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National Spiritual Assembly 

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From the table of the National Spiritual Assembly

THE NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY is delighted to share with the friends some of the highlights of its July 13–15 meeting in London.

The National Assembly enjoyed another wide-ranging and fruitful consultation with Counsellor Mr Shahriar Razavi which included a review of the progress to date of the Five Year Plan planning process. In this respect, the National Assembly has been greatly encouraged by the

The NSA



Eight members of the National Spiritual Assembly pictured recently with Members of the Continental Board of Counsellors for Europe, Mr Shahriar Razavi (far left) and Mr Paddy O'Mara (far right).

success of the series of institutional meetings that has taken place in all four parts of the United Kingdom as envisaged by the Universal House of Justice. Participants in these gatherings, which were organised by the Bahá'í Councils, included Continental Counsellor Mr Razavi, representatives of the National Assembly, Auxiliary Board members, members of the Board of the Training Institutes, and other specially invited guests. A particularly notable feature of these meetings was the spirit of loving and harmonious collaboration demonstrated by the various institutions represented.

These meetings have produced considerable clarity about the steps that now need to be taken to help the community grow. What emerged clearly from these consultations was that the training institute process now needs to be strengthened everywhere. The challenge facing the Councils is to convey the next steps in the planning process to the friends under their respective jurisdictions.

The state of the National Fund was the subject of intensive consultation around the National Assembly table. The National Assembly heard from its Treasurer and the Financial Manager that income to the National Fund since Ridván was some 40% below budget. Expenditure during this period, on the other hand, remained well within budget. It is clear that the recent changes in local boundaries have had an adverse effect on the size of contributions to the National Fund. Nevertheless, the National Assembly is confident that this is only a temporary setback and contributions will pick up as the friends grow to realise that they have a direct connection with the Lifeblood of the Cause, one which it is their direct responsibility to strengthen.

The National Assembly also spent considerable time consulting about the spiritual health of the community. It is clear that the Bahá'í community is not immune from the tests and trials of living in an increasingly secular and materialistic society. The National Assembly was reminded that the primary remedy for countering such adverse influences is contained in the current Five Year Plan. The Universal House of Justice has asked us to put the Word of God at the centre of our lives and to invite all to experience its soul-uplifting and transformational power.

The National Spiritual Assembly takes great heart from some of the successes of the recent past and many of these were recalled during its recent meeting. Some are more obvious, such as the recent Arts for Nature tribute to Rúhíyyih Khánum in London in which many Bahá'ís were prominently involved. Other activities may not make the headlines but that is not to say that they are no less important or valuable. For example, the fact that dozens of children receive some form of Bahá'í education each week through the network of Bahá'í Community Schools is an achievement worthy of celebration. And the human resources of the Cause continue to develop and strengthen as increasing numbers of believers benefit from the training provided by study circles and other institute courses.

The National Assembly was also reminded of the fact that this long-standing Bahá'í community has a rich heritage and has a past record of service both at home and further afield of which it should be rightly proud. It was fitting then that the National Assembly took time to sign a copy of “**Unfolding Destiny**”, the collection of the messages of the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith to this community, for presentation to the National Assembly of Uganda on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the establishment of the Faith in that country.

As many of the friends will know, the British Bahá'í community played a central role in assisting with the opening of vast parts of the African continent to the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh under the leadership and guidance of Shoghi Effendi during the early 1950s, and next month many Bahá'í communities in Central and East Africa will be celebrating the fruits of those historic achievements.

The National Spiritual Assembly visited the Resting Place of Shoghi Effendi on the Sunday morning of its meeting and remembered many of the friends in its prayers at that sacred spot.

So, what can the UK community be proud of?

from the National Spiritual Assembly

THE NEXT ITEM ON THE AGENDA IS: “The Spiritual Health of the United Kingdom Bahá'í Community”. It is one of those wide-ranging and deep consultations that the National Assembly has from time to time. It is prompted by the challenges of the new Five Year Plan, the situation the Bahá'ís and their communities are facing owing to the boundary changes, the expanding financial needs of the Cause in this country and a general feeling that we haven't had a good consultation about this for a long time and it is about time to do so!

We start down the road of “how difficult it all is” and wondering how we are all going to cope. But soon the consultation turns away from the problems and on to the ways in

which the Bahá'ís are meeting these and overcoming them and how they are being helped by the Learned Arm. One person recalls that at a recent meeting of the Fund Development Team a member encouraged his colleagues to make a list of all the things the UK community could be proud of.

“Where is that list?” someone asks.

The flip chart has been tidied away and the list is gone.

“But I have some of it right here!” another says.

The list is read out.

“They haven't mentioned _____!” says one.

“Or _____.” says another.

“And don’t forget _____,” says a third, when the chairman calls his name.

And so, from a rather downbeat beginning, the National Spiritual Assembly starts to consider all the things that we Bahá’ís in the United Kingdom have to be proud of – our achievements over many decades, on the one hand, and those more recent accomplishments born of the enthusiasm created by the Four Year and the Twelve Month Plans.

So what are these? You will have your own list but here is what we see as the outstanding characteristics, accomplishments and activities of the United Kingdom Bahá’í community – things which the British Bahá’ís can be proud of, things which make a unique contribution to the worldwide Bahá’í community and to society at large.

At the top of the list are the arts and the Arts Academy – how these have changed and enriched the lives of us all! Scholarship and work of the Association for Bahá’í Studies, English-Speaking Europe: the scholars from our country make an outstanding contribution to Bahá’í scholarship and their books, articles and lectures are known around the world. Education: our well-established model of community schools provides Bahá’í education for children of all backgrounds while our national Bahá’í curriculum ensures a consistent and systematic approach; many other national Bahá’í communities have translated the curriculum and are using it for their own children.

And then there are publications – books, magazines, journals. Not only are we the home for three international Bahá’í publishing houses (the Bahá’í Publishing Trust, George Ronald, and OneWorld), we have a number of other thriving presses such as the Warwick Bookshop and Sapling Publications. Someone once commented that the United Kingdom was the world centre of Bahá’í book publishing. There’s also the “read round the world” Bahá’í Journal, Phoenix for youth and Dayspring for children. And let’s not forget the UK Bahá’í Review, our new external affairs quarterly magazine.

Which brings us to external affairs itself. Who can ignore the enormous strides we have taken in this field? The defence of our co-religionists in Iran, the fact that the Bahá’í Faith has been mentioned by the Prime Minister as one of the nine major religions in the United Kingdom, the high profile the Faith has received in many fora, our involvement with a host of organisations of social change, our own Associations of Bahá’í Women and that amazing “Juggle” conference last November and the newly formed Institute for Social Cohesion. And all the external affairs activities that are taking place in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales. Consider the Bahá’í exhibition at St Mungo Museum of Religion in Glasgow, currently running. How possible was that ten years ago? So abundant are the examples in this area that the National Spiritual Assembly is in danger of going on about it until Sunday!

And now we look at our past – our rich, unique heritage. The first newspaper reference to the Bábí Faith occurred in The Times on November 1, 1845; Bahá’u’lláh Himself commented favourably on the British parliamentary system and commended Queen Victoria for having ended slavery. In April 1890 Edward G. Browne of Cambridge

University was granted four interviews with Bahá’u’lláh and left the only detailed description of Him by a Westerner. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá visited Britain twice, in 1911 and in 1912-13, and was knighted by the British government in 1920. The Guardian was in England attending Balliol College at Oxford when, upon the passing of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in 1921, he became the head of the Bahá’í Faith. On November 4, 1957 Shoghi Effendi died in London; his mortal remains lie in the New Southgate Cemetery, a centre to which Bahá’ís from all over the world come.

The Guardian inspired the British friends in the first Six Year Plan to achieve remarkable victories on the homefront and then gave us the Two Year Africa Campaign during which pioneers such as Philip Hainsworth, Ted Cardell, Claire Gung and Isobel and Hassan Sabri settled in East Africa, attracting his praise and winning accolades for the British Bahá’í community.

And looking forward? The development of study circles, the fantastic Tranquillity Zones,

the homefront pioneering, leading to new believers, new communities, new hope. Having inspired ourselves with this list, we think, “Why not share this with the friends? Surely they will be uplifted by a recital of their achievements.” No vote needed – decided by acclamation!

... our contributions to the Faith are the surest way of lifting once and for all time the burden of hunger and misery from mankind ... (Shoghi Effendi: Lights of Guidance, p. 122)

Finance Department

Boundaries and Finances

DO YOU LIVE in a new community owing to the changes in boundaries? Do you have a Gift Aid or covenant? Have you requested that all or part of your Gift Aid/covenant donation go back to your old community? If the answer to these three questions is yes, please let the Finance Department know how you wish your donation to be distributed now, in the light of the new boundary changes, i.e. your old community does not exist or you are not part of that community. The Finance Department can be contacted either by email, telephone or post, whichever is the most convenient for you.

Many of us now live in very small groups (I live in a “family” group of two people!) and are wondering what to do about having a Bahá’í fund and a bank account. Here is some new guidance for us:

Groups of two or more people may, if they wish, open a bank account in the name of the group (i.e. Bahá’í Community of XXXX). This will enable them to make group donations and individuals will be able to use the gift aid system to earmark for their local fund (see below*).

Wherever possible, the signatories on the account should be from different families, but if this is not possible (as in my community) it should not prevent the group opening an account. As the group grows so the signatories can be changed.

Groups wishing to open a bank account should consider using NATWEST bank, asking for the Clubs & Associates Mandate form. This is because the National Assembly itself uses NATWEST and the transfers can be made very quickly from the National Assembly account to the local account. No groups should be subject to payment of bank charges but if they are, please contact the Finance Department.

Isolated believers should remember that they, like all other individuals, can make their own contributions to the main funds of the Faith i.e. National (including Regional Branches), International and Continental Fund. The only fund that isolated believers cannot support is their own local fund, but of course it does not prevent them supporting a nearby community, thus fulfilling the wishes of the Guardian to support all funds.

*In brief, an individual who pays tax and wants to contribute to his or her local fund should send the donation to the National Fund earmarked for the local fund. The Finance Department will then send the whole amount back to the local fund and keep the 28p per pound gift aid for the National Fund. Then if the local community wishes itself to make a contribution to the National Fund, the local treasurer issues a community cheque made payable to the National Fund. It may seem a lot of to-ing and fro-ing but it does increase the amount the National Fund receives by quite a bit!

Wendi Momen, Treasurer

Tranquillity Zone Website

ARRANGING A Tranquillity Zone has proved a valuable experience for many local communities. It can be very useful for proclamation and teaching and as a public service/social development project (though this and the teaching role should

Screen shot



not, of course, be confused). The National Spiritual Assembly feels it has much to offer as one approach for the spreading of the Faith. In fact it has taken it seriously enough to trademark the name Tranquillity Zone to make sure it is not exploited commercially and also to establish a domain for it on the World Wide Web.


Image from: www.connectworldwide.net [Site is no longer available].

It therefore gives the National Assembly great pleasure to announce the launch of its official Tranquillity Zone Website at <http://www.tranquillity-zone.org.uk/> with details about how to hold one, practical advice, possible readings, samples of press coverage from around the country, and other material.

The friends are encouraged to visit this site: for those thinking of or planning a Tranquillity Zone locally a visit is essential. Communities with their own Websites – an increasing number – could also consider making a link from their site to the Tranquillity Zone one.

For those who cannot access the Website the material is available in printed form on request from the National Spiritual Assembly, at 27 Rutland Gate, London, SW7 1PD.

The National Assembly is also making available the files of the Website so that those who wish can have the whole thing on their hard disk. It comes as a Zipped archive of 703KB and is available electronically from: <mailto:resources@bahai.org.uk>

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