

## XXXI. MILITARY SERVICE

Compiled from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, Abdu'l

Original English



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### 1. Bahá'ís Cannot Voluntarily Enlist Where Subject to Taking Human Life

"Bahá'ís cannot voluntarily enlist in any branch of the Armed Forces where they would be subject to orders to engage in the taking of human life."

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Fiji Islands, August 2, 1971)

### 1. Bahá'ís Are Not Conscientious Objectors

"Our position as Bahá'ís is not that we won't obey our Government or support the country if attacked, it is that we do not believe in, or wish to take part in, killing our fellow-men. We are not conscientious objectors at all; we will serve, but wish, as there is a provision in the law in the U.S.A. covering our attitude, to be classified as non-combatants. If you need to consult on this matter, you should refer to the N.S.A., as this question continually arises, and they can give you advice which will be the most accurate and applicable to present conditions."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, July 15, 1952)

### 1. There Are Many Avenues Through which the Believers Can Assist in Time of War

"It is still his firm conviction that the believers, while expressing their readiness to unreservedly obey any directions that the authorities may issue concerning national service in time of war, should also, and while there is yet no outbreak of hostilities, appeal to the government for exemption from active military service in a combatant capacity, stressing the fact that in doing so they are not prompted by any selfish considerations, but by the sole and supreme motive of upholding the Teachings of their Faith, which make it a moral obligation for them to desist from any act that would involve them into direct warfare with their fellow-humans of any other race or nation."

"The Bahá'í Teachings, indeed, condemn, emphatically and unequivocally, any form of physical violence, and warfare in the battlefield is obviously a form, and perhaps the worst form, which such violence can assume."

"There are many other avenues through which the believers can assist in times of war by enlisting in services of a non-combatant nature — services that do not involve the direct



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shedding of blood — such as ambulance work, anti-air raid precaution service, office and administrative works, and it is for such types of national service that they should volunteer."

"It is immaterial whether such activities would still expose them to dangers, either at home or in the front, since their desire is not to protect their lives, but to desist from any acts of wilful murder."

"The friends should consider it their conscientious duty, as loyal members of the Faith, to apply for such exemption, even though there may be slight prospect of their obtaining the consent and approval of the authorities to their petition. It is most [pg 408] essential that in times of such national excitement and emergency as those through which so many countries in the world are now passing that the believers should not allow themselves to be carried away by the passions agitating the masses, and act in a manner that would make them deviate from the path of wisdom and moderation, and lead them to violate, however reluctantly and indirectly, the spirit as well as the letter of the Teachings."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the British Isles, June 4, 1939)

### **1. Bahá'ís Recognize the Right and Duty of Governments to Protect Their People**

"...Bahá'ís recognize the right and duty of governments to use force for the maintenance of law and order and to protect their people. Thus, for a Bahá'í, the shedding of blood for such a purpose is not necessarily essentially wrong. The Bahá'í Faith draws a very definite distinction between the duty of an individual to forgive and 'to be killed rather than to kill' and the duty of society to uphold justice. This matter is explained by Abdu'l-Bahá in 'Some Answered Questions'. In the present condition of the world Bahá'ís try to keep themselves out of the internecine conflicts that are raging among their fellow men and to avoid shedding blood in such struggles, but this does not mean that we are absolute pacifists. This point is explained in the following statement written by the Guardian's secretary on his behalf on 21 November, 1935:

'With reference to the absolute pacifists, or conscientious objectors to war; their attitude, judged from the Bahá'í standpoint, is quite anti-social and due to its exaltation of the individual conscience leads inevitably to disorder and chaos in society. Extreme pacifists are thus very close to the anarchists, in the sense that both of these groups lay an undue emphasis on the rights and merits of the individual. The Bahá'í conception of social life is essentially based on the subordination of the individual will to that of society. It neither suppresses the individual nor does it exalt him to the point of making him an anti-social creature, a menace to society. As in everything, it follows the 'golden mean'. The only way that society can function is for the minority to follow the will of the majority.'

'The other main objection to the conscientious objectors is that their method of establishing peace is too negative. Non-cooperation is too passive a philosophy to become an effective way for social reconstruction. Their refusal to bear arms can never establish peace. There should first be a spiritual revitalization which nothing, except the Cause of God, can effectively bring to every man's heart.'

"A further quotation which may help this dear friend to understand this matter is the passage about the establishment of the Lesser Peace on page 65 of 'The Secret of Divine Civilization'."

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, February 9, 1967)

**1. It is Their Duty as Loyal and Devoted Citizens to Offer Their Services to Their Country**

"He has noted your Assembly's request for his advice as to what forms of national service the friends may volunteer for in times of emergency. While the believers, he [pg 409] feels, should exert every effort to obtain from the authorities a permit exempting them from active military service in a combatant capacity, it is their duty at the same time, as loyal and devoted citizens, to offer their services to their country in any field of national service which is not specifically aggressive or directly military. Such forms of national work as air raid precaution service, ambulance corps, and other humanitarian work or activity of a noncombatant nature, are the most suitable types of service the friends can render, and which they should gladly volunteer for, since in addition to the fact that they do not involve any violation of the spirit or principle of the Teachings, they constitute a form of social and humanitarian service which the Cause holds sacred and emphatically enjoins."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the British Isles, November 27, 1938)

**1. "Specifically Aggressive or Directly Military" Activities Are to be Avoided**

"From study of the beloved Guardian's letters it is apparent that what he wanted the friends to avoid is 'specifically aggressive or directly military' activities. As regards indirect activities it would be extremely difficult in modern society for anyone to disassociate himself from activities which, in the long run and by devolution, are inimical to the human race."

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, November 29, 1967)

**1. A Bahá'í May Enlist in the Armed Forces if Not Made Liable for Combatant Service**

"...there is no objection to a Bahá'í enlisting voluntarily in the armed forces of a country in order to obtain a training in some trade or profession, provided that he can do so without making himself liable to undertake combatant service."

"There is likewise no objection to a Bahá'í seeking or continuing a career in the armed forces, provided that he can do so without making himself liable to undertake combatant service."

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly, January 13, 1981)

**1. National Service Through Professions Useful to Mankind — National Spiritual Assembly Has Responsibility to Counsel Youth**

"Whenever circumstances of military or paramilitary service arise the Bahá'í friends should do their utmost to avoid taking part. If, however, they are compelled to do so they should then do

everything possible to ensure that they are engaged only in non-combatant services. When the question of National Service, such as you describe in Guyana, includes training in skills and professions useful to mankind, such as agriculture, the friends may certainly volunteer for such services, provided they are definitely assured that their training will not subject them later to call up for military service in combatant roles."

"If compelled to enter training of a military kind the friends should endeavour to be assigned to such non-combatant activities as stretcher bearing, the medical corps, administrative duties, and other essential departments of military organizations which would not involve them directly in the taking of life."

"It is therefore for your National Spiritual Assembly to decide whether the National Service programme in Guyana is a permissible occupation for Bahá'í youth and [pg 410] if so whether on a voluntary basis, or if under compulsion, what steps can be taken to enable Bahá'í youth to serve as non-combatants."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Guyana, Surinam and French Guiana, September 14, 1975)

#### **1. Bahá'ís Are Not Asking to be Given a Safe Berth During Hours of National Crisis**

"Regarding your question about military service, the Guardian sees no reason why the Bahá'í in question should not bring a test case, and press the matter. It is now, since he has become a follower of Bahá'u'lláh, against his conscience to kill his fellow-men; and he should have the right to explain his position and ask to be exempted from combatant service. During the hearing of such cases, the Bahá'ís should make it absolutely clear that we do not fear being placed in danger, and are not asking to be given a safe berth in hours of national crisis — quite the contrary — any dangerous service that Bahá'ís can render their fellow-men during the agonies of war, they should be anxious to accept."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the British Isles, February 25, 1951) [pg 411]

