

THE ROLE OF BAHÁ'Í-INSPIRED ORGANIZATIONS

A compilation of guidance from the Bahá'í World Centre

The role of Bahá'í-inspired organizations requires some explanation to avoid confusion and misunderstandings. On the one hand, such organizations are by definition inspired by the spiritual principles and teaching of the Bahá'í Faith. On the other hand they will have members, collaborators and participants who are not Bahá'í and whose freedom of conscience and belief must be respected. Bahá'ís working in such organizations must use great care to avoid doing anything that might be interpreted as imposing their faith on others, including using what can be seen as an arcane Bahá'í vocabulary, or trying to teach the Bahá'í Faith directly in a context where this is inappropriate because people are there for other reasons. This paper summarizes guidance received by a number of Bahá'í-inspired organizations from the World Centre of the Bahá'í Faith. It first reviews the distinctive Bahá'í approach to social and economic development, since most Bahá'í-inspired organizations are intended to contribute in some way to development processes. It then describes the general purpose of Bahá'í-inspired organizations, and gives the specific advice that several such organizations have received on their purpose. Finally it shows the importance of not mixing Bahá'í teaching activities with organizations intended to serve humanity. This compilation should help Bahá'ís in such organizations to avoid even unconsciously imposing on or distancing people they are working with. It should also reassure our partners and collaborators that their independence of belief and of investigation of truth will be respected.

BAHÁ'Í APPROACH TO SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

"...learning to apply the Teachings to achieve progress could be taken as the very definition of Bahá'í social and economic development. Such learning has to occur locally, regionally, nationally and internationally and become the axis around which our development efforts are organized at all levels." (Bahá'í Social and Economic Development: Prospects for the Future, statement approved by the Universal House of Justice, 16 September 1993, p. 3)

Community-led development

"It has often been said that development is not a product to be delivered by the 'developed' to the 'underdeveloped'. Rather, it is a process the main protagonists of which have to be the people themselves. The greatest concern of Bahá'í projects has to be the development of the friends' capacity to make decisions about their spiritual and material progress and then to implement them. In an ideal project, while concrete action is directed towards visible improvement of some aspect of life, success is measured by the impact these actions have on the capacity of the community and its institutions to address development issues at increasingly higher levels of complexity and effectiveness." (Bahá'í Social and Economic Development: Prospects for the Future, statement approved by the Universal House of Justice, 16 September 1993, p. 2)

"...service is a basic principle of human existence; every act,

every personal or community project, is to be carried out in the spirit of service.... Nonetheless, the delivery of services should not be viewed as the main purpose of Bahá'í development undertakings. Approaches to development centered on the donation of goods and services, so characteristic of traditional religious charity and the programs of the welfare state, are known to have debilitating effects and often lead to paralysis." (Bahá'í Social and Economic Development: Prospects for the Future, statement approved by the Universal House of Justice, 16 September 1993, p. 2)

"The first steps to be taken must necessarily begin in the Bahá'í community itself, with the friends endeavoring, through their application of spiritual principles, their rectitude of conduct, and the practice of the art of consultation, to uplift themselves and thus become self-sufficient and self-reliant." (Bahá'í Social and Economic Development: Prospects for the Future, statement approved by the Universal House of Justice, 16 September 1993, p. 1)

"Progress in the development field will depend largely on natural stirrings at the grass roots, and should receive its driving force from those sources rather than from an imposition of plans and programs from the top." (Bahá'í Social and Economic Development: Prospects for the Future, statement approved by the Universal House of Justice, 16 September 1993, p. 1)

Integration

"Certain lessons that have been learned in the larger society need to be incorporated into Bahá'í thinking about social and economic development. Paramount among these is the inescapable need for integration. Experience has shown that fragmented activities in various fields such as health, education, agriculture, or industrial development do not lead to sustainable development. The knowledge that should be brought to bear on development problems of the communities of the world does not fit into a single discipline. Effective development unequivocally calls for coordinated interdisciplinary and multi-sectoral action.

"The idea of integral development may seem to contradict the principle enunciated above that grass roots action must begin simply and in a way that can be managed by the community itself. However, this apparent contradiction disappears if local action is seen as a means for building capacity. In this case it does not matter with which activity the development of a community actually begins; complexity will arise naturally in an organic way. What is to be avoided is the artificial fragmentation created by separate programs set in motion in a given population by professionals in specific disciplines, each ignoring the knowledge and experience of other groups, each competing for resources and for the constant attention of the people they are to serve." (Bahá'í Social and Economic Development: Prospects for the Future, statement approved by the Universal House of Justice, 16 September 1993, p. 4)

Development of human resources

"Learning and the building of capacity are closely linked to the development of human resources. That development ideas and projects are not imposed from above, and that institutions are to respond to aspirations and initiatives at the grass roots, are established characteristics of Bahá'í development. However, the vigilant application of these principles does not imply that no initiative can be taken from the top. Proven and well-conceived programs and approaches to development can be promoted nationally and

internationally, primarily through training. Training methods would, of course, have to foster participation and be carried out with a humble attitude towards learning. Otherwise, training tends to produce a cadre of individuals who are slaves to a given way of doing things.

"Moreover, the need for development of human resources is not limited to the direct participants in the actual projects. Thousands of Bahá'í youth in colleges and universities throughout the world, as well as an increasing number of professionals working in fields related to social and economic development, should be encouraged to participate in a worldwide learning process designed to grow in size and range. Indeed, Bahá'í development projects may be seen as sites where training is provided for an increasing number of individuals from both materially poor and wealthy nations and from various sectors of society." (Bahá'í Social and Economic Development: Prospects for the Future, statement approved by the Universal House of Justice, 16 September 1993, p. 3)

"...an increasing number of these programs and organizations [should] offer training through internships of various durations [for] university students and professionals interested in social and economic development." (Bahá'í Social and Economic Development: Prospects for the Future, statement approved by the Universal House of Justice, 16 September 1993, p. 6)

Assistance to projects

"In general, the determining factor in matching offers of service and assistance to projects should be the capacity of the projects to receive help and not the amount of resources available. It is quite possible that the talents of the friends, especially those in North America, exceed the capacity of the development projects elsewhere to receive assistance at this stage in the growth of the Faith. In this connection, the two-pronged approach you are pursuing seems most appropriate. While striving to help increase the capacity of projects worldwide, you are at the same time encouraging individual believers from more materially prosperous countries to become involved in Bahá'í projects at home. You should also continue encouraging them to participate in worthy endeavors outside the Faith in order to influence their professional fields and infuse them with the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh. They should be assured that this is, in and of itself, a tremendous service to the Cause and not feel that they are serving the Faith only if they dedicate themselves directly to Bahá'í projects." (The Universal House of Justice, memorandum to the Office of Social and Economic Development, 11 March 1997)

THE PURPOSE OF BAHÁ'Í-INSPIRED ORGANIZATIONS

"Openness to collaboration with people of capacity and leaders of thought concerned with issues of progress, and willingness and ability to invite them to participate in applying the Teachings to specific problems, have to be created at all levels, if we are to fully exploit this dimension of our development endeavors." (Bahá'í Social and Economic Development: Prospects for the Future, statement approved by the Universal House of Justice, 16 September 1993, p. 4)

Groups of believers who share a common vision of service may establish a Bahá'í-inspired agency as a non-governmental, non-profit organization for social and economic development. Regarding

initiatives of this kind, a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice states:

"The law of most societies allow for the establishment of non-profit organizations which, while private, are subject to special regulations and enjoy certain privileges. Customarily a board of trustees is responsible for all the affairs of such an organization and must ensure that its income is spent for the purpose stipulated in its by-laws. This board also oversees the functioning of the projects of the organization and the work of those who are in charge of them. An increasing number of believers around the world are taking advantage of this possibility and creating organizations dedicated to the application of Bahá'u'lláh's Teachings to the analysis and resolution of important social and economic issues. The House of Justice looks with keen interest on this growing phenomenon in the Bahá'í world. It only cautions the friends that in establishing such organizations they should exercise care not to become a burden on the institutions or unduly divert the contributions of the believers from the essential and primary tasks of supporting the Funds of the Faith and the activities of the institutions. It also expects them to conduct their affairs according to Bahá'í moral and ethical principles.... It is important to avoid the impression that participating in the projects of these organizations does not constitute legitimate service to the Cause. Otherwise sincere and devoted believers will be discouraged from engaging in activities that are 'Bahá'í' in nature." (Evolution of Institutional Capacity for Social and Economic Development, prepared by the Office of Social and Economic Development, 28 August 1994)

Bahá'í-inspired organizations may enjoy "the guidance and support of the institutions of the Faith." (Bahá'í Social and Economic Development: Prospects for the Future, statement approved by the Universal House of Justice, 16 September 1993, p. 5)

"We are instructed to provide you with the following clarification regarding the nature of Bahá'í-inspired organizations....

"Bahá'í development efforts are generally overseen by organizations of two kinds: those that are administered by the Bahá'í institutions and those that, while operating on the principles of the Faith and inspired by its teachings, enjoy autonomy, usually in terms of legal structure, administrative structure, and programmatic content. Both types of organizations may have as their aim the application of the principles of the Faith to one or more aspects of the process of civilization building. In this sense, the endeavours of both form part of the worldwide Bahá'í effort to draw humanity closer to Bahá'u'lláh's vision of a prosperous and peaceful global society.

"The Universal House of Justice regards the multiplication of Bahá'í-inspired organizations in recent years as a most welcome development. Through them, groups of believers can take advantage of the laws that exist in most countries governing non-profit organizations--which bring together the valuable characteristics of both private enterprise and public institutions--to pursue social action within the framework of the Bahá'í teachings. That such organizations are not directly administered by the Bahá'í institutions grants them a degree of freedom that would be inappropriate for a Bahá'í agency to enjoy. In this context, they are proving to be an excellent vehicle for engagement by members of the Bahá'í community with civil society, a channel for the creative

and disciplined expression of individual initiative in bettering the world.

"Yet with these prerogatives also come certain cautionary considerations. Bahá'í-inspired organizations are especially careful to avoid giving the false impression that they are using development initiatives as a cover to propagate the Faith. This is true also of an organization engaged in development that is administered by the Bahá'í institutions, but the parameters are somewhat different. A donor agency would accept as natural, for example, that a training institute under the aegis of a National Spiritual Assembly would offer religious programmes for Bahá'ís, parallel to the programmes of social and economic development that the donor is interested to support, which are open to the generality of the population. Bahá'í-inspired organization would have more difficulty explaining to donor agencies and, indeed, to the larger society the presence of explicitly Bahá'í programmes in its calendar of activities.

"Bahá'í-inspired agencies also approach with circumspection their interactions with the Bahá'í community. For example, although working for or studying at a Bahá'í-inspired organization can legitimately be regarded as promoting the advancement of the Cause, the organization should avoid any suggestion that such efforts are equivalent to direct service to the Faith. The same precaution applies, of course, to fundraising. Individuals are free to donate funds to projects of their choice, including those of a Bahá'í-inspired organization, confusion would arise, however, if such financial assistance were to be represented as contributions to the institutions of the Faith for specifically Bahá'í endeavours.

"In addition to the above, there are certain principles that govern the operation of Bahá'í-inspired organizations in order for their valuable purpose to be realized. As with the activities of any individual believer or group of believers, a Bahá'í-inspired organization, although enjoying wide scope in pursuit of its programmes, remains under the general guidance of one or other of the institutions of the Faith. While the institutions do not involve themselves in the day-to-day affairs of the organization, their responsibility for oversight obviously has to include protecting the good name of the Faith.

"Another principle concerns the involvement of Bahá'í-inspired organizations in the international field. The Administrative Order is structured in such a way that Assemblies foster initiative and safeguard the right of people to be meaningfully involved in the development of their own communities. Accordingly the activities of the friends in each national community fall under the guidance of the institutions of that community. Thus, the institutions in one country do not generally run projects in another, although there is ample room for collaborative efforts between them.

"The operation of this principle should not inhibit the regular functioning of a Bahá'í-inspired organization. Students from any part of the world, for example, are quite free to study in Bahá'í or Bahá'í-inspired educational establishments located in countries other than their own. Similarly, there may well be times when a Bahá'í-inspired organization is permitted or even invited to manage a project in another country, as is the case with Landegg

University's "Education for Peace" programme in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Office of Social and Economic Development at the Bahá'í World Centre is charged with confirming that the principle is appropriately applied and respected in the field of development." (Letter from the Department of the Secretariat, Universal House of Justice, to Landegg International University dated 4 July 2002)

Advice to the International Environment Forum

"The House of Justice commends the efforts of you and your associates to establish an organization whose purpose is to provide a forum for those involved with environmental issues, both Bahá'ís and non-Bahá'ís, to exchange ideas and experiences and to explore the application of the teachings to environmental concerns in diverse social realities. It, likewise, appreciates your desire to ensure that the relationship of this organization to the institutions of the Faith is properly defined and does not breach any Bahá'í administrative principles.

"...it is understood that you have decided to constitute yourselves as a Bahá'í-inspired nongovernmental organization. The House of Justice finds this decision a wise one and quite appropriate for the objectives you intend to pursue. In this case, it is suggested that you chose a name for the organization which conveys an image of its area of concern, but does not include the word "Bahá'í". (letter from the Department of the Secretariat, Universal House of Justice, 15 September 1998)

"The establishment of the type of organization you are considering seems timely and will no doubt provide a means through which issues related to the environment can be addressed. With regard to the questions you have raised, we offer the following thoughts for your consideration.

"There are currently two broad sets of activities related to social and economic development in which the friends are involved. The first consists of efforts by Bahá'ís to apply the teachings to resolve social and material problems through various projects. In this respect, Bahá'í social and economic development is an organic component of Bahá'í community life and is one among a number of elements which include teaching, deepening, and community development, all contributing to the progress of the Cause. The second set of activities can be described as the efforts of believers whose educational backgrounds and professions place them in a position where they can influence the various fields of human endeavor with concepts and principles drawn from Bahá'u'lláh's teachings. This, in itself, is an important service to the Cause and to humanity.

"The proposed Forum could assuredly play a valuable role in the latter area of endeavor. It would provide opportunities for the friends to gain a better understanding of how the Bahá'í teachings about the environment and related subjects apply to the problems facing the world today. It would also enable them to use these new insights in their fields and professional projects and to effectively share them with non-Bahá'í colleagues. The potential for influencing like-minded non-Bahá'í projects and organizations is virtually unlimited.

"As to serving as a "resource bank" for projects within the Bahá'í

community, at the current time most Bahá'í efforts are embryonic initiatives that have limited ability to make use of the professional skills of the Forum's membership. In the future, however, when the appropriate opportunities arise, and as the capacity of these projects develops, individuals from the Forum might be called upon to collaborate with them.

"One way that the Forum might wish to contribute directly to progress in Bahá'í social and economic development would be to explore its implications for the European continent itself. In many countries blessed with material prosperity, the friends have found it difficult to translate the call for Bahá'í social and economic development into concrete action. Yet, in guidance we have received from the Universal House of Justice, it is stated that:

"The worldwide Bahá'í community, as an organic whole, transcends divisions prevalent in society today, such as "North" and "South", "developed" and "underdeveloped". Social and economic development efforts are undertaken by Bahá'ís irrespective of the degree of material prosperity achieved by their nations, as they strive to apply the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh to the gradual process of building a new civilization." (letter from the Office of Social and Economic Development, 30 September 1997)

"...the Forum has chosen to structure itself as a Bahá'í-inspired, non-governmental organization,... [and] draws its membership from among professionals and interested parties in a wide range of countries. The distinctive nature of the Forum, namely, your status as a non-governmental organization with an international membership, will determine to a large extent the types of activity in which the Forum could most effectively engage....

"With regard to the scope of your undertakings, we believe that the IEF has, in the past year, taken some important, initial steps toward becoming an organization that is capable of exerting a meaningful influence on like-minded non-Bahá'í projects and agencies.... We envision that the two mutually-complementary objectives of all your activities -- the regular meetings and conferences; your publications; your collaborative work with other agencies; and the various networking activities -- would be 1) to generate and promote a discourse on how the Bahá'í teachings can be applied to the environmental challenges facing the world, and 2) to influence specific agencies, groups or individuals concerned with these issues.

"The editorial group will no doubt have an important role in this process, with the preparation of papers and materials that convey and illustrate the Bahá'í perspective and which can become points of discussion when shared with others. In this regard, because your focus will be the wider community, we suggest that you direct your efforts toward producing publications for the non-Bahá'í community-at-large, whether children, youth or adults. We feel confident that interested Bahá'ís will learn from what you make available to this larger audience.

"...it is legitimate... for the Forum to collaborate with development agencies and with individuals in other countries in order to pursue its objectives. However, our Office believes that a pivotal factor in strengthening the position of the Bahá'í

community in dealing with development matters is an expansion of institutional capacity indigenous to an ever-increasing number of countries. This requires that distinct institutions in different countries be established and nurtured so as to be able to address specific needs or opportunities within each nation, act as institutions of learning for these populations, and, where necessary, collaborate internationally on joint projects. Accordingly, we do not feel that it would be appropriate for your Forum to promote the creation of chapters or other forms of affiliate organizations within its structure.... In general, ...we consider that your organization would be most effective if it restricted its membership to individuals. On a related theme, you have enquired about your relationship with Bahá'í institutions in various countries. In principle, the IEF is free to respond to specific requests for assistance from Bahá'í institutions just as it would respond to similar requests from non-Bahá'í institutions or groups.

"As the Forum will be composed of persons with specific professional expertise in environmental matters such as technical, training, fund raising, or managerial skills, it will naturally attract the attention of existing Bahá'í projects in different parts of the world. In such a case, however,... the transfer of skills and expertise must be based on the needs of local projects.

"...The Forum has a potentially useful role to play in the promotion of a greater awareness of environmental issues and the provision of a medium through which interested people are able to share experiences and learn from each other. Caution needs to be exercised that the enthusiasm thus generated does not inadvertently lead to arrangements for overseeing or controlling existing local or regional initiatives."

(letter from the Office of Social and Economic Development, Bahá'í World Centre, 5 August 1999)

Advice to the European Bahá'í Business Forum

"In the view of the House of Justice these proposed initiatives are important to the external affairs activities, and the Forum's initiatives in the matter are much appreciated.

"The Governing Board will be encouraged to know that particular attention is being given to the need to provide appropriate information to private enterprise and the corporate world generally, in the consultations currently going on toward the framing of an External Affairs Strategy. It seems likely, too, that the Forum will be called on to play an important role in this respect." (Letter from the Department of the Secretariat, The Universal House of Justice, to EBBF dated 21 December 1993)

"The Universal House of Justice... commends you most warmly for your energetic and imaginative initiatives in Albania and Bulgaria. Beyond their service components, these activities are undoubtedly serving to attract the positive attention of prominent people in those countries to the Faith." (Letter from the Department of the Secretariat, The Universal House of Justice, to EBBF dated 3 March 1994)

"We are confident your Forum will find itself playing an increasingly vital role in influencing Europe's business world with the spirit of Bahá'í Teachings." (The Universal House of Justice to EBBF, fax dated 15 September 1994)

"Your group should feel confident, however, that the House of Justice is keenly interested in public information activities within the international business community and in any proposals that EBBF may have in this respect." (Letter from the Department of the Secretariat, The Universal House of Justice, to EBBF dated 8 August 1995)

"The Universal House of Justice was delighted to learn of the success of the conference, and encourages you to continue in your efforts to nurture the growing reputation of the Forum." (Fax from the Department of the Secretariat, The Universal House of Justice, to EBBF dated 7 November 1995)

"The House of Justice has watched with keen interest the increasing role of private, non-profit, Bahá'í organizations and associations, of which the European Bahá'í Business Forum is an impressive example. Such bodies remain as independent, private initiatives, although functioning under the aegis and guidance of one of the institutions of the Faith." (Email from the Department of the Secretariat, The Universal House of Justice, to George Starcher, EBBF, dated 28 April 1997)

"We continue to be impressed by the energetic outreach and demonstrated creativity of your organization.

"With regard to your participation in an interfaith event that would explore how business professionals apply religious beliefs to their daily lives, we concur with your Governing Board that such an activity offers an excellent opportunity for EBBF to contribute to the unfolding discourse about the role of spirituality in business. Your intent to act as a co-sponsor of the proposed event and not as a principal organizer seems a prudent use of your resources. We feel that EBBF is more than capable of presenting perspectives found in the Bahá'í teachings at such an event, and of demonstrating the Bahá'í principle of service to others, and thus representation from the Bahá'í International Community would be unnecessary." (Letter from Office of Public Information, Bahá'í International Community, to EBBF dated 2 February 1998)

"The subject of global governance is of immense importance to Bahá'ís because of the compelling statements in the Writings of the Faith about world peace. These Writings provide ideas and perspectives which the Bahá'ís should not hesitate to share with all segments of humanity, including the business community. In this connection, as you know, the House of Justice has not only issued a statement, "The Promise of World Peace", for wide dissemination, it has also approved an external affairs strategy with the major purpose of influencing the processes towards the Lesser Peace. However, it is important that the believers and Bahá'í institutions and organizations understand the context in which they should operate in this respect.

"Any related activity by Bahá'ís to exert such influence should be undertaken with the understanding that the Lesser Peace is dependent on the initiatives of non-Bahá'í leaders and not on the basis of any Bahá'í scheme. In this regard, the following reply was written on behalf of the beloved Guardian in a letter dated 14 March 1939 to an individual:

Your view that the Lesser Peace will come about through the political efforts of the states and nations of the world, and independently of any direct Bahá'í plan or effort, and the Most

Great Peace be established through the instrumentality of the believers, and by the direct operation of the laws and principles revealed by Bahá'u'lláh and the functioning of the Universal House of Justice as the supreme organ of the Bahá'í superstate -- your view on this subject is quite correct and in full accord with the pronouncements of the Guardian as embodied in "The Unfoldment of World Civilization". (See The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh: Selected Letters (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1991), pp. 161-206.)

"It is clear, then, that the friends must respect the prerogatives of political leaders in this matter and allow them the latitude to exercise the initiative that only they can effectively take towards the establishment of the Lesser Peace. Because of the political gravity of the decisions involved in the establishment of peace, and the differing political attitudes which it invokes, certain actions on the part of the Bahá'í community would embroil the friends in partisan politics. There is quite a difference between identifying certain requisites of peace, such as the convocation of world leaders, as does the Peace Statement, and attempting to initiate the political processes towards their realization. Even though the establishment of the Lesser Peace will come about independently of any Bahá'í plan or action, Bahá'ís should not be inert. Indeed, they may promote the concept of world peace with all that it implies without allowing their activities to assume a character that could be identified with the political processes which its realization will require.

"The enthusiasm of the friends for assisting in developments towards peace is not diminished by this understanding. What is critical is that they appreciate the proprieties to be observed by the Bahá'í community in a matter of such vital importance to the welfare of all humankind. If, for instance, the Bahá'ís attempt to take a leading role in organizing events associated with the anticipated convocation of world leaders, their motives could be seriously misunderstood. The risk is that Bahá'ís might act in a manner which would put non-Bahá'ís in the awkward position of appearing to endorse a specifically Bahá'í vision or make them feel that Bahá'ís are seeking to impose the requirements of the religion upon others. We Bahá'ís must be aware that in our zeal we can easily overwhelm others and even, owing to the wariness that we might inadvertently engender, cause them to lose sight of the practical importance of establishing world peace.

"It is with such a rationale in mind that the Office of Public Information, as instructed, cautioned you against the pursuit of activities related to global governance. For the establishment of peace at this stage is essentially a political matter, and any Bahá'í involvement in aspects of it needs to be guided by the institutions of the Faith.

"Bahá'í organizations, such as EBBF, can play significant roles, within the context of their specializations, in the promotion of world peace. The business community is showing increasing interest and indeed has a great stake in global stability. Opportunities, therefore, abound for EBBF to influence the future attitudes and activities of that community. Without attempting to take the lead, EBBF can certainly collaborate with business and related organizations in activities in which its efforts would be regarded

as vital, supportive, educational, and as conducive to the creation of a new vision for peace. (Letter from Department of the Secretariat, The Universal House of Justice, to EBBF dated 10 March 1996)

"The House of Justice was pleased to note the steady growth in membership of EBBF, and the increase in the number of countries now represented in the Forum. The conferences, projects and initiatives engaged in by EBBF and its branches in the past year are impressive and warmly commended. With the foundation being built and in consultation with the various National Spiritual Assemblies, your goal to establish an enthused and active EBBF branch in each of the major countries of Europe may well, in due course, be realized.

" We are to assure you of the prayers of the House of Justice that your dedicated efforts to influence the world of business with the principles and ethics of the Bahá'í Faith may be continually guided and confirmed by Bahá'u'lláh." (Letter from Department of the Secretariat, The Universal House of Justice, to EBBF dated 11 November 1996)

"One important means through which Bahá'ís everywhere can help to advance the Cause of God is to demonstrate to others how there are ways in which spiritual principles can be applied with great benefit in every discipline, profession, and field of endeavour, and it seems that your organization is continuing to do excellent work in this regard." (Email from Department of the Secretariat, The Universal House of Justice, to EBBF dated 21 December 1997)

"The House of Justice greatly appreciates your efforts to establish the reputation and standing of EBBF among like-minded associations and groups in the wider community. The recognition given to EBBF by an international foundation such as AIESEC is of particular note, as a token of what can be achieved." (Email from the Department of the Secretariat, The Universal House of Justice, to EBBF dated 7 October 2001)

"The House of Justice was impressed to note that the participants at the conference were representative of divers countries across Europe and that there were a significant number of young professionals present. Without doubt those who attended the conference found the presentations both stimulating and inspiring, and will find new opportunities to relate the Teachings to issues under discussion among their non-Bahá'í associates." (Email from the Department of the Secretariat, The Universal House of Justice, to EBBF dated 25 November 2001)

Advice to the Rabbani Trust (concerning its Conference on Social and Economic Development)

"These... issues need to be considered in the light of the current status of Bahá'í development activities worldwide. Close adherence to the guidance offered by the Universal House of Justice for more than a decade has created an appropriate environment in the world in which these activities can flourish. In local and national communities in every continent, believers and their institutions have taken steps to contribute to the spiritual and material upliftment of their societies. To a large extent, it can be said that these efforts belong to the people who participate in and benefit by them. In examining these endeavors, one should not use the same lens through which society at large views "development projects". Nor should the worldwide Bahá'í community be compared with a nongovernmental development organization operating projects in various countries. The Office of Social and Economic Development

itself engages little in project management. Its purpose is to foster learning about the theory and practice of Bahá'í development to which each independent effort can contribute. Even in promoting campaigns, such as literacy or primary health care, which involve the systematic establishment of projects in country after country, the role of our Office is to offer a framework, make suggestions and provide support.

"It should also be understood that in the Bahá'í community the dichotomy that characterizes the development field, such as "North-South" or "developed-underdeveloped", does not exist. All efforts, whether local or national, whether the result of individual or institutional initiative, whether the work of professionals or believers with little formal education, enjoy a degree of equality in relation to one another. Issues governing international collaboration are addressed by the World Centre, including, if needed, the creation of any administrative agency or structure, as in the case of the Comité de Coordinación de Radio Bahá'í en América Latina (CCORBAL).

"Currently, of the more than one thousand Bahá'í development efforts, the vast majority are grassroots activities of fixed duration begun by believers and Local Assemblies. A few hundred efforts are ongoing projects or agencies -- the majority of which are schools -- that are under the direction of National Assemblies or are privately managed by groups of believers. No more than a handful, mostly Bahá'í-inspired organizations, have achieved the stature of development organizations with reasonably complex programmatic structures that systematically manage a number of lines of action in a coordinated, interdisciplinary manner. All of these efforts function as distinct centers of learning, each gaining direct experience in applying the teachings to the resolution of social problems. Clearly, some will surpass others in the extent of their learning, but, irrespective of their attainments, the relationship among the projects will always be characterized by an attitude of sharing and by mutual respect.

"...We believe it is critical that the individuals and agencies participating in the conference see themselves as equal collaborators in a collective process of reflection and learning and the Trust as the mere host of the conference.

...Recommendations having to do with the evolution of the development work in the Americas should simply be referred to the institutions of the Faith, and the Trust should not feel that it needs to follow them up. We encourage the Trust to continually emphasize these points to the participants and avoid taking any action that implies a coordinating relationship between the Trust and other development projects or agencies....

"The second issue to be considered involves individuals, groups of believers and agencies who have arisen through the inspiration of the conference and wish to support existing development activities. Some of these friends are professional in fields relevant to development, yet without prior experience overseas and with modest involvement in Bahá'í development projects in their own countries. In order for their energies to be channelled effectively, we feel that they should gain an accurate picture of current development activities, including strengths and weaknesses, so that they have realistic expectations of the part they can play. Clearly, in view

of the foregoing comments, only a small number of Bahá'í efforts would be in a position to benefit from the services of volunteers from abroad, particularly those with specialized skills. We wish to avoid, on the one hand, grassroots projects being overwhelmed by experts from outside, and on the other, the inevitable frustration that would come to those well-intentioned believers and agencies that find no constructive outlet for their talents....

"It is also important for the friends to be aware that at this stage they can contribute to Bahá'í social and economic development primarily through their efforts to initiate activities or sustain projects in their own communities and to infuse their professional fields with Bahá'í concepts and principles. A letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice explains:

In general, the House of Justice perceives ... an ardent desire on your part to contribute to the extension of Bahá'í education. This is indeed praiseworthy. But it is important for you to be aware of a fundamental challenge which you, like other Bahá'í professionals, face at this stage in the growth of the Faith. The capacity of Bahá'í communities, and hence the projects they initiate, to benefit from the expertise of Bahá'í professionals is limited. It is natural, then, for such individuals to focus their energies outside the Faith and to devote themselves to influencing the evolution of thought in their fields, as you have done and continue to do, infusing it with the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh. The friends everywhere should realize that this is, in and of itself, a tremendous service to the Cause and not assume that they are serving the Faith only if they dedicate themselves directly to Bahá'í projects.

"...There are, we feel, four objectives [for the conference]:

1. To provide an environment in which representatives of Bahá'í development efforts in the Americas can gather together to share information and experiences -- both challenges and successes
2. To analyze the shared experience in light of the teachings of the Faith and current thought in development-related fields in order to advance the collective learning process
3. To allow projects to come into contact with individuals who can potentially be of assistance to them
4. To enable those who desire to initiate development efforts in their communities to learn about the principles and practice of Bahá'í social and economic development

"...Experience has shown that attempts to initiate a project by simply submitting an impersonal grant proposal rarely succeed. The friends should begin their development efforts using available resources, confident that as their work expands, additional funds can be found.... (Office of Social and Economic Development, Bahá'í World Centre, to the Eshraghieh and Mahmoud Rabbani Trust, 23 March 1997)

Advice to a group of Bahá'í management consultants

"...The House of Justice regards the members of your group as having the potential to assist in the advancement of the Bahá'í community in a variety of ways.

"Through their participation on an individual basis in Bahá'í

community life, including administrative activities, the group members can offer their insights and experience to consultation on the issues with which the Bahá'í community must grapple in the process of growth. In addition they have before them the opportunity to contribute to the vital task of relating the Bahá'í teachings to the questions of business ethics and management which are being raised and discussed in professional circles and in the wider society. The growing concern about values and motivation in business activity, the fostering of individual initiative and creativity in a complex organization, the maintenance of the environment in the face of expanding business activity, the ethics of multinational business operation in the less developed parts of the world, the creation of appropriate measures for increasing the participation of women and minorities in management in cultural settings which have traditionally created barriers to them -- these and many other issues await the insights which knowledgeable and experienced Bahá'ís can bring to their resolution.

"Such activities will also attract to the ranks of the Faith those who are active in business and in management and who are searching for means by which spiritual values can be incorporated into the modification of present-day practices.

"The House of Justice encourages the members of the group to take advantage of every opportunity to expand the range of their experience as Bahá'ís to include diverse settings in rural or village areas in less-developed parts of the world, in addition to experience in more sophisticated and technologically advanced settings in the Western world. This could be accomplished, for example, through traveling teaching. Such experience would widen the scope of the insights they can contribute to the growth of the world-wide Bahá'í community. (Department of the Secretariat, Universal House of Justice, 3 August 1999)

Advice to an individual

"Since this effort is unique and is still in its experimental stage, you are encouraged to proceed with developing it as an individual initiative that falls within the category of a Bahá'í-inspired project. As such, it does not require the sponsorship of a Bahá'í institution. However, it would be appropriate for you to inform your National Spiritual Assembly of your plans and expectations and to seek any advice it may wish to offer regarding your intention to render a service to the Bahá'í community as well as to a general audience.

"You should feel free, too, to explore the feasibility of making a commercial venture of this project. Whatever path you finally decide to take, it would appear necessary for you to establish a group of competent collaborators to assist with the organization and operation of ..., and with acquiring necessary funding." (Letter from Department of the Secretariat, The Universal House of Justice, dated 7 April 2002, to an individual)

TEACHING THE FAITH VERSUS SERVICE TO HUMANITY

"...it will be vital that members of the Faith respect scrupulously the nature and purpose of such organized discussion [interfaith exchange]. To divert it into an occasion for the teaching of the

Bahá'í Faith would be an abuse of the goodwill of others. Obviously, circumstances may arise in which consultation... leads to requests from the other participants for further information about the Faith itself. Bahá'í representatives will naturally be happy to provide information of this kind, but will want to keep such remarks within the context of the enquiries made." (The Difference Between External Affairs and Teaching, letter from the Department of the Secretariat to National Spiritual Assemblies, 11 June 2002)

"In pursuing the mission laid on it by Bahá'u'lláh, the Bahá'í community has always been called on to maintain a balance between the two parallel tasks involved: on the one hand, to promote the advancement of the Cause through teaching its message to all peoples, and, on the other, to contribute to the well-being of humankind through vindicating the ideals of unity, tolerance and cooperation. When they are properly carried out, these two mandates, although essentially distinct from one another, are mutually reinforcing." (The Difference Between External Affairs and Teaching, letter from the Department of the Secretariat to National Spiritual Assemblies, 11 June 2002)

"The relationship between teaching and social and economic development needs to be considered both in terms of certain fundamental principles and in the context of the processes which characterize the growth of the Bahá'í community. You are well aware of the relevant principles, which include the following: Bahá'ís should give the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh liberally and unconditionally to humanity so that people may apply them to pressing social issues and uplift themselves materially and spiritually; in their dealings with society at large, the friends should be upright and avoid any trace of deception; social and economic development projects should not be used as an inducement to conversion; and funds from non-Bahá'ís should not be utilized for strictly Bahá'í purposes. None of these diminishes the importance of the sacred obligation to teach the Cause. Teaching should remain the dominating passion of the life of every individual believer....

"Social and economic development is an important area of activity in and of itself. Its justification should not be sought in its ability to produce enrollments.... Naturally, when endeavors in the development field are successful, they increase the public's interest in the Faith and create new teaching opportunities for the Bahá'í community....

(The Universal House of Justice, memorandum to the Office of Social and Economic Development, 27 April 1998)

"Activities in the development field should be viewed as a reinforcement of the teaching work, as a greater manifestation of faith in action." (Bahá'í Social and Economic Development: Prospects for the Future, statement approved by the Universal House of Justice, 16 September 1993)

"Teaching and development are distinct yet complementary aspects of the work of the Bahá'í community. Experience has shown that one way of dealing with those whose interest in the Faith is aroused by Bahá'í-inspired social action, is to set up, parallel to the development efforts, programs to present directly the teachings of the Faith, and not incorporate these in the development projects themselves." (letter to IEF from the Office of Social and Economic Development, Bahá'í World Centre, 5 August 1999)