

VII. National Committees

Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi

Original English



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Large issues in such spiritual activities that affect the Cause in general in that land, ... far from being under the exclusive jurisdiction of any Local Assembly or group of friends, must each be minutely and fully directed by a special board, elected by the National Body, constituted as a committee thereof, responsible to it and upon which the National Body shall exercise constant and general supervision.

From a letter 5 March 1922 written by Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada, 'Bahá'í Administration', p. 24

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I very highly approve of the arrangements you have made for centralizing the work in your hands and of distributing it to the various committees, who, each in its own sphere, have so efficiently and thoroughly undertaken the management of their own affairs.

From a letter 23 December 1922 written by Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada, 'Bahá'í Administration', p. 28

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Vital issues, affecting the interests of the Cause in that country, such as the matter of translation and publication, the Maṣḥriqu'l-Adhkár, the Teaching Work, and other similar matters that stand distinct from strictly local affairs, must be under the full jurisdiction of the National Assembly.



ORIGINAL



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It will have to refer each of these questions, even as the local Assemblies, to a special Committee, to be elected by the members of the National Spiritual Assembly from among all the friends in that country, which will bear to it the same relation as the local committees bear to their respective local Assemblies.

From a letter 12 March 1923 written by Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of America, Australasia, France, Germany, British Isles, Italy, Japan and Switzerland
'Bahá'í Administration', p. 40

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Touching the recent decision of the National Spiritual Assembly to place as much as possible of the current details of the work in the hands of its national Committees, I feel I should point out that this raises a fundamental issue of paramount importance, as it involves a unique principle in the administration of the Cause, governing the relations that should be maintained between the central administrative Body and its assisting organs of executive and legislative action. As it has been observed already, the role of these committees set up by the National Spiritual Assembly, the renewal, the membership and functions of which should be reconsidered separately each year by the incoming National Assembly, is chiefly to make thorough and expert study of the issue entrusted to their charge, advise by their reports, and assist in the execution of the decisions which in vital matters are to be exclusively and directly rendered by the National Assembly.

The utmost vigilance, the most strenuous exertion is required by them if they wish to fulfil, as befits their high and responsible calling, the functions which it is theirs to discharge. They should, within the limits imposed upon them by present-day circumstances, endeavour to maintain the balance in such a manner that the evils of over-centralization which clog, confuse and in the long run depreciate the value of Bahá'í services rendered shall on the one hand be entirely avoided, and on the other the perils of utter decentralization with the consequent lapse of governing authority from the hands of the national representatives of the believers definitely averted. The absorption of the petty details of Bahá'í administration by the personnel of the National Spiritual Assembly is manifestly injurious to efficiency and an expert discharge of Bahá'í duties, whilst the granting of undue discretion to bodies that should be regarded in no other light than that of expert advisers and executive assistants would jeopardize the very vital and pervading powers that are the sacred prerogatives of bodies that in time will evolve into Bahá'í National Houses of Justice.

I am fully aware of the strain and sacrifice which a loyal adherence to such an essential principle of Bahá'í administration — a principle that will at once ennoble and distinguish the Bahá'í method of administration from the prevailing systems of the world — demands from the national representatives of the believers at this early stage of our evolution. Yet I feel I cannot refrain from stressing the broad lines along which the affairs of the Cause should be increasingly conducted, the knowledge of which is so essential at this formative period of Bahá'í administrative institutions.

From a letter 18 October 1927 written by Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada, 'Bahá'í Administration', p. 141

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Aided by national committees responsible to and chosen by them, without discrimination, from among the entire body of the believers within their jurisdiction, and to each of which a particular sphere of Bahá'í service is allocated, these Bahá'í National Assemblies have, as the scope of their activities steadily enlarged, proved themselves, through the spirit of discipline which they have inculcated and through their uncompromising adherence to principles which have enabled them to rise above all prejudices of race, nation, class and color, capable of administering, in a remarkable fashion, the multiplying activities of a newly-consolidated Faith.

Nor have the national committees themselves been less energetic and devoted in the discharge of their respective functions. In the defense of the Faith's vital interests, in the exposition of its doctrine; in the dissemination of its literature; in the consolidation of its finances; in the organization of its teaching force; in the furtherance of the solidarity of its component parts; in the purchase of its historic sites; in the preservation of its sacred records, treasures and relics; in its contacts with the various institutions of the society of which it forms a part; in the education of its youth; in the training of its children; in the improvement of the status of its women adherents in the East; the members of these diversified agencies, operating under the aegis of the elected national representatives of the Bahá'í community, have amply demonstrated their capacity to promote effectively its vital and manifold interests....

Shoghi Effendi, 'God Passes By', p. 333

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He feels that the Local Assemblies should be encouraged to realize that National Committees are constituted to serve their needs, not to dictate arbitrarily to them, and to unify the work of the Cause which is now spreading so rapidly in the British Isles. The

Committees in question should be very tactful in dealing with a young Assembly which is beginning to “feel its oats”, as this spirit of independence, if properly handled, can lead it to be strong and independent rather than weak and always relying on other bodies to carry it forward! Assemblies, however, should certainly co-operate with National Committees and not refuse their assistance.

From a letter 5 November 1948 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the British Isles

