

5 December 2000

Transmitted electronically

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

Bahá'í World News Service and Network of National Public Information Officers

In February of this year we wrote to you, asking you to complete a questionnaire on the status of your public information activities. We indicated at the time that we saw a growing need to expand the availability of news and information about the activities of the Bahá'í community, not only for the benefit of Bahá'ís themselves, but also for the media and other interested sectors of society. We also indicated that we hoped to systematize the gathering and dissemination of news by making more effective use of the global network of national public information officers.

Over the past several months we have received nearly 100 completed questionnaires. These have proved extraordinarily helpful for the analysis of current needs and available resources. We would still appreciate receiving completed questionnaires from any Assemblies that have not yet responded. So far we have learned that more than 60 Assemblies have appointed officers or committees to handle the public information work, and we have found a great diversity of systematic efforts in the public information arena around the world.

Against this backdrop we are pleased to announce the launching of the Bahá'í World News Service, an Internet-based news service that will greatly facilitate the flow of news and information about Bahá'í activities in different parts of the world. The news service covers a broad spectrum of Bahá'í activity, including external affairs, teaching and consolidation, institutional development, social and economic development, youth activities, the arts and scholarship. Its primary means of distribution are through a Web site, <www.bahaiworldnews.org>, and through email subscriber lists. Subscription to the news service is available to anyone, including Bahá'í institutions and individuals as well as the media and the general public. A cumulative digest will be published monthly and sent primarily to Bahá'í institutions.

The Bahá'í World News Service supersedes the Bahá'í International News Service (BINS), the biweekly news bulletin that ceased publication with its issue of 15 September 2000. The Bahá'í World News Service will fulfil many of the same functions as BINS in informing Bahá'ís about the state of the community around the world and encouraging and stimulating them in their own activities. However, because it is a public news service, it will be produced with the media and the general public in mind and will play an important role in the public information work. An occasional supplement for Bahá'ís only under the title "Culture of Growth" will be published along with the monthly digest.

The launching of the Bahá'í World News Service opens several lines of activity for the National Public Information Officers (NPIOs). As noted above, more than 60 National

Spiritual Assemblies have appointed NPIOs to handle relations with the media and to prepare press releases and articles on the activities of their national communities. Our aim is that these officers will serve, subject to your direction and the resources available to them, as members of a network of correspondents for the Bahá'í World News Service. They would submit timely reports and photographs to the news service and may be contacted by our Office for assistance in reporting and gathering information about particular events. They would maintain close contact with the secretariats of their National Spiritual Assemblies, checking with them as to the accuracy and propriety of reports intended for the news service. In addition, the NPIOs would serve as a distribution network for the news service by seeking out means of conveying articles from the news service to appropriate media in their countries.

The Office of Public Information will be communicating soon with the National Public Information Officers to convey further guidelines for their participation in the Bahá'í World News Service. As a rule any correspondence addressed to the NPIOs will be carbon copied to your national secretariats. We will work from the list of NPIOs that we have compiled from the responses to the questionnaire. Please help us to keep the list current by informing us immediately if a new officer is appointed.

We would like to briefly address the question of news photographs. Quality photographs greatly enhance the value of the news service, and we would like to encourage all the NPIOs to document news events with action photographs. Because timeliness is essential, we hope that to the extent possible photographs will be submitted by email in an electronic file format. For this purpose your Assembly may wish to consider obtaining a digital camera or to encourage friends with such equipment to volunteer their services.

Distribution of photographs will also be primarily by electronic means. The news service Web site will have a photo archive that will enable users to download images for printing in national news bulletins or for other purposes. A number of National Spiritual Assemblies have been receiving glossy black and white prints of news photos with their biweekly BINS bulletins. We will continue to provide prints, but would like to make them available only to those Assemblies that are unable to make use of electronic images. We have enclosed a few questions about your Internet communications capacity, which we hope you will answer and return to us as soon as possible.

Thank you very much for your assistance and support. We are very excited about the Bahá'í World News Service and look forward to working with you and your National Public Information Officers in this endeavor.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Office of Public Information

Enclosure

cc: International Teaching Centre
Continental Boards of Counsellors
Counsellors

