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12 April 1948

UNITED NATIONS PALESTINE COMMISSION

Communication Received from National Spiritual Assembly
of the Baha'is of the United States and Canada, concerning the
Organization's position with regard to Palestine and the pre-
servation of religious rights.

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Assembly of the Baha'is of the United States and Canada, concerning the
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NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY OF THE BAHÁ'Í'S
OF THE UNITED STATES AND CANADA

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Office of the Secretary:
536 Sheridan Road, Wilmette, Illinois.

April 6, 1948

Dr. Ralph J. Bunche
United Nations Palestine Commission
Lake Success, N.Y.

Dear Dr. Bunche:

Acting through our Assembly, eight National Baha'i Assemblies in North America, Europe, Africa, the Middle and Far East, and Australasia are accredited to the Non-Governmental Section of United Nations as an international organization.

On behalf of the international Baha'i community, we desire to record with the Palestine Commission the following statement on the Baha'i interests in Palestine, and respectfully appeal to the Commission for the preservation of these religious rights.

The three sacred persons of our faith are interred in Palestine, and their shrines have for many years, interrupted only by the two world wars, been the goal of pilgrimage for Baha'is of East and West. The founder of our religion, Baha'u'llah, was exiled to Akka from Adrianople before 1870 and died in 1892. His eldest son, 'Abdu'l-Baha, appointed his successor and the interpreter of his written teachings, shared this exile and continued to live in Akka and Haifa under official duress until the overthrow of the Turkish regime in 1908, and in a condition of freedom until his death in 1921. The Bab, who heralded the coming of Baha'u'llah, martyred in Tabriz for his faith in 1850, was interred on Mount Carmel by direction of 'Abdu'l-Baha in 1909.

In his will and testament, 'Abdu'l-Baha provided for the Baha'is an international administrative order under the headship of his grandson, Shoghi Effendi, in the office of Guardian and chairmanship of the Baha'is.

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House of Justice to be elected in the future.

Our religious head, Shoghi Effendi, maintains the Baha'i world center in Haifa which supervises and coordinates the local and national activities of the faith in other lands. The Guardian has likewise developed the Baha'i shrines and represented the Baha'i interests in Palestine in relation to the civil authority since 1922.

In the light of these facts, the Baha'is point out that their religious interests in the Holy Land are unique, in that Palestine embraces their world center of pilgrimage and their international administrative seat as well. The soul and mind of this new worldwide religion are both identified with the Holy Land, and the members of the faith have during recent decades greatly increased the holdings of property adjacent to our shrines. These properties due to their religious nature have been exempted from both government and municipal taxation.

The future political disposition of the Holy Land is not our concern. The Baha'is take no side in any political issue. Ours is a deep and abiding spiritual devotion to the maintenance of our sacred places and the development of future religious institutions for the furtherance of the universal principles given the world today by Baha'u'llah.

Yours faithfully,

National Spiritual Assembly

By: /s/ Morace Holley

Secretary.

THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE BAHÁ'Í FAITH
TO PALESTINE

A Statement By
Shoghi Rabbani

To Mr. Justice Emil Sandstrom, Chairman
United Nations Special Committee on Palestine

July 14, 1947

Mr. Justice Emil Sandstrom, Chairman
United Nations Special Committee on Palestine

Sir:

Your kind letter of July 9th reached me and I wish to thank you for affording me the opportunity of presenting to you and your esteemed colleagues a statement of the relationship which the Baha'i Faith has to Palestine and our attitude towards any future changes in the status of this sacred and much disputed land.

I am enclosing with this letter, for your information, a brief sketch of the history, aims and significance of the Baha'i Faith, as well as a small pamphlet setting forth its views towards the present state of the world and the lines on which we hope and believe it must and will develop.

The position of the Baha'is in this country is in a certain measure unique; whereas Jerusalem is the spiritual center of Christendom it is not the administrative center of either the Church of Rome or any other Christian denomination. Likewise although it is regarded by Moslems as the spot where one of its most sacred shrines is situated, the Holy Sites of the Mohamedam Faith, and the center of its pilgrimages, are to be found in Arabia, not in Palestine. The Jews alone offer somewhat of a parallel to the attachment which the Baha'is have for this country inasmuch as Jerusalem holds the remains of their Holy Temple and was the seat of both the religious and political institutions associated with their past history. But even their case differs in one respect from that of the Baha'is, for it is in the soil of Palestine that the three central figures of our religion are buried, and it is not only the center of Baha'i pilgrimages from all over the world but also the permanent seat of our Administrative Order, of which I have the honor to be the Head.

The Baha'i Faith is entirely non-political and we neither take sides in the present tragic dispute going on over the future of the Holy Land and its peoples nor have we any statement to make or advice to give as to what the nature of the

political future of this country should be. Our aim is the establishment of universal peace in this world and our desire to see justice prevail in every domain of human society, including the domain of politics. As many of the adherents of our Faith are of Jewish and Moslem extraction we have no prejudice towards either of these groups and are most anxious to reconcile them for their mutual benefit and for the good of the country.

What does concern us, however, in any decisions made affecting the future of Palestine, is that the fact be recognized by whoever exercises sovereignty over Haifa and Acre, that within this area exists the spiritual and administrative center of a world Faith, and that the independence of that Faith, its right to manage its international affairs from their source, the right of Baha'is from any and every country of the globe to visit it as pilgrims (enjoying the same privilege in this respect as Jews, Moslems and Christians do in regard to visiting Jerusalem) be acknowledged and permanently safeguarded.

The Sepulchre of the Bab on Mt. Carmel, the Tomb of 'Abdu'l-Baha in that same spot, the Pilgrim Hostel for oriental Baha'is in its vicinity, the large gardens and terraces which surround these places (all of which are open to visits by the public of all denominations), the Pilgrim Hostel for western Baha'is at the foot of Mt. Carmel, the residence of the Head of the Community, various houses and gardens in Acre and its vicinity associated with Baha'u'llah's incarceration in that city. His Holy Tomb at Bahji, near Acre, with His Mansion which is now preserved as a historic site and a museum (both likewise accessible to the public of all denominations), as well as holdings in the plain of Acre -- all these comprise the bulk of Baha'i properties in the Holy Land. It should also be noted that practically all of these properties have been exempted from both Government and Municipal taxes owing to their religious nature. Some of these extensive holdings are the property of the Palestine Branch of the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada, incorporated as a religious society according to the laws

of the country. In future various other Baha'i National Assemblies will hold, through their Palestine Branches, parts of the International Endowments of the Faith in the Holy Land.

In view of the above information I would request you and the members of your Committee to take into consideration the safeguarding of Baha'i rights in any recommendation which you may make to the United Nations concerning the future of Palestine.

May I take this opportunity of assuring you of my deep appreciation of the spirit in which you and your colleagues have conducted your investigations into the troubled conditions of this Sacred Land. I trust and pray that the outcome of your deliberations will produce an equitable and speedy solution of the very thorny problems which have arisen in Palestine.

Yours faithfully,

(Signed) Shoghi Rabbani

Haifa, Palestine

July 14, 1947

The Faith established by Baha'u'llah was born in Persia about the middle of the nineteenth century and has, as a result of the successive banishments of its Founder, culminating in His exile to the Turkish penal colony of Acre, and His subsequent death and burial in its vicinity, fixed its permanent spiritual center in the Holy Land, and is now in the process of laying the foundations of its world administrative center in the city of Haifa.

Alike in the claims unequivocally asserted by its Author and the general character of the growth of the Baha'i community in every continent of the globe, it can be regarded in no other light than a world religion, destined to evolve in the course of time into a world-embracing commonwealth, whose advent must signalize the Golden Age of mankind, the age in which the unity of the human race will have been unassailably established, its maturity attained, and its glorious destiny unfolded through the birth and efflorescence of a world-encompassing civilization.

Though sprung from Shi'ah Islam, and regarded, in the early stages of its development, by the followers of both the Muslim and Christian Faiths, as an obscure sect, an Asiatic cult or an off-shoot of the Muhammadan religion, this Faith is now increasingly demonstrating its right to be recognized, not as one more religious system superimposed on the conflicting creeds which for so many generations have divided mankind and darkened its fortunes, but rather as a restatement of the eternal verities underlying all the religions of the past, as a unifying force instilling into the adherents of these religions a new spiritual vigor, infusing them with a new hope and love for mankind, firing them with a new vision of the fundamental unity of their religious doctrines, and unfolding to their eyes the glorious destiny that awaits the human race.

The fundamental principle enunciated by Baha'u'llah, the followers of His Faith firmly believe, is that religious truth is not absolute but relative, that Divine Revelation is a continuous and progressive process, that all the great

religions of the world are divine in origin, that their basic principles are in complete harmony, that their aims and purposes are one and the same, that their teachings are but facets of one truth, that their functions are complementary, that they differ only in the non-essential aspects of their doctrines, and that their missions represent successive stages in the spiritual evolution of human society.

The aim of Baha'u'llah, the Prophet of this new and great age which humanity has entered upon--He whose advent fulfills the prophecies of the Old and New Testaments as well as those of the Qur'an regarding the coming of the Promised One in the end of time, on the Day of Judgment - is not to destroy but to fulfill the Revelations of the past, to reconcile rather than accentuate the divergencies of the conflicting creeds which disrupt present day society.

His purpose, far from belittling the station of the Prophets gone before Him or of whittling down their teachings, is to restate the basic truths which these teachings enshrine in a manner that would conform to the needs, and be in consonance with the capacity, and be applicable to the problems, the ills and perplexities, of the age in which we live. His mission is to proclaim that the ages of the infancy and of the childhood of the human race are past, that the convulsions associated with the present state of its adolescence are slowly and painfully preparing it to attain the stage of manhood, and are heralding the approach of that Age of Ages when swords will be beaten into plowshares, when the Kingdom promised by Jesus Christ will have been established, and the peace of the planet definitely and permanently ensured. Nor does Baha'u'llah claim finality for His own Revelation, but rather stipulates that a fuller measure of the truth He has been commissioned by the Almighty to vouchsafe to humanity, at so critical a juncture in its fortunes, must needs be disclosed at future stages in the constant and limitless evolution of mankind.

The Baha'i faith upholds the unity of God, recognizes the unity of His Prophets, and inculcates the principle of the oneness and wholeness of the entire human race. It proclaims the necessity and the inevitability of the unification of mankind, asserts that it is gradually approaching, and claims that nothing short of the transmuting spirit of God, working through His chosen Mouthpiece in this day, can ultimately succeed in bringing it about. It, moreover, enjoins upon its followers the primary duty of an unfettered search after truth, condemns all manner of prejudice and superstition, declares the purpose of religion to be the promotion of amity and concord, proclaims its essential harmony with science, and recognizes it as the foremost agency for the pacification and the orderly progress of human society. It unequivocally maintains the principle of equal rights, opportunities and privileges for men and women, insists on compulsory education, eliminates extremes of poverty and wealth, abolishes the institution of priesthood, prohibits slavery, asceticism, mendicancy and monasticism, prescribes monogamy, discourages divorce, emphasizes the necessity of strict obedience to one's government, exalts any work performed in the spirit of service to the level of worship, urges either the creation or the selection of an auxiliary international language, and delineates the outlines of those institutions that must establish and perpetuate the general peace of mankind.

The Baha'i Faith revolves around three central Figures, the first of whom was a youth, a native of Shiraz, named Mirza 'Ali-Muhammad, known as the Bab (Gate), who in May, 1844, at the age of twenty-five, advanced the claim of being the Herald Who, according to the sacred Scriptures of previous Dispensations, must needs announce and prepare the way for the advent of One greater than Himself, Whose mission would be, according to those same Scriptures, to inaugurate an era of righteousness and peace, an era that would be hailed as the consummation of all previous Dispensations, and initiate a new cycle in the religious history of mankind. Swift and severe persecution, launched by the organized forces of Church and State in His

native land, precipitated successively His arrest, His exile to the mountains of Adharbayjan, His imprisonment in the fortresses of Mah-Ku and Chihriq, and His execution, in July 1850, by a firing squad in the public square of Tabriz. No less than twenty thousand of his followers were put to death with such barbarous cruelty as to evoke the warm sympathy and the unqualified admiration of a number of Western writers, diplomats, travelers and scholars, some of whom were witnesses of these abominable outrages, and were moved to record them in their books and diaries.

Mirza Husayn-'Ali, surnamed Baha'U'llah (the Glory of God), a native of Mazindaran, Whose advent the Bab had foretold, was assailed by those same forces of ignorance and fanaticism, was imprisoned in Tihiran, was banished, in 1852, from His native land to Bagdad, and thence to Constantinople and Adrianople, and finally to the prison city of Acre, where He remained incarcerated for no less than twenty-four years, and in whose neighborhood he passed away in 1892. In the course of His banishment, and particularly in Adrianople and Acre, He formulated the laws and ordinances of His Dispensation, expounded, in over a hundred volumes, the principles of His Faith, proclaimed His Message to the kings and rulers of both the East and the West, both Christian and Muslim, addressed the Pope, the Caliph of Islam, the Chief Magistrates of the Republics of the American continent, the entire Christian sacerdotal order, the leaders of Shi'ah and Sunni Islam, and the high priests of the Zoroastrian religion. In these writings He proclaimed His Revelation, summoned those whom He addressed to heed His call and espouse His Faith, warned them of the consequences of their refusal, and denounced, in some cases, their arrogance and tyranny.

His eldest son, 'Abbas, Effendi, known as 'Abdu'l-Baha (the Servant of Baha), appointed by Him as His lawful successor and the authorized interpreter of His teachings, Who since early childhood had been closely associated with His Father, and shared His exile and tribulations, remained a prisoner until 1908, when, as a result of the Young Turk Revolution, He was released from His confinement.

Establishing His residence in Haifa, He embarked soon after on His three-year journey to Egypt, Europe and North America, in the course of which he expounded before vast audiences, the teachings of His Father and predicted the approach of that catastrophe that was soon to befall mankind. He returned to His home on the eve of the first World War, in the course of which He was exposed to constant danger, until the liberation of Palestine by the forces under the command of General Allenby, who extended the utmost consideration to Him and to the small band of His fellow-exiles in Acre and Haifa. In 1921 He passed away, and was buried in a vault in the mausoleum erected on Mount Carmel, at the express instruction of Baha'u'llah, for the remains of the Bab, which had previously been transferred from Tabriz to the Holy Land after having been preserved and concealed for no less than sixty years.

The passing of 'Abdu'l-Baha marked the termination of the first and Heroic Age of the Baha'i Faith and signalized the opening of the Formative Age destined to witness the gradual emergence of its Administrative Order, whose establishment had been foretold by the Bab, whose laws were revealed by Baha'u'llah, whose outlines were delineated by 'Abdu'l-Baha in His Will and Testament, and whose foundations are now being laid by the national local councils which are elected by the professed adherents of the Faith, and which are paving the way for the constitution of the World Council, to be designated as the Universal House of Justice, which, in conjunction with me, as its appointed Head and the authorized interpreter of the Baha'i teachings, must coordinate and direct the affairs of the Baha'i community, and whose seat will be permanently established in the Holy Land, in close proximity to its world spiritual center, the resting-places of its Founders.

The Administrative Order of the Faith of Baha'u'llah, which is destined to evolve into the Baha'i World Commonwealth, and has already survived the assaults launched against its institutions by such formidable foes as the Kings of the Qajar dynasty, the Caliphs of Islam, the ecclesiastical leaders of Egypt, and the Nazi regime in Germany, has already extended its ramifications to every continent of the

globe, stretching from Iceland to the extremity of Chile, has been established in no less than eighty-eight countries of the world, has gathered within its pale representatives of no less than thirty-one races, numbers among its supporters, Christians of various denominations, Muslims of both Sunni and Shi'ah sects, Jews, Hindus, Sikhs, Zoroastrians and Buddhists. It has published and disseminated, through its appointed agencies, Baha'i literature in forty-eight languages; has already consolidated its structure through the incorporation of five National Assemblies and seventy-seven local Assemblies, in lands as far apart as South America, India and the Antipodes - incorporations that legally empower its elected representatives to hold property as trustees of the Baha'i community. It disposes of international, national and local endowments, estimated at several million pounds, and spread over every continent of the globe, enjoys in several countries the privilege of official recognition by the civil authorities, enabling it to secure exemption from taxation for its endowments and to solemnize Baha'i marriage, and numbers among its stately edifices, two temples, the one erected in Russian Turkistan and the other on the shore of Lake Michigan at Wilmette, on the outskirts of Chicago.

This Administrative Order, unlike the systems evolved after the death of the Founders of the various religions, is divine in origin, rests securely on the laws, the precepts, the ordinances and institutions which the Founder of the Faith has Himself specifically laid down and unequivocally established, and functions in strict accordance with the interpretations of the authorized Interpreters of its holy scriptures. Though fiercely assailed, ever since its inception, it has, by virtue of its character, unique in the annals of the world's religious history, succeeded in maintaining the unity of the diversified and far-flung body of its supporters, and enabled them to launch, unitedly and systematically, enterprises in both Hemispheres, designed to extend its limits and consolidate its administrative institutions.

The Faith which this order serves, safeguards and promotes, is it should be noted in this connection, essentially supernatural, supranational, entirely non-political, non-partisan, and diametrically opposed to any policy or school of thought that seeks to exalt any particular race, class or nation. It is free from any form of ecclesiasticism, has neither priesthood nor rituals, and is supported exclusively by voluntary contributions made by its avowed adherents. Though loyal to their respective governments, though imbued with the love of their own country and anxious to promote, at all times, its best interests, the followers of the Baha'i Faith, nevertheless, viewing mankind as one entity, and profoundly attached to its vital interests, will not hesitate to subordinate every particular interest, be it personal, regional or national, to the over-riding interests of the generality of mankind, knowing full well that in a world of inter-dependent peoples and nations the advantage of the part is best to be reached by the advantage of the whole and that no lasting result can be achieved by any of the component parts if the general interests of the entity itself are neglected.

Nor should the fact be overlooked that the Faith has already asserted and demonstrated its independent religious character, has been emancipated from the fetters of orthodoxy in certain Islamic countries, has obtained in one of them an unsolicited testimony to its independent religious status, and succeeded in winning the allegiance of royalty to its cause.

"It is like a wide embrace," is Queen Marie of Rumania's own tribute, "gathering together all those who have searched for words of hope. It accepts all great Prophets gone before, it destroys no other creeds and leaves all doors open.....The Baha'i teachings brings peace to the soul and hope to the heart. To those in search of assurance the words of the Father are as a fountain in the desert after long wandering.....It is a wondrous message that Baha'u'llah and His son 'Abdu'l-Baha have given us. They have not set it up aggressively, knowing that the germ of eternal truth which lies at its core cannot but take root and

spread.....It is Christ's Message taken up anew, in the same words almost, but adapted to the thousand years and more difference that lies between the year one and today.....If ever the name of Baha'u'llah or 'Abdu'l-Baha comes to your attention, do not put their writings from you. Search out their books, and let their glorious, peace-bringing, love-creating words and lessons sink into your hearts as they have into mine."

"The teachings of the Babis, "wrote Leo Tolstoy,"..... have a great future before them....I therefore sympathize with Babism with all my heart, inasmuch as it teaches people brotherhood and equality and sacrifice of material life for service to God....The teachings of the Babis which come to us out of Islam have through Baha'u'llah's teachings been gradually developed, and now present us with the highest and purest form of religious teaching."

"Take these principles to the diplomats," is the late President Masaryk's advice, "to the universities and colleges and other schools, and also write about them. It is the people who will bring the universal peace." "The Baha'i teaching," is President Eduard Benes' testimony, "is one of the great instruments for the final victory of the spirit and of humanity.....The Baha'i Cause is one of the great moral and social forces in all the world today. I am more convinced than ever, with the increasing moral and political crises in the world, we must have greater international coordination. Such a movement as the Baha'i Cause which paves the way for universal organization of peace is necessary."

"If there has been any Prophet in recent times," asserts the Rev. T. K. Cheyne in his 'The Reconciliation of Races and Religions', "it is to Baha'u'llah that we must go. Character is the final judge. Baha'u'llah was a man of the highest class - that of Prophets." "It is possible indeed, "declares Viscount Samuel of Carmel, "to pick out points of fundamental agreement among all creeds. That is the essential purpose of the Baha'i religion, the foundation and growth of which is one of the most striking movements that have proceeded from the East in

recent generations."

"Palestine," is Professor Norman Bentwich's written testimony, "may indeed be now regarded as the land not of three but of four faiths, because the Baha'i creed, which has its center of faith and pilgrimage in Acre and Haifa, is attaining to the character of a world religion. So far as its influence goes in the land, it is a factor making for international and inter-religious understanding."

And, finally, is the judgment passed by no less outstanding a figure than the late Master of Balliol, Professor Benjamin Jowett: "The Babi movement may not impossibly turn out to have the promise of the future." Professor Lewis Campbell, an eminent pupil of Dr. Jowett, has confirmed this statement by quoting him as saying: "This Baha'i Movement is the greatest light that has come into the world since the time of Jesus Christ. You must watch it and never let it out of your sight. It is too great and too near for this generation to comprehend. The future alone can reveal its import."