

## THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

Day of the Covenant  
26 November 2003

To the Followers of Bahá'u'lláh in the Cradle of the Faith

Dearly loved Friends,

It is now a little over 125 years since 'Abdu'l-Bahá addressed His open letter to the people of your country. Because of His vital role in a religious community that had been made the object of intense prejudice, the Author necessarily refrained from attaching His name to the document. His message, however, could not have been more clear. Speaking out of a profound love for a native land that He had not seen during the long years of exile since His childhood, the Master appealed in passionate language for its people to call to mind those days when Iran "was as the heart of the world", "the source and centre of sciences and arts, the wellspring of great inventions and discoveries, the rich mine of human virtues and perfections". The time had come, He insisted, when the heirs of so great a civilization could—and must—arise and reclaim their heritage.

What the letter prophetically laid out was the challenge of modernity. Today, that challenge has become the inescapable preoccupation of populations throughout the planet, not least the peoples of the Islamic world. The meaning of modernity and the features of that rising flood of cultural revolution were explicitly identified in the Master's message: constitutional and democratic government, the rule of law, universal education, the protection of human rights, economic development, religious tolerance, the promotion of useful sciences and technologies and programmes of public welfare. In praising the achievements of what He termed this "temporal and material apparatus of civilization", the Master made it clear that He was not proposing simply a credulous imitation of the West. On the contrary. In uncompromising language, He portrayed European society as drowning "in the sea of passion and desire", trapped in a materialistic perception of reality that could bring in its wake nothing but disillusionment:

Be just: can this nominal civilization, unsupported by a genuine civilization of character, bring about the peace and well-being of the people or win the good pleasure of God? Does it not, rather, connote the destruction of man's estate and pull down the pillars of happiness and peace?

Readers were urged to look below surface phenomena. As a lengthy exposition of historical processes would have burdened what was intended as an urgent appeal for reflection and action, 'Abdu'l-Bahá confined Himself to a few salient examples of the points He was making. Their common theme was the transformative power that has been responsible for all of humanity's development over the ages and that would later lend the published edition of the letter its familiar title *The Secret of Divine Civilization*. Whether in reviewing events of Persian history or touching on passages in the Holy Qur'án, the letter called on its readers to reflect deeply about the unique endowment that promotes the advancement of all human well-being: