

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

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Transmitted by email: WRoberts@usbnc.org

The participants of the Black Men's Gathering
c/o Dr. William Roberts
U.S.A.

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

The letter from the participants of 2011 Black Men's Gathering has been warmly received by the Universal House of Justice. It was pleased to note that a portion of the gathering was devoted to a study of the 28 December 2010 message concerning the new Five Year Plan, as well as the letters dated 1 April 1996, 3 June 2007, and 10 April 2011, which have particular relevance to African American believers.

A quarter century ago, the Black Men's Gathering was established with the aim of soothing hearts that had sustained slow-healing wounds and cultivating capacity for participation in a world-embracing mission. The approach involved drawing together a small number of participants from across the country with a capable facilitator. As you well know, in the Bahá'í Faith, the watchword of which is the oneness of humanity, it is no small exception to make arrangements for an assemblage that excludes others by race and gender. Yet, acknowledging the uncommon circumstances, the House of Justice lent its support to your endeavor with high hopes and expectations. For these many years, the Gathering has served its members as a bulwark against the forces of racial prejudice afflicting your nation, and, indeed, attacking the Bahá'í community itself, creating an environment in which injuries could be tended, bonds of unity strengthened, sparks of spirituality fanned into flames, and the capacity for assuming the responsibility for the work of the Cause gradually developed through experience in the field of action. The House of Justice hopes that, from the various communications you have studied, you have perceived that the time has now come for the friends who have benefited from the Gathering to raise their sights to new horizons.

The impact of the unfoldment of the Divine Plan is making itself felt in all continents of the world. The result is not only demonstrated in the growth in numbers and the invigoration of community life, but also in the stirrings of the society-building power of the Faith, as discussed in the 28 December message. During the last Plan, Africa particularly distinguished itself through its achievements. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, more than 90 intensive programs of growth emerged. In the single cluster of Tiriki West in Kenya, more than 500 empowered individuals established a pattern of community life that embraced some 5,000 souls. Reports received from junior youth groups made it evident that thousands of young minds and spirits were galvanized and transformed as young people displayed a new attitude

toward their communities, their families, and their education, determined to resist and cast aside the burdensome yoke of social ills such as tribalism. And in the establishment of hundreds of community schools across a dozen countries, the friends demonstrated their ability to apply Bahá'u'lláh's teachings to an embryonic educational network that made its mark on the spiritual, social, and material education of children, in many instances surpassing the performance of government schools.

The experience of the last five years and the recent guidance of the House of Justice should make it evident that in the instruments of the Plan you now have within your grasp everything that is necessary to raise up a new people and eliminate racial prejudice as a force within your society, though the path ahead remains long and arduous. The institute process is the primary vehicle by which you can transform and empower your people, indeed all the peoples of your nation. You have the capacity to serve as, and to prepare others to be, educators of children, animators of junior youth, teachers of the Faith, tutors of study circles, participants in elevated discourse, and initiators of social action. Let the well-prepared army you have assembled advance from its secure fortress to conquer the hearts of your fellow citizens. What is needed is concerted, persistent, sacrificial action, cycle after cycle, in cluster after cluster, by an ever-swelling number of consecrated individuals.

In the next year you will observe the centenary of the visit of 'Abdu'l-Bahá to your shores and will recall His tireless and heroic exertions to quicken the peoples of America—in particular His fearless assault on racial barriers. Follow in His noble path, so that by the end of this new Plan and the one to follow, you will have an abundant harvest of victories to offer in His name by the centenary of His passing in 2021.

Rest assured of the supplications of the House of Justice at the Sacred Threshold that the Almighty will confirm and reinforce your devoted efforts to bring the light of Bahá'u'lláh's Message to an ever-increasing number of receptive souls.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat