



BAHAISM XI. BAHAI CONVENTIONS

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xi. Bahai Conventions

Bahai conventions occur at the national and international level for the primary purpose of electing the national Spiritual Assemblies and the Universal House of Justice (See [maḥfel-e rūḥānī](#) and [bayt al-'adl](#)).

The first Bahai convention in the world was probably the meeting convened by the Chicago Spiritual Assembly on 26 November 1907 for the purpose of choosing a site for the House of Worship (Mašreq al-Aḏkār) that was to be built. Thereafter, conventions were held annually in the United States and, from 1910, on 'Abd-al-Bahā's instructions, were held each year during the Bahai festival of Rezwān (21 April-2 May). In 1909, with the approval of 'Abd-al-Bahā', the convention decided to set up a formal national body to be called the Bahai Temple Unity, the precursor of the national Spiritual Assembly in the United States.

In some countries, Bahai conventions antedate the establishment of the national Spiritual Assembly since there were national Bahai institutions that were precursors of that body. In Iran, for example, the first national convention was held in 1927 to elect the "Central Spiritual Assembly" although the national Spiritual Assembly was not formally set up until 1934. In other



countries, the holding of national conventions postdated the establishment of national Spiritual Assemblies which were elected by postal ballots until then. This occurred in the British Isles where the national Spiritual Assembly was elected in 1923, but the first convention was not held until 1927. In general, however, the development of Bahai conventions lagged behind in the East compared with the West because of the difficulties of holding large meetings.

Currently, Bahais in electoral districts elect delegates to the national convention. The Universal House of Justice decides the total number of delegates depending on the number of Bahais in that country. The lowest number of delegates is nine and the numbers can then rise in multiples of five, nine and nineteen. The highest number of delegates is currently 171. Each national Spiritual Assembly then distributes the delegates among the electoral districts in proportion to the number of Bahais in each district.

The national convention is held annually, although this may be changed in the future by the Universal House of Justice. It has two main functions: Firstly to elect the new national Spiritual Assembly—each delegate votes for nine persons from among the whole adult Bahai community of that country; secondly, the National Convention may consult on any subject it wishes and can make resolutions to be passed on to the national Spiritual Assembly. However, the national Spiritual Assembly has no obligation to act on these resolutions, only to consider them.

The international convention is at present held every five years in Haifa to elect the Universal House of Justice. All national Spiritual Assembly members are eligible to attend and vote.

Both national and international conventions are usually held during the Rezwān period (see above). The convention elects its own chairman and secretary. Bahai elections are by secret ballot; there are no electioneering or canvassing of votes and no nominations of candidates.



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