

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

June 16, 2022

To the participants in the  
fourth ARISE conference

Dearly loved Friends,

We can imagine no more appropriate an occasion for the gathering of the fourth ARISE conference than the days leading up to Juneteenth, a celebration, as you well know, marking the freedom, resilience, and radiant spirit of the people of African descent. In the symbolism of that holiday—that all were not free until all were free—we find too the spirit of Bahá'u'lláh's mighty Cause, which in itself is an invitation to true freedom: freedom from want, freedom from prejudice, and freedom to pursue our noble purpose—to refine our inner characters and to contribute to the betterment of the world. As we together lend our energies to realizing this goal, we continue to strive with all our hearts to ensure the day will come when all will be gathered under the tent of universal unity and know justice, peace, and tranquility.

However bright the future promised by the Beloved of the Worlds, we readily acknowledge how disintegrative forces such as materialism, prejudice, unfettered individualism, and religious fanaticism continue to assail humanity and retard its progress towards the realization of the unification of mankind. Among the most grievous manifestations of these forces are the demonstrations of racial prejudice and violence in our country. Indeed, only a month ago, the lives of 10 African American citizens were snuffed out in a mass shooting motivated by that odious and loathsome affliction. Even as we join you in prayer for the progress of the noble souls lost to gun violence, we look to the believers in this land to channel their shared grief into action. However discouraging the present events, however outrageous the injustices laid bare, however intractable the problem appears, such fresh evidences of this pernicious blight on American society cannot disorient you, the devoted followers of the Blessed Beauty; for while we are not immune from the suffering of our fellows, we do not, as Shoghi Effendi assured us, have to be confused. You—a people referred to by Bahá'u'lláh Himself as *“the pupil of the eye”* through which *“the light of the spirit shineth forth”*—know with certitude that by striving to translate His vision into reality, the scourge of racial prejudice will be effaced from the earth and a divine civilization, promoting the nobility and honor of all its members, will be firmly established.

It is clear that bringing this vision to life entails learning—learning how to draw on reservoirs of solidarity and collaboration; how to elevate the existing conversations on race relations and to set in motion more constructive approaches; how to, in the words of the Universal House of Justice, “draw insights from the Writings to sensitively and effectively address issues of racial prejudice that arise within [your] personal lives and families, among community members, and in social settings and the workplace;” how to concentrate on “practical challenges in specific settings through consultation in an atmosphere of love and common purpose;” and how to “become founts of love and create environments wherein the spirit and practice of race unity are prevalent,” so that “individuals of different races will have the intimate connection of heart and mind upon which mutual understanding and change depend” and “every trace of race prejudice will ultimately be removed.” In this present series of Plans now opening, the National Assembly hopes that the American Bahá'í community will emerge as the preeminent, acknowledged champions of the oneness of humanity. This is our aim.

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Page 2

You have now gathered to celebrate and draw inspiration from the spiritual gifts and heartfelt contributions of the Black people of the world toward realizing this vision. How fitting that these days of inspiration will be focused on the arts, which, as you well appreciate, have been elevated to the rank of worship in this Dispensation. Indeed, the arts have received the highest praise in the Holy Writings, being variously referred to with epithets such as *"a ladder for your souls,"* a *"gift of the Holy Spirit,"* and *"the food of the soul and the spirit."* Indeed, with regard to its effect, the House of Justice has explained that *"the day will come when the Cause will spread like wildfire when its spirit and teachings will be presented on the stage or in art and literature as a whole. Art can better awaken such noble sentiments than cold rationalizing, especially among the mass of the people."* We trust that all of the artistic presentations during this conference will uplift, stir, and edify you.

As these days of purposeful celebration fill your hearts and spirits, our hope is that you will feel inspired and encouraged to render even greater service to the Cause. The friends of African descent have been at the forefront of the frontiers of learning about raising up vibrant communities that serve as beacons of hope in this country, and we know that you are, as stated in our letter of June 3, 2021, *"instrumental to the growth and development of a truly just, inclusive and unified society in this land."* Your spiritual insights will be critical in assisting us all to achieve the single aim of this newly launched series of Plans: to release the society-building power of the Faith in ever-greater measures. We stress the importance of this work; every people has a share in the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, and all must be gathered together under this banner of oneness. As the Supreme Body has explained, *"in its early stages, the systematic effort to reach out to a population and foster its participation in the process of capacity building accelerates markedly when members of that population are themselves in the vanguard of such an effort"* as those *"individuals have special insight into those forces and structures in their societies that can, in various ways, reinforce the endeavors under way."* May the steps you take in pursuit of the framework of the Plan, shoulder-to-shoulder with your fellow believers and all well-wishers of humanity, bring our sorely-tried world ever closer to that promised Kingdom of God on earth, that hard-won era of heavenly peace.

The statements of Bahá'u'lláh and the beloved Master about the pupil of the eye serve as a brilliant metaphor, which invite us to reflect on a range of meanings about an image with profound spiritual import. As we continue to contemplate this special designation bestowed upon you, our hearts are deeply moved and humbled, and we stand ready and committed to support you—in prayer, word, and deed—in all your undertakings for the betterment of the world.

With warmest Bahá'í love,



Kenneth E. Bowers  
Secretary