

# National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United Kingdom

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Dearly loved Friends,

We would like to convey to you our deepest love and warmest greetings and share a few of the significant themes of our consultations over the past few months. In our most recent meetings, we have had the great blessing of being able to explore in depth with Counsellor Shirin Fozdar-Foroudi a range of areas that have become integral elements of the life of this Bahá'í community. Their further evolution in the years ahead is certain to increase the scope and depth of our community life, and our progressive interaction with wider society.

### **Intellectual life of the community**

One such focus of recent consultations has been the development of the intellectual life of the community. Two successful seminars were held in Edinburgh and London on the weekend of 7-8 November at which interested friends had the opportunity to study together recent guidance from the Universal House of Justice on this theme.

In its Ridván message of 2010, the House of Justice stated, “Access to knowledge is the right of every human being, and participation in its generation, application and diffusion a responsibility that all must shoulder in the great enterprise of building a prosperous world civilization—each according to his or her talents and abilities.”

Both arms of the administrative order recognise the need to work together to create an environment in which well-conducted and appropriate intellectual activity can flourish. The two recent gatherings offered a space for exploratory consultation, without preconceived outcomes. The excellent contributions made by the friends in both meetings will inform further our consultations about how to move ahead in this important area.

### **Institute for Studies in Global Prosperity (ISGP)**

Among the significant developments of the past decade has been the growth and consolidation of the seminars offered by ISGP for young believers pursuing higher education. The seminars aim to assist them in meeting the particular challenges they encounter while studying and to give them the tools to participate in discussions with their peers and teachers.

At its meeting on 30 October - 1 November, the National Spiritual Assembly enjoyed an illuminating and fruitful consultation with the members of the ISGP coordinating unit in the United

Kingdom. It was gratifying to learn that 2015 was the eighth year of the ISGP seminars being run here and the first time that the full four years of the programme were carried out concurrently during the summer.

It will be fascinating in the years to come to see how Bahá'í students increasingly apply the concepts they have been studying with ISGP, within their various fields of endeavour. And it is our hope that attendance in these seminars will become as much part of families' expectations for their children, as are the pursuit of children's classes, junior youth groups, and a Year of Service at earlier times in their development.

### **Office of Public Affairs (OPA)**

At its most recent meeting (11-13 December), the National Assembly was able to explore in depth the burgeoning public affairs work with members of the OPA coordinating team.

It is evident that OPA is developing greater clarity in the arena of discourses and how it is developing thinking to provide content on contemporary themes. Particularly noteworthy is the way OPA has continued to respond swiftly and effectively to the calls of the Bahá'í International Community in defence of our beleaguered brethren in Iran, and how that work is clearly beginning to correspond to the discourses on the role of religion in society and freedom of religion and belief.

Many believers throughout the United Kingdom are deeply involved in interfaith work, in interactions with civil society, and are engaging in conversations in the workplace and other social spaces. It is important we become increasingly confident and equipped to offer Bahá'í perspectives, and the National Assembly and OPA are eager to see more materials developed to assist the friends in their meaningful conversations.

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The House of Justice in its Riqván message of 2015 reminded us that all activity begins with the simple strand of love for Bahá'u'lláh held in the heart of the committed believer. Dearest Friends, our constant, loving prayer is that God may assist each and every follower of the Blessed Beauty in the United Kingdom to transform that simple strand of love into a life of dedicated service to humanity and the building of a prosperous civilisation He sacrificed His all to bring about.

With warmest Bahá'í greetings,

*National Spiritual Assembly*

NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY OF THE BAHÁ'ÍS OF THE UNITED KINGDOM