

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

October 15, 2024

To the American Bahá'í community

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

Conscious of the fact that humanity stands at an important juncture in its collective development, Bahá'ís everywhere are selflessly responding by redoubling their efforts to spread the healing message of Bahá'u'lláh through myriad means. Some of these involve online activity. Given the abundance of these lines of action, and the vast possibilities as well as potential pitfalls of this means of communication, the National Spiritual Assembly feels it timely to remind the friends of certain principles laid out by the Universal House of Justice that guide individual initiative in this area.

In a letter written on its behalf to selected National Spiritual Assemblies, dated February 10, 2021, the House of Justice noted the eagerness of the believers who, during the COVID-19 global health crisis, were able to “sustain the majority of their activities for the expansion and consolidation of the Faith—and often to even multiply them—by hosting them online.” Further, it observed that “other online activities that are coherent with the general direction of the community’s endeavours in service to the Cause and to humanity...can enrich the pattern of Bahá'í life.” However, the House of Justice reminded the friends of the “need for vigilance in ensuring that the primarily local character of community activities is not diluted,” writing:

As activities being held online multiply, you will wish to be particularly attentive to the possibility that they may be conducted in a manner that departs from well-understood principles and practices that guide the affairs of the Bahá'í community. It is, for example, quite easy for online gatherings organized by individuals to take on a regional, national, or even international scope, sometimes involving large numbers of a hundred or more participants. This type of gathering, no matter how well intended, is of a fundamentally different character than an individual initiative within the Bahá'í community. While many of these meetings may not, in themselves, be problematic, nevertheless, they may introduce various challenges, such as causing the friends to become inward looking, reducing the number of believers initiating their own activities, disengaging individuals from the local experience, or diminishing the effectiveness of the plans of local or regional institutions or agencies. They may even inadvertently intrude upon the prerogatives of Bahá'í institutions in other countries. Generally, it would not be appropriate for an individual initiative that aims to promote the Faith through the use of the Internet, and particularly social media, to direct its conceptual focus and content towards an audience beyond its own national community. Nor should an individual initiative assume responsibility for matters or activities that should be undertaken by Bahá'í institutions. It is left to each National Assembly to offer guidance to the friends in their endeavours, to ensure that institutions at the appropriate level are actively involved in overseeing or organizing gatherings when appropriate, and to offer specific counsel to particular individuals as necessary.

Another principle to bear in mind is that the online initiatives of individuals, while freely pursued, should be presented in a way that clearly distinguishes them from the initiatives of Bahá'í institutions. In a letter written on its behalf dated October 9, 2015, to a National Assembly, the House of Justice counseled:

The friends are generally free to determine what aspects of the Teachings they wish to touch upon in their contributions but in doing so should clearly distinguish their sites from those created by the institutions.... In addition, individuals will no doubt wish to avoid a tone that could be perceived as authoritative or instructional. They will also want to steer away from areas that lie exclusively within the sphere of institutional responsibility, such as offering a comprehensive collection of the writings and of the messages of the House of Justice or an exhaustive calendar of Bahá'í events across many countries. This becomes particularly significant when the visibility of a website increases and it gains prominence. As the institutions guide the friends in adopting the proper posture, the aim is not to unduly restrict their efforts but to avoid confusion and misinformation.

In the same letter, regarding the standard towards which the friends should aspire in their online discussions, the House of Justice further states:

Bahá'ís should embody moderation, courtesy, and humility in any discussion in which they take part—whether in person or online.... As they aspire to achieve the Bahá'í standard, the friends should endeavour to rise above, rather than emulate, widely employed techniques of persuasion and sensationalism, which are often reductive or crass, and must always remain conscious that they are striving for “an etiquette of expression worthy of the approaching maturity of the human race”.

Dear friends, we are confident you will take to heart the guidance of our beloved Supreme Body as you eagerly pursue your devoted services to the Faith. The two letters referenced herein are attached in their entirety for your further reflection.

Please be assured of our prayers on your behalf, that you may find bountiful confirmations in your strivings to be practitioners of peace in every social space you occupy.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,



Kenneth E. Bowers
Secretary