



International Conference marks fiftieth anniversary of the Faith in Uganda

THE FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY of the establishment of the Faith in Uganda was marked by an International Conference in Kampala from July 31 to August 2. In a week-long celebration that opened to the joyous beat of African drums – and which went on to feature a statement by Ugandan President Yoweri Kaguta Museveni, the Ugandan Bahá'í community commemorated its founding. The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the UK was represented by Mr Kishan Manocha and sent the letter of congratulation printed below.

The Ugandan Bahá'í community was established on August 2, 1951 when a small group of Bahá'ís from Great Britain and Iran arrived there with the intention of bringing the teachings of the Bahá'í Faith to its people. Within two years the community had expanded to nearly 300 members in some 25 localities who represented 20 tribes. Today, the Faith has an estimated 105,000 members in Uganda. Its members represent virtually every tribal and religious background.

Praise for the Faith's record of promoting harmony and development in a country that has often been divided by tribalism was a main message of President Museveni's statement, which was read by Captain Michael Mukula, State Minister for Health, before a crowd of some 2,000 people at the Bahá'í House of Worship in Kampala.

Among the founding members of the community present was Mr 'Ali Nakhjavani, who is currently a member of the Universal House of Justice. He spoke at several events during the week, on the theme of "The Spiritual Destiny of Africa." Mr Nakhjavani said that when he came to Uganda in 1951, the Faith was like "drops of water here and there."

"Now the Bahá'ís are like a lake," Mr Nakhjavani said. "They should now transform that lake into an ocean." He added that Africans – and all of humanity – are from a single lineage and that we should "see ourselves as one family" in the world.

Philip Hainsworth, another of the six founders who returned for the celebration, told how the fledgling Bahá'í community of Uganda became an important nucleus for the spread and expansion of the Faith to neighbouring countries in the 1950s and 1960s, through the hosting of various international conferences and, in 1957, with the start of construction of the first Bahá'í House of Worship on the continent.

At least three major television stations (CTV, UTV and WBS) carried two- to three-minute segments on their evening news broadcasts. The government newspapers The New Vision and Etop carried articles with colour photographs of Jubilee events. The newspapers

Monitor and Sunrise and numerous radio stations also covered the Jubilee.

Additional material from Bahá'í World News Service

**To the participants in the International Bahá'í Conference, Kampala, Uganda,
31st July to 2nd August, 2001**

Dearly loved Friends,

On this historic occasion marking the fiftieth anniversary of the establishment of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh in Uganda, the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United Kingdom sends you its warmest love and greetings. We join with you in celebrating the unforgettable achievements of the past half-century, a period which has seen the potentialities of the Cause of God unfold so brilliantly in Uganda despite the difficulties that the Bahá'í community has often had to endure.

That the British Bahá'í community was given the privilege by the beloved Guardian of playing such a central role in shaping the spiritual destiny of the peoples of the African continent evokes in us feelings of deep gratitude and humility. The spirit of devotion, the initiative and resourcefulness which characterised the services rendered by that vibrant band of believers half a century ago have set a glorious standard which the current generation of British Bahá'ís strives to emulate.

Our very dear 'Ali and Violette Nakhjavani and Philip Hainsworth were among those intrepid souls who responded with such exemplary determination and zeal to the call of Shoghi Effendi to take the Light of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh to the heart of Africa. Their achievements and those of the early pioneers who arose during the Africa Plan have become the stuff of Bahá'í history. They indeed made possible what we have come here to celebrate and their names will forever be immortalised in the annals of our beloved Faith. May their example spur us on to win even greater victories in His Name and so thereby ensure a glorious future for the generations to follow, generations which are destined to take the Cause of the Blessed Beauty to even greater heights.

May this marvellous gathering attract abundant divine confirmations.

With loving Bahá'í greetings

National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís
of the United Kingdom