

# PUBLIC DISCOURSES

## Quotes



National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the Czech Republic, 2024

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## SELECTED QUOTES ON PUBLIC DISCOURSES

### NON-INVOLVEMENT IN POLITICS

1. Always emphasizing the spiritual significance of the work of the Faith and the single-minded resolve with which the believers are to discharge their sacred duties, Shoghi Effendi warned against having any share in political controversies, entanglements, and bickerings... These are the inevitable foam and spray cast up as wave after wave convulses a turbulent and divided society. Too much is at stake to be occupied with distractions of this kind.

(Universal House of Justice, Ridván Message 2017)

2. At the same time, Bahá'ís respect those who, out of a sincere desire to serve their countries, choose to pursue political aspirations or to engage in political activity. The approach adopted by the Bahá'í community of non-involvement in such activity is not intended as a statement expressing some fundamental objection to politics in its true sense; indeed, humanity organizes itself through its political affairs.

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of Iran, 2 March 2013)

3. There is, however, one case in which one can criticize the present social and political order without being necessarily forced to side with or oppose any existing regime. And this is the method adopted by the Guardian in his "Goal of a New World Order". His criticisms of the world conditions beside being very general in character are abstract; that is, instead of condemning existing institutional organizations it goes deeper and analyzes the basic ideas and conceptions which have been responsible for their establishment.

(From a letter dated 18 November 1948 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the USA and Canada)

### CORRELATING THE BAHÁ'Í FAITH WITH CURRENT THOUGHTS AND PROBLEMS

4. The Cause needs more Bahá'í scholars, people who not only are devoted to it and believe in it and are anxious to tell others about it, but also who have a deep grasp of the Teachings and their significance, and who can correlate its beliefs with the current thoughts and problems of the people of the world.

(From a letter dated 21 October 1943 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, quoted in a statement dated 4 August 1984 written by the International Teaching Centre on "Bahá'í Scholarship")

5. Bahá'í scholarship is an endeavour accessible to all members of the Bahá'í community, without exception... You can perform a valuable service in bringing this potential role to the attention of all the believers -- including those who may lack formal education, and those who dwell in remote areas, villages and islands -- and to discourage any thought that Bahá'í scholarship is an activity open only to those who are highly educated or who are pursuing an academic career.

(From a statement dated 9 August 1984 written by the International Teaching Centre on "Bahá'í Scholarship")

6. Every believer has the opportunity to examine the forces operating in society and introduce relevant aspects of the teachings within the discourses prevalent in whatever social space he or she is present.

(From a letter dated 24 July 2013 written by the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Canada)

## PARTICIPATING IN THE DISCOURSES OF SOCIETY

7. Efforts to participate in the discourses of society constitute [another] area of action in which the friends are engaged. Such participation can occur at all levels of society, from the local to the international, through various types of interactions—from informal discussions on Internet forums and attendance at seminars, to the dissemination of statements and contact with government officials. What is important is for Bahá'ís to be present in the many social spaces in which thinking and policies evolve on any one of a number of issues—on governance, the environment, climate change, the equality of men and women, human rights, to mention a few—so that they can, as occasions permit, offer generously, unconditionally and with utmost humility the teachings of the Faith and their experience in applying them as a contribution to the betterment of society.

(From a letter dated 4 January 2009 written by the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Australia)

8. It seems appropriate that the friends everywhere would reflect on the nature of the contributions which their growing, vibrant communities will make to the material and spiritual progress of society. In this respect, it will prove fruitful to think in terms of two interconnected, mutually reinforcing areas of activity: involvement in social action and participation in the prevalent discourses of society...

At the level of the cluster, involvement in public discourse can range from an act as simple as introducing Bahá'í ideas into everyday conversation to more formal activities such as the preparation of articles and attendance at gatherings, dedicated to themes of social concern—climate change and the environment, governance and human rights, to mention a few. It entails, as well, meaningful interactions with civic groups and local organizations in villages and neighbourhoods.

In this connection, we feel compelled to raise a warning: It will be important for all to recognize that the value of engaging in social action and public discourse is not to be judged by the ability to bring enrolments. Though endeavours in these two areas of activity may well effect an increase in the size of the Bahá'í community, they are not undertaken for this purpose. Sincerity in this respect is an imperative. Moreover, care should be exercised to avoid overstating the Bahá'í experience or drawing undue attention to fledgling efforts, such as the junior youth spiritual empowerment programme, which are best left to mature at their own pace. The watchword in all cases is humility.

(Universal House of Justice, *Ridván Message* 2010)

9. Learning about the participation of Bahá'ís in the discourses of society will advance as more and more believers throughout the world contribute to this area of activity over the coming years. This will occur at a number of levels. A growing number of individual believers will bring insights based on the writings to conversations in a variety of social spaces in which they find themselves—some will be related to life in their localities while others will be connected to their professions. Bahá'í-inspired agencies will naturally contribute to discourses associated with aspects of social and economic development relevant to their work. Further, as programs of growth advance and the friends are drawn into the life of society around them, their efforts to overcome challenges facing their communities through the application of spiritual principles will invariably entail participation in discourses at the grassroots. That Bahá'í involvement in the discourses of society will grow organically at all levels, in line with the increasing capacity of the believers, is evident. Equally clear is the centrality of the role of the training institute to this process.

(From an unpublished letter dated 6 February 2011 on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly)

## INVOLVEMENT IN THE LIFE OF SOCIETY

10. The friends are also developing their capacity for engaging those around them, regardless of creed, culture, class, or ethnicity, in conversations about how to bring about spiritual and material well-being through systematic application of the divine teachings. One gratifying result of this growing capacity is the

community's increased ability to make meaningful contributions to various important discourses prevalent in society; in certain countries, leaders and thinkers striving to address the challenges confronting their societies increasingly show appreciation for the perspectives offered by Bahá'ís. These contributions articulate insights derived from Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation, draw on the experience being generated by the believers around the world, and aim to elevate the discussion above the acrimony and contention that so often prevent discourses of society from progressing. Further, the ideas and lines of reasoning advanced by Bahá'ís are reinforced by their practice of consultation. Sensitized as they are to the importance of harmony and the fruitlessness of conflict, the followers of Bahá'u'lláh seek to cultivate those conditions that are most conducive to the emergence of unity in any setting. We are heartened to see the believers expanding their efforts to participate in the discourses of society—especially those friends who, in their professional capacity, are able to contribute to discourses directly related to peace.

(From a letter dated 18 January 2019 written by the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of the World)

11. The friends must guard against being drawn into the ultimately futile conflict and strife that characterizes so much of the discussion of the affairs of society, or—heaven forbid—allowing interaction of this type to permeate, even fleetingly, the conversations of the community. Yet such vigilance on your part in avoiding discord and in not becoming entangled in society's controversies should under no circumstances be construed as aloofness from the many pressing concerns of this time. Far from it. You are among the most active and earnest of humanity's well-wishers. But, whether through deeds or words, the merit of your every contribution to social well-being lies, first, in your resolute commitment to discover that precious point of unity where contrasting perspectives overlap and around which contending peoples can coalesce.

(From a letter dated 25 November 2020 written by the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of the World)

12. Midway through the series of Plans [from 1996 to 2021], the community's involvement in the life of society began to become the focus of more direct attention. The believers were encouraged to think of this in terms of two interconnected areas of endeavour—social action and participation in the prevalent discourses of society. These, of course, were not alternatives to the work of expansion and consolidation, much less distractions from it: they were inherent within it. The greater the human resources a community could call on, the greater became its capacity to bring the wisdom contained in Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation to bear upon the challenges of the day—to translate His teachings into reality.

And the troubled affairs of humankind over this period seemed to underline how desperate was its need for the remedy prescribed by the Divine Physician. Implied in all this was a conception of religion very different from those holding sway in the world at large: a conception which recognized religion as the potent force propelling an ever-advancing civilization. It was understood that such a civilization would also not appear spontaneously, of its own accord—it was the mission of Bahá'u'lláh's followers to labour for its emergence. Such a mission demanded applying the same process of systematic learning to the work of social action and engagement in public discourse.

(Universal House of Justice, *Riḍván Message* 2021)

## RELEVANT LETTERS BY THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

9 October 2015

To a National Spiritual Assembly

Regarding the medium of the Internet and the promotion of the Faith

1 March 2017

To the Baha'is of the World

On moral questions of consumption and excessive materialism

25 November 2017

To three individual Bahá'ís

Regarding climate change

1 December 2019

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

On social media and non-involvement in politics