

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

28 December 2005

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

In the coming weeks you will be engaged in consultations on the features of the next Five Year Plan as described in our message dated 27 December 2005 to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors. We feel that these deliberations will benefit from the following comments regarding the curriculum of the training institute.

When in our message dated 26 December 1995 we underscored the need for a formal programme of training, we were aware that certain elements of a curriculum meeting the necessary requirements existed in the materials of the Ruhi Institute. It was our conviction, however, that the accumulated experience at that point did not justify our recommending a specific set of materials to be used by training institutes throughout the world. Therefore, the messages written by us and on our behalf in the early part of the Four Year Plan encouraged National Spiritual Assemblies and the Counsellors to open the way for training institutes to follow whatever curriculum they deemed appropriate. Yet, conscious of the inherent difficulty in creating comprehensive programmes, we repeatedly expressed the view that the execution of plans should not await protracted decisions on the question of curriculum and that materials readily available should be used. The availability of such materials was limited worldwide, and National Spiritual Assemblies and institute boards began to adopt the books of the Ruhi Institute as they became aware of them, often through the Counsellors. By the time the Four Year Plan came to a close, it was all too apparent that national communities which had vigorously set out to implement the sequence of courses designed by the Ruhi Institute were far ahead of those who had attempted to develop their own programme.

It was the Five Year Plan, however, that served to convince Counsellors, National Assemblies and boards everywhere of the merits of the Ruhi Institute curriculum. The introduction of the seventh book in the Institute's main sequence at the start of the Plan enabled many to appreciate more the intimate connection between the flow of individuals through a sequence of courses and the movement of clusters from one stage of growth to the next. Indeed, as progress was achieved in hundreds of clusters, it became clear to institutions at all levels that the content and order of the main sequence prepared the friends to carry out those acts of service required by the pattern of growth being established in a cluster. We have, in fact, described the dynamics of this relationship in our message of 27 December 2005.

We have now familiarized ourselves with the Ruhi Institute's present plans for curriculum development, which increasingly draw on experience worldwide in sustaining large-scale expansion and consolidation. We welcome the decision of the Institute, for example, to move the book currently occupying the fifth position in the sequence to a set of courses branching out

from Book 3 for preparing Bahá'í children's class teachers and to insert in the fifth place a new book for raising up animators of junior youth groups. That the eighth book in the main sequence, initiating a series concerned with the institutional aspects of service to the Cause, will address the all-important question of the Covenant is noted with equal pleasure. With these thoughts in mind, we have reached the conclusion that the books of the Ruhi Institute should constitute the main sequence of courses for institutes everywhere, at least through the final years of the first century of the Formative Age when the Bahá'í community will be focused on advancing the process of entry by troops within the framework for action set forth in our 27 December message.

To select one curriculum to be used by training institutes worldwide for a certain period of time is not to ignore the variety of needs and interests of the friends as they endeavour to better equip themselves to understand and apply the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh. Nor does it in any way diminish the value of the efforts made to develop courses and materials to respond to these needs. It is not intended to suggest, either, that one curriculum should necessarily appeal to everyone. What this decision does imply, however, is that the present demands of the growth of the Faith are such that, for some years to come, training institutes should not attempt to meet all of the needs and interests of the friends.

The institutions of the Faith will continue to respect the wishes of those who, for whatever reason, do not feel inclined to participate in the study of the books of the Ruhi Institute. Those not so disposed should recognize that there are many avenues of service open to them, including, above all, individual teaching which is the paramount duty of every Bahá'í. Local deepening classes and summer and winter schools, which remain an important feature of Bahá'í community life, will provide ample opportunities for them to deepen their knowledge of the teachings. What we ask of such friends, as we have in the past, is that they not allow their personal preferences to hamper in any way the unfoldment of an educational process that has shown the potential to embrace millions of souls from diverse backgrounds. Regarding the materials that have been developed in other contexts over the years, and which will continue to emerge, these surely have their proper place in the Bahá'í community. Some, for example, form the basis for deepening classes at the grassroots, while others, with the necessary modifications, can be situated along one of the branches of courses stemming out from the Ruhi Institute's main sequence.

In this connection, we feel that the subject of branch courses deserves a few words of explanation. In our message dated 9 January 2001 to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors, we indicated that the main sequence could be likened to the trunk of a tree, which supports other courses branching out from it, each branch addressing some specific area of action. A set of health materials being developed in Africa offers a good illustration of a few features of such courses. Following years of training community health workers in the late 1980s and early 1990s, several Bahá'í agencies decided to elaborate a series of modules aimed at preparing individuals to deal with progressively more complex health issues at the local level. By the time the first module began to be used in its initial form, the institute process had gained in strength, and it became evident that those who had studied Books 1 and 2 of the Ruhi Institute were better prepared to visit members of their extended families and friends and speak on health-related subjects. The design of the modules was modified so that they could constitute a branch after Book 2, which participants study while they continue along in the main sequence. Efforts in this direction have met with definite success. This example illustrates that branch courses are

not a disconnected collection of materials randomly placed at various points. Rather, they must emerge out of actual experience and adhere to a certain logic, both internally and in the context of the overall institute programme, if they are to be pedagogically sound. Further, the very concept of a branch course suggests that it provides training for an area of service which will interest only some of those who are studying the books of the main sequence. We hope that the development of such courses to address specific needs, defined by action on the ground, will be a natural consequence of the endeavours of burgeoning communities which are avidly striving to translate into reality the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh and to use training materials as a means of systematizing their experience and sharing with increasing numbers the insights they gain.

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cc: The Hand of the Cause Dr. 'Alí-Muḥammad Varqá
International Teaching Centre
Boards of Counsellors
Counsellors