

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

15 December 2020

Transmitted by email:

U.S.A.

Dear Bahá'í Friend,

The Universal House of Justice has received your email letter of 28 June 2020, in which you share your sense of disappointment in relation to the response of the Bahá'í community to the specific concerns of African Americans in the United States. Also received was your email letter of 2 July. We have been asked to convey the following and very much regret the delay in our response.

The House of Justice sympathizes with your deep concern about the issues you have raised and acknowledges your sincerity and desire to see the Bahá'í community and the wider society make progress with addressing these challenges. It encourages you not to become disheartened by any problems you encounter. As Shoghi Effendi explained, “the promised glories” envisioned by Bahá'u'lláh “can be revealed only in the fullness of time”; it is our test and privilege at this juncture in the Formative Age to learn how to systematically propagate His teachings and translate them into effective action as a remedy for the world's multiplying ills.

The House of Justice is confident that you can trust that your fellow believers, who faithfully embrace Bahá'u'lláh's principle of the oneness of humanity, share your longing for the complete elimination of racial prejudice. Yet, Bahá'ís are not immune from the negative forces operating in society at large, which may result in misunderstandings and a delay in responding to challenges. At this time, the people of the United States do not have unity of thought and vision about how the problem of racial prejudice can be resolved; they are, instead, divided socially and politically on this issue. As you witness, even among Black intellectuals, as well as within the African American community more generally, there are disparate views. Therefore, rather than becoming enmeshed in patterns of behavior pervasive in the wider society that seek to assign blame or deal with issues at the level of broad generalities, Bahá'ís have the opportunity to address the challenge of racial prejudice through the instrumentality of the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh and His Administrative Order. They do so by concentrating on practical challenges in specific settings through consultation in an atmosphere of love and common purpose.

Every believer can address the improvement of his or her own character. Each can strive to work alongside others to ensure that the social spaces in which they participate—especially in families, local communities, places of work and education, Bahá'í activities, Spiritual Assemblies, and committees—manifest freedom from prejudice in all its forms. Furthermore, the framework for action of the current Plan enables the believers to expand the reach of these efforts by engaging others in neighborhoods and clusters in the process of community building, initiatives for social action, and the prevalent discourses of society. In these contexts, when a

specific concern is identified, the believers and their friends can explore the problem together and then participate in a process of learning how to resolve it, while eschewing any inclination toward withdrawal or conflict. Thus, day by day, in practical ways, they learn to solve particular problems that arise and at the same time build capacity to address more complex issues.

As the friends around the world have adopted this approach to address problems in diverse societies, promising signs are already appearing in many places where the Plan's framework for action has taken root. For example, in the Bihar Sharif cluster in India, the oppressive influence of the centuries-old caste system is gradually being undone at the grassroots. The communities in this cluster are learning to mix without regard to caste, so much so that the friends are visiting the homes of families from different castes. To cite another example, in the Lubumbashi cluster in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the inequality between the sexes has long prevented women from speaking in the presence of men in various social spaces. Now, however, women have been given the courage to freely share their ideas and consult with men in different settings.

You indicate that you have decided to focus on spreading the Faith among African Americans and to dedicate yourself to their advancement and upliftment. This will, no doubt, allow you to learn how to create a social space for individuals to come together in a new pattern of engagement. The House of Justice hopes that you might find one or two other like-minded believers who can assist you in applying the instruments and methods of the Plan to cultivate a dynamic and growing pattern of community life. In this regard, when reaching out to those from the wider community, you can present the message of Bahá'u'lláh as the healing remedy for the ills of humanity and invite the receptive souls you encounter to become protagonists of a constant effort to learn to apply His teachings effectively, explaining that Bahá'ís are also learning to walk this same path. As 'Abdu'l-Bahá is reported to have remarked: "The earth plane is a workshop, not an art gallery for the exhibits of perfect powers. This is not the plane of perfection, but earth is the crucible for refining and moulding character".

You are also encouraged to turn to your National Spiritual Assembly, as the House of Justice is confident that you will receive a sympathetic hearing, and share with it your observations; these will undoubtedly prove to be beneficial as the Assembly guides the process of learning in your country.

Be assured of the supplications of the House of Justice in the Holy Shrines that you and all those who are laboring to promote unity and justice in your country through the redeeming message of Bahá'u'lláh may be divinely guided and assisted.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

cc: National Assembly of the United States