

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

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10 January 2012

From the Table of the National Assembly

The National Assembly is pleased to share news of some of its consultations and decisions from recent meetings.

Letters from the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís in the Cradle of the Faith, Iran

Over the past several years, in the midst of the great tribulations suffered by the believers in Iran, the Cradle of the Bahá'í Faith, the Universal House of Justice has provided that community with messages of consolation and guidance. These letters identify the essential challenges that Iranian society faces today and the response of the Bahá'í community to these challenges. In totality, they give a vision of the spiritual character of a just and prosperous society built upon principles such as the oneness of mankind, the equality of men and women, the importance of consultation in human affairs, social justice, and the centrality of family life. They call upon the Bahá'ís in Iran to respond to the severe persecutions they face by striving to translate these spiritual principles into social reality and to share their hard-won understanding with neighbours, friends and co-workers, exploring with them how together they can play a constructive role for the betterment of their society.

The National Assembly at each of its meetings will study and reflect on one of these letters. These letters are extraordinary in themselves, but read in the context of the reality of a persecuted community their tone and content are unprecedented. They stand out as a beacon light for the whole of humanity, and especially for suffering peoples everywhere.

Communications from the World Centre

The National Assembly considered a letter from the Universal House of Justice dated 1 November 2011 concerning “further development in the process by which the Universal House of Justice, in order to concentrate on matters requiring its direct attention, has progressively referred to various departments at the World Centre subjects that can be handled in other ways.” The House of Justice continue:

“As a further step in this process, the House of Justice has asked us to inform you that the range of incoming communications to which the Office of Correspondence will respond has been expanded and will include queries received from Baha'i institutions and individual believers that can be answered by sharing responses provided on previous occasions to similar questions. In carrying out this function, the Office, in accordance with policies laid down for this purpose, will draw on a large body of communications sent over the years by the House of Justice or on its behalf. Of course, it is hoped that the friends will, in the first instance, direct their inquiries to their Local or National Spiritual Assemblies.”

It is interesting to note that the friends are encouraged to initially direct their inquiries to their local or National Assemblies.

Training Institute Board

During each of its last three meetings the National Assembly had the privilege and pleasure of consulting with Counsellor Shirin Fozdar-Foroudi. At its last meeting a full-day consultation which focused on the development of the institute process in the United Kingdom, was inspired by the study of yet another remarkable letter of the Universal House of Justice, dated 12 December 2011, on aspects of the development of the training institute. Those friends who wish to read this letter should email resource@bahai.org.uk or write to 27 Rutland Gate, London SW7 1PD to request a copy.

Owing to the recent appointment of a new contingent of Auxiliary Board members – a number of whom had been serving on the Training Institute Board – it proved necessary for the National Spiritual Assembly to reappoint the Institute Board. A separate announcement has been made to the community concerning this. The National Assembly also gave some thought to the development of its own relationship with the Training Institute Board through means such as meeting with the entire Board at intervals and the involvement of its own members at gatherings of coordinators and so forth.

Junior Youth activities

The National Assembly was delighted to learn from the Counsellor that the junior youth resource person for Northern Europe (which includes the United Kingdom), Clare O'Brien, will be giving particular attention to the development of resources for the junior youth programme in London and will be spending more time in this cluster. The Assembly is aware that junior youth coordinators are currently striving to identify and raise the capacity of souls who wish to serve as animators of junior youth programmes. They are also seeking to engage those many friends who can host meetings, talk to parents and neighbours, and generally provide the back-up needed to sustain these activities. The National Assembly is particularly pleased to see how junior youth activities across the UK are evolving and increasing in number. Indeed, through the experience gained in coordinating this process, a model of coordination is emerging which is providing invaluable learning for other activities of the institute process.

Defence of the Bahá'ís in Iran

The National Assembly reviewed the efforts of the Office of Public Affairs to bring attention to the plight of the friends in Iran and in particular in light of the recent sentencing of 7 Bahá'í educators associated with the Bahá'í Institute for Higher Education, as well as the UK communities support of the Bahá'í International Community's efforts to have a resolution passed at the General Assembly of the United Nations expressing concern at the human rights situation in Iran, including that of the Bahá'ís .

Climate Week 2012

The National Spiritual Assembly consulted on the involvement of the Bahá'í community in Climate Week 2012. This National Assembly approved of this and, in due course, the Office of Public Affairs will provide the community with further information.

Financial matters

During its November and December meetings the Assembly considered the first and second draft of the budget for 2012-13. This will be finalised at the January meeting later this month.

The Assembly has also continued its extensive efforts to devise a systematic and clear remuneration policy for those serving the National Assembly who require financial assistance. This on-going project, which is based on clear principals set out in guidance from the Universal House of Justice, will arrive at a coherent and equitable scheme of remuneration which has regard for the needs of an individual and the spirit of service which all Bahá'í service entails.

Pioneering

Also considered recently were policies and guidelines in relation to what constitutes a pioneer move and what is the distinction between a short and a long-term pioneer. In addition, the Assembly consulted on the question of the “place of residence” of a short-term pioneer and their eligibility to exercise administrative responsibilities in their home country whilst at their pioneer post.

If any believer is interested in receiving these guidelines, please contact resources@bahai.org.uk or write to 27 Rutland Gate, London SW7 1PD.

Training of local Spiritual Assemblies

The National Assembly is very conscious of the fact that there is currently no training available to support local Assemblies in their efforts to fulfil their responsibilities. It is also aware, however, that in time courses of the Ruhi Institute will evolve to fulfil this need. In the absence of these courses, the Assembly has taken steps to prepare some “light-touch” materials which it hopes will be adequate in the interim. These are still being developed and it is hoped to pilot them in the coming months.

The spirit of service and the use of funds

Some time was spent by the National Assembly consulting on the need to foster a spirit of service and volunteering in all fields of endeavour. The Assembly wants to find a balance between making use of the most skilled friends in various areas, some of whom may require financial assistance to carry out a service, and the need both to minimise the burden on the funds of the Faith and to encourage voluntary service. In this connection, the National Assembly will, at a future meeting, study a specially prepared compilation on the spirit of service, volunteering and offering financial assistance so as to gain a deeper understanding of this theme.

Queen’s Diamond Jubilee Event at Lambeth Palace, 15 February 2012

The National Assembly was delighted to learn that the Bahá'í community had been invited to send representatives to Lambeth Palace, together with eight other major religious groups in the United Kingdom, to meet with the Queen to mark her Jubilee year and to show Her Majesty a “treasure” which will demonstrate something of the significance of the Faith. The National Assembly is engaged in on going consultation about the choice of a “treasure” which will have some association with the history of the Cause in this country.

Prayers

At each of its meetings, that National Assembly has a devotional which is offered for an extensive list of individuals, institutions, projects and so forth. The Assembly invites the community to send to the National Assembly for inclusion on this prayer list any requests for prayers.