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To the friends gathered at Canada's unit conventions

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

It is with joy that the National Spiritual Assembly greets you, participants in a unique electoral process described in the powerful 18 January 2019 message of the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of the world as itself an expression of peace. Indeed, as you gather to elect your delegates to the National Convention and consult about the progress of the Cause this year, your deliberations will be lifted by the House of Justice's stirring, sobering description of the forces propelling the peoples of the world towards peace and the role that Bahá'ís and their collaborators play in hastening the fulfilment of that promise.

At Ridván 2018, the Universal House of Justice greeted the Bahá'ís of the world “in the enduring afterglow of those memorable events that marked the bicentenary of the Birth of the Blessed Beauty” and noted the capacities that had developed in a community that was not the same as it had been at the beginning of the Plan. It was more conscious of its mission, and had surged in its capacity to “bring friends and acquaintances into contact with its community life; to inspire neighbourhoods and villages into unified endeavour; to articulate how spiritual truths can be translated into sustained practical action; and, above all, to converse not only about the teachings that will build the world anew, but about the One Who taught them: Bahá'u'lláh.” In this afterglow, warmed by the remarkable receptivity of friend and stranger alike, the community was summoned to the next great work in the period leading up to the second bicentenary celebration: to nurture patiently towards fruition every seed so lovingly sown during the first.

It is to this work that the National Assembly turns in this message. Thrilling news has reached us of the seeds that have been lovingly planted by enkindled gardeners across the country. Among the creative and earnest responses to the two calls in the National Assembly's 6 April 2018 letter — the first to all the friends to intensify their teaching efforts until the bicentenary of the Birth of the Báb, and the second to the youth, to devote time to service and to arise as pioneers — are the following.

- A flow of encouragement, experience and resources has increased between adjoining clusters across the country, with examples as geographically varied as Ottawa, Cornwall and Lanark in the Ontario region, and Prince Edward Island and South East New Brunswick in the Atlantic Provinces.
- Summer and winter institute campaigns involved over 600 friends of every age. In more than 30 clusters, youth devoted time during their summer vacations to strengthening the junior youth programme, learning to connect with entire families. In a Calgary neighbourhood, for example, 50 junior youth, their siblings and parents are engaged and they aim to increase that number to 80 families by the bicentenary. Junior youth camps in the city of Québec and in Montréal last summer channelled the service of youth and attracted 45 of their younger peers.
- Sustained devotional gatherings across the nation are now kindling and connecting hearts in over 1,400 homes, attracting a regular participation of at least 8,000 souls.
- In British Columbia, half a dozen neighbourhoods have each grown from a small core of individuals to at least 100 regular participants in core activities. In Toronto, one neighbourhood grew from 8 core activities to 23 in 8 months, and social action has begun to emerge in the form of regular homework help for youth and English conversation circles for parents and their friends. A strong movement of youth pioneers has supported this growth and in turn been generously supported by Local Spiritual Assemblies, families and communities.

- Outside of larger urban centres, the signs of growth are equally promising. In a small town in Saskatchewan, the children’s class taught by the grandparents of a few school-age children grew into a summer children’s festival that attracted over a dozen of their friends. In Muscowpetung First Nation, the junior youth group has grown beyond 15 junior youth, an extension that has happened naturally as the junior youth themselves have taken ownership of the programme. In the Arctic communities of Inuvik, Pond Inlet and Iqaluit, children’s classes and junior youth groups have been established to join those already existing in other far northern settlements, beacons of light in the darkness of a long winter.

One of the most striking capacities that was developed and refined in celebrating the bicentenary of the Birth of Bahá’u’lláh is that of working in groups. In a society which suffers increasingly from social isolation, there is a critical need to strengthen this treasured capacity and apply it in new ways in the community-building work: “Participation in these foundational activities is becoming so embedded in the culture of the population that it is viewed as an indispensable aspect of the life of a community. A new vitality emerges within a people taking charge of their own development, and they build immunity to those societal forces that breed passivity. Possibilities for material and spiritual progress take shape. Social reality begins to transform... There must emerge in many hundreds of clusters a growing band of believers who can maintain, with those around them, a sustained focus on nurturing growth and building capacity, and who are distinguished by their ability and their discipline to reflect on action and learn from experience. Raising up and accompanying an expanding nucleus of individuals in each place—not just at the level of the cluster but within neighbourhoods and villages—is at once a formidable challenge and a critical need. But where this is occurring, the results speak for themselves.”¹

Among the questions we ask you to consider and share insights about at this unit convention are the following:

- What have you discovered in your attempts to nurture the seeds planted during the first bicentenary, and what support did you need? How have you intensified your efforts? If the spirit of intensity has waned, what is needed to rekindle it between now and the next bicentenary?
- What experience can you share of working as part of a group of friends that seeks to itself grow, to nurture growth and build capacity?
- How might the capacity to work in groups be applied to devotional gatherings, which are often considered an individual or family activity? The International Teaching Centre describes groups who study guidance together, expand their reach to include not only family and friends, but also neighbours, and then regularly reflect and learn together. What experience has there been in this regard?

Dear friends, in the fleeting months that remain until the bicentenary of the Birth of the Báb, precious and irretrievable opportunities await. The intensity of focus to which the National Assembly summoned the friends during this period of special potency holds the potential of a leap forward, a further transformation in our community life. Through your efforts, tens of thousands of Canadians — original to this land, settled for generations or newly arrived — are finding a home in a community that is drawing “nearer and nearer unto the threshold of oneness”², filled with confidence in the future and determined to act. Our ardent, grateful prayers are with you.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,
NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY
OF THE BAHÁ’ÍS OF CANADA



Karen McKye, Secretary

¹ Universal House of Justice to the Bahá’ís of the world, Ridván 2018

² ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Tablets of the Divine Plan*, p. 95