

19th Annual Black Men's Gathering

Green Acre Bahá'í School

Eliot, Maine

United States of America

July 16, 2005

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Australia

Dearly loved Friends,

The participants of the 19<sup>th</sup> Annual Black Men's Gathering sends you its warm and humble greetings from the Green Acre Bahá'ís School in Eliot, Maine, United States!

For the past two decades, Bahá'í men of African descent have gathered in a spirit of unconditional love and fellowship, embracing and sharing experiences with others whom Bahá'u'lláh likened to "the pupil of the eye". These men gather in an atmosphere of safety and brotherhood, expressed by so many participants to be unlike any other atmosphere on the globe where they experience a unique opportunity to know and love God while also learning how to know and love themselves. This year, the gathering is pleased to announce that over 120 black Bahá'í men are in attendance from all over the United States as well as various parts of the globe. We write to you with particular delight and enthusiasm as one of the gathering's participants, Frederick Landry, has recently pioneered to Australia and presently lives in Melbourne, Victoria.

The gathering, founded and facilitated by member of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States, William Roberts, provides daily experiences that are always special and unique. The mornings at the gathering include traditional African drumming followed by an hour or two of powerful prayers and song. We continue the day's events by reading and consulting on a particular message or letter from the Bahá'í World Centre. Each day also includes the sharing of learnings and successes of the past year as well as the development of strategic and systematic plans for the year to come.

Each year the gathering reads and consults on the Ridván Message and discusses its implications for the Bahá'ís of the world and in particular for the members of the Black Men's Gathering. The members of the gathering are committed to continuing to advance

the Cause through the directives of the Supreme body in the final months of the Five Year Plan by continuing to conduct children's classes, plan devotional gatherings and facilitate study circles. What may be of particular interest to the Bahá'ís of Australia is the style of devotionals that have developed at the annual and local gatherings and devotionals all over the United States. In these, a particular spirit continues to be captured where African drumming, prayers and songs are offered in a unique format where those present are encouraged to participate, as they feel moved. We are confident that you will be pleased to welcome such devotionals in the spirit and style of the Black Men's Gathering and have asked that our brother Frederick bring this with him upon his return to Australia.

At this year's gathering, we were fortunate to be visited by a member of the Continental Board of Counsellor for the Americas. Counsellor Eugene Andrews addressed the gathering urging the brothers to continue to focus our energies on the three core activities as well as ensuring that we are focusing on our community of interest thus leading to an increase in human resources and ultimately more souls being attracted to the Faith. We pledge to do this and are empowered by his words describing the spirit and fruits of this gathering of black men by declaring, "This is the make a difference Gathering."

We ask for your prayers as the participants leave here and return to their homes all over the world to put into practice our individual commitments and assure you of our prayers for your service and the entire Australian Bahá'í Community.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Participants of the 19<sup>th</sup> Annual Black Men's Gathering