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## National Spiritual Assembly

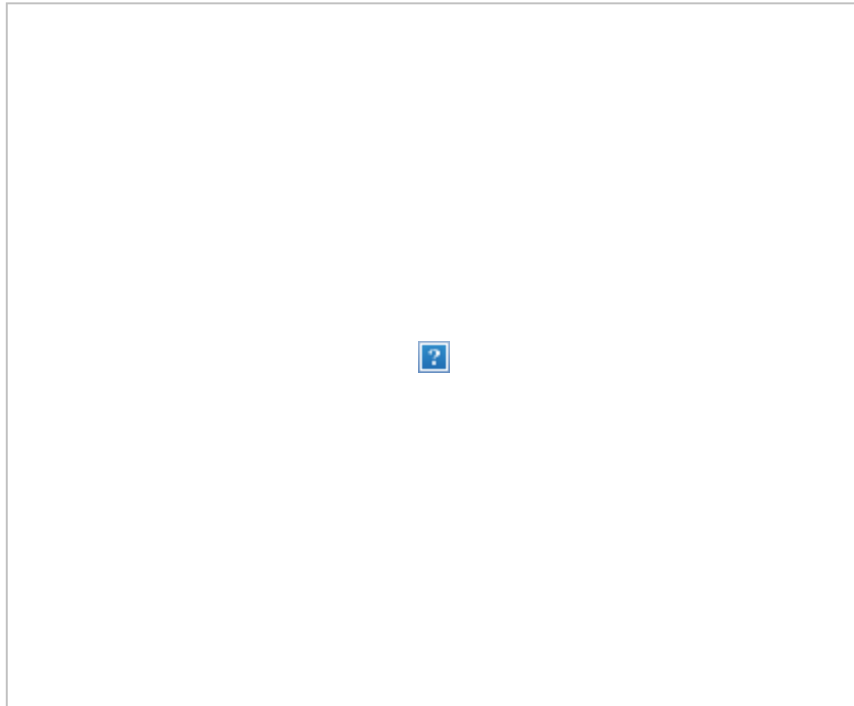
### From the Table of the National Spiritual Assembly

June 6, 2002

#### DEARLY LOVED FRIENDS

The National Spiritual Assembly sends you its warmest greetings and love. We are happy to share with you some of the highlights of our most recent meeting.

The weekend of May 17-19, 2002 saw the National Spiritual Assembly meeting for the first time this administrative year. We were particularly pleased to have the opportunity to consult for more than four precious hours with Mr Douglas Martin, member of the Universal House



*Eight members of the National Spiritual Assembly pose with member of the Universal House of Justice, Mr Douglas Martin*

of Justice, who had been travelling on a private visit throughout our corner of Europe - from Iceland, through Scotland, Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic, finishing with a week in London before a visit to the Faroe Islands.

Mr Martin conveyed the love of the Universal House of Justice and informed the National Spiritual Assembly of how very pleased he is at the progress of the Faith in this country. He spoke animatedly about his experiences in Scotland, attending the Annual Gathering in Inverness and a youth meeting in Edinburgh. He praised the youth he had encountered in Scotland and Northern Ireland for their energy, enthusiasm, intelligent questions and dedication to the Cause. In both places, he had encouraged the youth to consider dedicating time to travel teaching in the Faroe Islands which is a priority for pioneers and travel teachers.

Mr Martin was deeply impressed by the commitment and capacities of the Bahá'í Councils he had met with, saying the decentralisation process in the UK is working extremely well, and is very promising for the imminent growth of the Cause. He was pleased about the progress of the training institute process and emphasised the need to establish fully the sequence of courses. Mr Martin offered a fascinating view of the success of Study Circles around the world and talked about the infinite possibilities available to national communities to develop "branch" courses to meet the needs of varied populations, once the

commitment to develop similar courses to meet the needs of various populations, and a central “trunk” of courses has been established.

Among the other subjects that the National Spiritual Assembly was able to consult in depth with Mr Martin about was the arts. He told us that, in his personal opinion, the UK is a powerhouse of creative talent which outshines every other country in the Bahá’í world. He challenged the National Spiritual Assembly to think carefully about how the artists can be assisted to make their unique and invaluable contribution to the Cause not only here but in the whole of Europe. In conclusion, he said he would be very excited to be able to convey to the Universal House of Justice the positive experiences he had in all of his travels throughout the United Kingdom.

Prior to our consultation with Mr Martin, the National Assembly began its meeting by studying the Ridván message of the Universal House of Justice. New insights were gained on the processes underway in the world, in particular relating to the coherence of the three core activities of the Five Year Plan – children’s classes, study circles and devotional meetings – within the framework of clusters. We were also interested to note from the message the Universal House of Justice wrote to us following our National Convention how developing the training process further is the key to the multiplication of the core activities.

The other major consultation of the weekend was with Counsellor Shahriar Razavi on the subject of child education. The Counsellor explained how the three core activities of the Plan are in fact, three facets of the teaching work because the Universal House of Justice has now identified them as portals to entry by troops. The consultation on Bahá’í education, in particular how it can be effectively opened to all, and how it can multiply as an activity, and integrate with the other two core activities was very illuminating and fruitful. The National Assembly has no intention of diluting the efficacy of existing structures which currently serve the needs of Bahá’í children. However these must be developed further and serious attention now needs to be paid to what it means for children’s education to be a portal to entry by troops.

This is not a subject that can be rushed, however, as a wide range of issues such as curriculum, teacher training and the organization of children’s education needs to be addressed. A number of documents from the Universal House of Justice and the International Teaching Centre have been shared with the National Assembly for ongoing study and consultation. The National Assembly will be keeping the Bahá’í Councils, Training Institute boards and the Children’s Bahá’í Education Service fully informed of its thinking on the development of children’s education.

The National Spiritual Assembly is looking forward immensely to meeting the believers in London on Saturday, June 15 at Baden-Powell House, 65-67 Queen’s Gate, London SW7 5JS (nearest underground stations are Gloucester Road and South Kensington).

With warmest Bahá’í love

The National Spiritual Assembly

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## **Press conference launches open letter from the Universal House of Justice to the religious leaders of the world**

May 14, 2002

DEAR FRIENDS

A press conference this morning at 27 Rutland Gate publicly launched an open letter from the Universal House of Justice to the religious leaders of the world. The message is both an encouragement and a warning. It identifies religiously motivated hatred and fanaticism as one of the greatest dangers facing the world today, and it calls on leaders of faith to demonstrate, by their own example, their unshakeable commitment to eradicating religious conflict and intolerance.



and violence.

It points out that the essential oneness of humankind has largely been accepted as the basis for international law and as the norm against which the conduct of peoples and governments is judged. In religion, however, divisions are still all too sharply drawn.

The Universal House of Justice urges religious leaders to take up interfaith dialogue more vigorously and confidently than ever before; to identify common ground and to bring communities together.

*The letter is presented to Chief Rabbi,  
Dr Jonathan Sacks, by National  
Assembly Secretary, Barney Leith*

And the Universal House of Justice warns against the obvious and unavoidable alternative: if interfaith work is left undone, we will see more of the prejudice, hatred and violence that has torn communities and societies apart – even here in the UK.

It is worth highlighting three elements of the House of Justice's message:

Firstly, it acknowledges the wonderful power of religion to motivate human behaviour, although it notes that this power can be harnessed with equal effectiveness for ill, as well as for good.

Secondly, the Universal House of Justice warns in clear and unequivocal language against religious extremism, and the desire of any single faith community to claim a finality or a monopoly on religious truth. Claims of this kind fuel bitter prejudice and hatred between people, and give rise to violence.

And finally, the House of Justice encourages leaders of faith to acknowledge a conclusion which is inherent in the interfaith work that they have been involved in for decades – that the source of the world's great religions is one. From a Bahá'í perspective, this is an inescapable truth. If we acknowledge – as many religious leaders do – that there is “spiritual value” in each of the world's great religions, each of which teaches that there is one God, we cannot simultaneously support the belief that they are inspired by different Gods.

The letter is unequivocal on this point. It calls for a firm acknowledgement that the same divine source underlies all religions. The differences between religions have arisen as a result of their emergence in different cultures, times and societies. Each brings a unique perspective on human spirituality, each offers a marvellous wealth of forms of worship and spiritual discovery. But each is divinely inspired, and there is only one God at the heart of all religions.

On Friday morning May 10, at 9 am, a delegation of two members of the National Spiritual Assembly and Ms Carmel Momen (National Public Information Officer) presented the message to Professor Jonathan Sacks, Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of Great Britain and the Commonwealth, at his home in London.

The Chief Rabbi welcomed the Bahá'í delegation and said that he was a great admirer of the Bahá'ís and of what they do around the world.

Professor Sacks listened intently to a summary of the themes of the message by one of the National Assembly representatives and responded by saying that the message is exactly what the world needs now. “This is the message,” he said, “and this is the moment.”

Throughout the half-hour conversation, Professor Sacks repeatedly emphasised his positive acceptance of the Message of the House of Justice and his high opinion of the Bahá'ís.

As the meeting drew to a close, the delegation presented Professor Sacks with the book published by the Haifa Municipality with photographs and text about the Shrine of the Báb and the Terraces and gardens on Mount Carmel. It was felt that this would be particularly appropriate, given his station as Chief Rabbi. It was immediately clear that he was very

pleased with this gift and he leafed through the book commenting on the beauty of the Bahá'í properties. At the close of the meeting he said, "Convey to your community our blessings and deepest gratitude for the message which you bring and which we need." He promised to read the Message before Shabat started at sunset. The National Spiritual Assembly is thrilled indeed at the tone and outcome of this meeting. It is felt to be very significant that the first recipient of the Message in the UK is the Chief Rabbi, whose influence extends far beyond the shores of these islands.

Yesterday the message was presented by a National Assembly representative (accompanied by Carmel Momen) to the Chaplain to the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Reverend David Marshall. During the meeting at Lambeth Palace Mr Marshall listened carefully and responded sympathetically. He promised to read the message himself and to give it to the Archbishop. He explained that the Archbishop was unable to meet the Bahá'í delegation himself because of the pressure of engagements as he approaches his retirement. Further meetings have been arranged in coming days with the General Secretary of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales (representing the Archbishop of Westminster, Cardinal Cormac Murphy O'Connor), Archbishop Gregorios of Thyateira and Great Britain (the Greek Orthodox Archbishop), and the President of the Methodist Conference.

Arrangements are being made for meetings with other national religious leaders in the near future. Arrangements are also being made for meetings with religious leaders in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales through the respective Bahá'í Councils.

The message has to reach religious leaders and congregations at all levels. Before too long the National Assembly's task force (as instructed by the House of Justice) will write to Local Spiritual Assemblies and Groups with guidance on identifying local religious leaders and on how to present the message to them. It would be helpful to begin to identify such leaders now, but we ask that you wait until the guidance letter comes from the National Assembly before you take any steps to actually approach such leaders.

It should be noted that the message will be sent to Anglican and Roman Catholic Bishops from the National Office.

The National Spiritual Assembly has arranged for the bulk printing, in a good quality edition, of the message for use by Local Spiritual Assemblies and Groups in this endeavour. There is no doubt that this is a most exciting and historically significant development. The National Assembly has been struck by the very positive responses so far received from national religious leaders. Ultimately the message will be a tool for Bahá'ís everywhere as they engage in interfaith dialogue.

With loving Bahá'í greetings, National Spiritual Assembly

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## Release of Bahá'í Prisoners in Iran

June 9, 2002

The National Assembly is very happy to inform the friends of the release from imprisonment in Iran of Mr. Sirus Zabihi-Moghaddam, who was arrested in late 1997 together with Mr. Hedayat Kashefi-Najafabadi and Mr. Ataollah Hamid Nasirizadeh.

Apparently, the release of Mr. Zabihi-Moghaddam was sudden; without any prior notification he was taken in a car to the city centre of Mashhad where he was released with a statement that he was free. Further details are not known at this time, and he appears to have been given no written



*Chief Rabbi, Dr Jonathan Sacks,  
peruses the open letter from the  
Universal House of Justice*

document from the authorities verifying his status.

Following this release, four Bahá'ís are known to still remain imprisoned in Iran because of their Faith.

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## In Memoriam Page

May 28, 2002

THE NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY has decided to create within the Bahá'í Journal an In Memoriam page. This page will honour United Kingdom believers who have recently passed to the 'Abhá Kingdom. It will also aim to inform the friends of the passing of believers in other countries who have made a remarkable contribution to the work of the Cause.

Commencing in the September issue, we will record the names and services of all believers who have passed away in the previous month. Where possible, we would like to include a small summary of their lives and service to pay tribute to their achievements and inspire their fellow believers.

To report the passing of a Bahá'í, please contact the National Bahá'í Centre or the Records Office at [records@bahai.org.uk](mailto:records@bahai.org.uk)

It would also be helpful if you could nominate a family member or friend of the deceased who would be happy to share information about his or her life and arrange for a photograph to be sent for the In Memoriam page.

“These are the servants of the Blessed Beauty,” wrote ‘Abdu’l-Bahá of those who have passed on, “In His path they were afflicted; they met with toil and sorrow; they sustained injuries and suffered harm. Upon them be the glory of God, the All-Glorious. Upon them be salutation and praise, Upon them be God’s tender mercy and forgiveness.”

*Memorials of the Faithful p. 12*

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