often spoken out about the oppression of other religious and ethnic minorities in Iran. Of course, in determining what kinds of activities Bahá'ís and Bahá'í institutions may take part in, a crucial distinction should be drawn between those that possess a partisan political character — participation in which would be contrary to Bahá'í principles — and those that do not.
