

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

26 February 2021

Transmitted by email:

U.S.A.

Dear Bahá'í Friend,

The Universal House of Justice has received your email letter of 7 October 2020, in which you share your observations about some of the social and political issues in the United States as well as your views on your Bahá'í community's approach to addressing these issues. We have been asked to convey the following and very much regret the delay in our reply.

The sincere interest in the welfare of your country and its peoples that has prompted you to write is acknowledged. It is clear that you are generally aware of the principle of non-involvement in politics enunciated by Shoghi Effendi; this principle not only demands that Bahá'ís strictly avoid any type of partisan political activity but also requires that they refrain from becoming involved in debates surrounding any political controversy or reacting, orally or otherwise, in a manner that could be taken as evidence of support for a partisan political stance. Moreover, it is not for Bahá'ís, in offering social commentary, to vilify specific individuals, organizations, or governments or to make attacks on them. “Except to speak well of them, make thou no mention of the earth's kings, and the worldly governments thereof”, was the counsel of ‘Abdu'l-Bahá to one believer. Therefore, Bahá'ís should be circumspect in the manner in which they mention any political figures when making public comments, regardless of whether such comments are sympathetic or critical.

You express concern about the lack of response by Bahá'ís in your community to the many injustices prevalent in society and believe that their reluctance to join peaceful protests, to write to their civil representatives, and to participate in local and national elections is due to a misunderstanding of the injunction in the Bahá'í writings against involvement in partisan politics. At the outset, it is important to distinguish between partisan political activity and the discourse and action intended to bring about constructive social change. While the former is proscribed, the latter is enjoined; indeed, a central purpose of the Bahá'í community is social transformation. In society at large, often in an attempt to resolve a social problem, a political change is engendered without a concurrent effort to transform people's understanding of the applicable underlying principles. In some instances, this can give rise to counter political action by others to eventually undo that change. However, Bahá'ís recognize that the root causes of the many ills afflicting society in this age of transition are spiritual and moral, and it is this understanding that shapes their approach to working for social transformation. Thus, the believers are engaged in initiatives across the globe which seek to bring about meaningful and enduring change on both a social and individual level—change that is guided by a shared understanding of the exigencies of this period in human history and the means for addressing

them. Of course, individual Bahá'ís are, in principle, free to participate in those efforts and activities, such as peaceful rallies, that uphold constructive aims in order to support a specific movement intended to effect some immediate social change. However, should such activities gradually become diverted from their original purpose and assume a partisan character or degenerate into violence, they must of course be avoided. As part of their participation in these efforts, Bahá'ís also endeavor to share insights from the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh with others in order to elevate the conversation surrounding the search for solutions. You may wish to turn to your National Spiritual Assembly with a view to learning about the range of activities under way in your country.

To assist in your ongoing reflection on this matter, two communications are commended to your study: a letter dated 2 March 2013 written by the House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of Iran and subsequently shared with all National Spiritual Assemblies, and a letter dated 27 April 2017 written on behalf of the House of Justice to an individual believer, both of which concern the relationship between the principle of non-involvement in political affairs and engagement in social action and public discourse. These letters can be found on the Bahá'í Reference Library at the address set out below. Furthermore, in connection with some of the particular issues you have raised in your letter, enclosed is a selection of extracts on the subject of political non-involvement and social transformation, which you will no doubt find useful.

Rest assured of the supplications of the House of Justice at the Sacred Threshold that the efforts of the believers in your country and their compatriots to work for the betterment of humanity may be blessed and confirmed.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/the-universal-house-of-justice/messages/

Enclosure

cc: National Assembly of the United States