

INTERNATIONAL YOUTH PROJECT REPORT
BOLIVIA AND VENEZUELA
SUMMER OF 1967

by

Gregory C. Dahl

The two Bahá'í youth who participated in the International Youth Project described in the following pages were Steve Blair, a junior at Lake Forest College in Illinois, and Greg Dahl, a junior at Harvard College in Massachusetts. They were both nineteen years of age at the time.

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I. CHRONOLOGY OF THE TRIP

- 6/10/67 Steve and I arrived individually in MIAMI.
- 6/11 Met at Miami Race Unity Day picnic. Left on overnight propeller flight for Lima.
- 6/12 Arrived in LIMA, PERU. Were met by Chairman and Secretary of NSA, Enrique and Isabel Sánchez, taken to Hazira, given tour of city. Meeting with Bahá'ís in the evening.
- 6/13 Talked with Bahá'ís, recorded songs.
- 6/14 Early flight to LA PAZ, BOLIVIA. Were met by Bahá'ís, taken to the Hazira. Took it easy because of altitude (12,000 ft.) in the world's highest capital.
- 6/15-6 Spent two days in La Paz with the Bahá'ís, and seeing the city, buying things like toilet paper and blankets needed on the trip.
- 6/17 Sixteen hours in an antique train (with steam engines) across the altiplano via Oruro to COCHABAMBA (only 200 miles as the crow flies). Were met by Auxiliary Board Member Athos Costas and pioneer Ellen Sims at the station. Taken to National Bahá'í School for Instructors, where we were to stay.
- 6/18-9 Had lunch with the NSA, and spent some time with some of the members. Began a painting project at the school.
- 6/20-2 10-day course for 17 young and new Bahá'ís began at the school. Attended classes, sang songs, continued painting. Steve was feeling a little ill from the rough diet.
- 6/23 Unfortunate accident. We were jumping over fires as part of a national holiday celebration, and we collided in mid air. Steve suffered the loss of a filling and a deep wound under his chin. We took him to the "hospital" and had three stitches put in.
- 6/24 Steve's tooth examined. X-rays showed a deep fracture necessitating the removal of the tooth (a molar).
- 6/25-9 Continued classes, reading, painting. Course ended.
- 6/30- 7/1 Recorded an interview with Athos and Angélica Costas for use on radio. Read and copied a report written by Athos about Bolivia.
- 7/2 Train to ORURO, where we were met by Andrés Jachakollo, (one of the indigenous Bolivians who were at the London Congress), and Dr. Owladi, a Persian pioneer. Slept in Dr. Owladi's apartment.
- 7/3-4 Waited in Oruro for a truck to Sacaca. Slowly becoming acclimated. Spent time reading, seeing the city, writing letters.
- 7/5 Travelled in an open truck to SACACA with Andrés Jachakollo (see page 7 following). Met by Jermán Rivera. Spent the night there.
- 7/6 Twelve mile walk up and down thousands of feet at roughly 12,000 ft. elevation, to the Bahá'í village of JANKARACHI, where there is a Bahá'í school. Spent two nights in Jankarachi, holding one meeting

- with the community and one meeting with the Assembly. Steve broke his glasses during the night on the hard adobe floor.
- 7/8 Walked back in the direction of Sacaca, holding a meeting in the village of TOTOROJO in the afternoon, and spending the night in SACACA.
- 7/9 Walked to JANKOHUYO, about 8 miles, another village with a Bahá'í school. Spent the night there.
- 7/10 Had a meeting in the morning, with about 40 in attendance, including children. Walked back to SACACA in the afternoon, and had a meeting there in the evening, by the light of a lantern.
- 7/11 Ride in "gondola" or small bus over the mountains to ORURO.
- 7/12-4 Stayed in Dr. Owladi's apartment, waiting for transportation to Potosí, though he was on a teaching trip in the Department of La Paz.
- 7/15 Met NSA Chairman Estanislao Alvarez on a bus from La Paz, and accompanied him to POTOSÍ, where we stayed the night in inexpensive lodgings (42¢ US a night).
- 7/16 Saw some of the city. Met with about 30 Bahá'ís, mostly Indians, in the afternoon. Unfortunately my voice had gone because of the cold weather in Oruro, and singing for the next month was difficult or impossible.
- 7/17 Took a bus with two indigenous Bahá'í guides to the 95 km marker, where we set out on foot for HUARCU, a small village where there are Bahá'ís, stopping in Iscoporgata, an even tinier village, on the way. Had a long meeting that afternoon in Huarcu, and spent the night there.
- 7/18 Returned to ISCOPORGATA for a meeting, then caught a bus back to POTOSÍ, where we slept in the Bahá'í center.
- 7/19 Twelve hours in a bus to TARIJA, (150 miles from Potosí as the crow flies), where we were met by pioneer Rezsi Sunshine and the whole community of Bahá'ís, and taken to her home, which is the Center. Had first hot baths in weeks.
- 7/20-8 Stayed in Tarija with Rezsi, reading, giving firesides, spending time with the Bahá'ís, enjoying the warm climate and low elevation. I had a very brief illness, and was much handicapped by my lack of voice. We recorded an interview (with singing) which was broadcast on radio. There were two declarations while we were there.
- 7/29 Flew to COCHABAMBA, the plane arriving only five hours late.
- 7/30-1 Continued painting at the school, reading, talking to Athos, arranging travel plans. Attended a Feast with the Cochabamba friends on the last evening.
- 8/1 Steve and I separated, he taking a flight to La Paz on his way home, I boarding a bus for Santa Cruz.
- * * * * *
- 8/1 I arrived in SANTA CRUZ in the evening, finding no one to meet me. Eventually got in touch with my host, Miguel Diez, with whom I was to stay.
- 8/2-6 Passed time with Miguel and his family. Met with a few Bahá'ís. Recorded a radio interview. Cleaned up the center, which is a small room in Miguel's house. Saw some of the town and the surrounding countryside.
- 8/7-8 Thirty-one hours in rattletrap buses to LA PAZ. I was very ill and freezing cold all night (the windows wouldn't stay up in sub-freezing

- weather). My luggage was delayed in Cochabamba, and did not arrive with me. Spent the night in the Hazira.
- 8/9 Did shopping, took care of affairs, got my luggage in the morning. Said good-bye to our hosts at the Hazira, the Rezvanis, and boarded a train for Lake Titicaca. Spent the night on a boat cruising the lake.
- 8/10 Took train to CUZCO, PERU, and was met by pioneers Fernando and Pepita Alvarez and other Bahá'ís upon arrival. Spent two nights in the humble dwelling of a Bahá'í student, in the company of the Alvarez.
- 8/11 Saw some of Cuzco. Visited PUCYURA, a village near Cuzco where the Alvarez have the Bahá'í institute. Returned to Cuzco for the night.
- 8/12-3 Up at 2:30 A.M. to get car for Arequipa. Twenty-five hours of driving later I arrived in LIMA. Marvelous to be back in civilization again after two months. Eventually succeeded in contacting the Bahá'ís, and spent the night in the Hazira.
- 8/14-7 Arranged visa and tickets for Venezuela, and waited for space on a flight. Saw more of Lima, had a good meeting with Bahá'ís and contacts and spent time with the Sánchez and the Czerniejewskis.
- 8/18 Flew to Panama, arriving late and missing a connection. The next flight was in two days. Spent the afternoon persuading the airlines to pay for a hotel, since I had practically no money. (I had difficulty contacting the Bahá'ís, since the phone wasn't working.) First genuine hot shower in two months.
- 8/19 Finally contacted the Bahá'ís, and was given a tour of the city and a visit to the temple site by Leota Lockman. Attended a Nineteen Day Feast in the evening, retiring with the youth to the Hoys' apartment in the Zone for a party and singing, and thence to my hotel.
- 8/20 Met Ruth Pringle, Auxiliary Board member, and went with her to the home of the Chairman of the LSA and her husband to have lunch. Discussed teaching problems. Caught my flight in the afternoon for MARACAIBO, VENEZUELA, where I was met by pioneer Judy McLaren, and taken to her home.
- 8/22 Drove with Peter McLaren in the Bahá'í Scout to CARACAS, where we talked with pioneers Weldon and Carole Woodard in the evening, and passed the night in the Hazíratu'l-Quds.
- 8/23-4 Visited the Woodards again, and Mickey Posner. Then we left for CIUDAD BOLÍVAR, spending the night in our hammocks on the road, and arriving mid-afternoon at the home of the Gonzales, where we spent the night.
- 8/25 Picked up students for the course during the day, after making a few necessary purchases in Ciudad Bolívar. Arrived in the village of CAMURICA in the evening, with eight people in the Scout, (which is built for four or five, but has been known to carry twelve).
- 8/26-8 Gave a course in Camurica. Pete went to get more students, and we ended with eleven full time, from five communities. (See page 13 below for a description of the teaching methods used in such courses.)
- 8/29 Concluded the course in the morning and afternoon. Drove to SAN ANTONIO in the evening, a community where many Bahá'ís are located during the wet season while their own villages are flooded by the Orinoco River. Here we had a meeting, before retiring to our hammocks.
- 8/30 Left off our cargo of students in their various communities, and then drove back to CIUDAD BOLÍVAR, where we had a meeting and passed

- the night.
- 8/31 Drove all day, arriving in CARACAS at dinner time, and spending the evening with the Woodards, where we recorded Spanish Bahá'í songs for me.
- 9/1 Left with Weldon in the Scout for MARACAIBO, leaving Peter in Caracas for an NSA meeting. Spent the night in the McLarens' home.
- 9/2 Drove with Weldon to the Guajira, where we visited several villages and lined up eleven students to leave the following day for a course in Riohacha. Spent the night in the Bahá'í village of LOS MOCHOS, one of several communities with an "instituto Bahá'í", or building for holding meetings and courses.
- 9/3 Put some of our students on the bus, and then drove with nine in the Scout, across the informal border to the Bahá'í school in RIOHACHA, COLOMBIA.
- 9/4-9 I helped to teach the week-long course at the school, and led the singing each evening. There were twelve students who stayed the whole week, from eight different communities, mostly Venezuelan. The other teachers were Hamilton Breton, who lives at the school, and Leonor Porras-- both Colombians. Weldon had to return to Maracaibo on the second day.
- 9/10 Sent the women off by bus for MAICAO, and arrived there ourselves in the Colombian Bahá'í Jeep. The international Guajira committee held a meeting in the Scout, which Peter had brought from MARACAIBO, and then I returned with him to his home, leaving off students on the way through the Venezuelan Guajira.
- 9/11 Did packing and wrote letters during the day. Gave a fireside in the evening.
- 9/12 Became very ill during the night, and spent the morning exhausted and feverish in my hammock. Pete helped me on the plane in the early afternoon, and I was feeling miraculously better by the time I landed in Miami, where I caught a flight for NEW YORK. Thus ended a rich and rewarding summer.

II. GENERAL OBSERVATIONS-- by country

BOLIVIA:

Bolivia is a large, sparsely populated, and economically backward country. With nearly three times the land area of California, it has a population only one-fifth the size, or 3 3/4 million. About two-thirds of these people live on the arid, high altiplano, (elevation 11,000 feet and above), which covers less than half the country, and lies in the West and South. To the north and east lie vast expanses of low and very fertile land, ranging from savanna to rain forest, which are almost entirely unsettled. Some 60 or 70% of the population are pure indigenous Quechua or Aymara-speaking Indians, descendants of the Incas, who continue to exist on a subsistence level in the most primitive manner as farmers and herders, scattered throughout the hills and mountains of the altiplano. The remaining 30 or 40% of the population is mestizo, except for perhaps 5% white, and most of these are to be found in the few cities of the country, where Spanish is spoken. (10% of the population of Bolivia lives in La Paz, the capital.) There is a major dichotomy between the rural farmers and herders, known as "campesinos", and those who live in the cities; prejudices and divisions are not generally based on race, however.

At the present time there are over 11,000 registered Bahá'ís in Bolivia, (or over twice that number if one includes children), nearly 37 times the corresponding percentage in the United States. Nearly all of these are campesinos, or rural farmers of the altiplano. They live in over 1,000 villages, widely scattered throughout the Departments of La Paz, Oruro, Chuquisaca, and especially the northern part of Potosí, with a smaller number in Cochabamba, and conspicuously few in Pando, Beni, Santa Cruz, and Tarija. Most of these villages are accessible only on foot, after perhaps several days of walking from the nearest road or provincial center, which in turn is usually what North Americans would consider a very difficult journey over dangerous unpaved mountain roads by rickety bus or open truck, from the nearest major city. These simple country people farm the arid, rocky, and often mountainous land using the most picturesque and primitive means. They use cows to pull their wooden plows. (The wood for the plows must come from some distance, since straight trees do not grow naturally on the altiplano, and trees of any kind are rare.) Further work is done with wooden hand instruments; for instance, wooden mallets, for breaking up clods of earth. The staple food is small potatoes, which are eaten boiled, or freeze-dried outside and stored for as long as ten years. Other crops include a small amount of corn and wheat. A little dried lamb is available as a delicacy, and there are a few eggs from the chickens-- but these are relatively scarce, judging by what we saw. There is nothing green in the diet of these people, except for the coca leaf, rich in cocaine, (a local anesthetic), purchased and chewed by many of them to ward off hunger. They also herd sheep and llama, alpaca or vicuña, depending on elevation and terrain, which provide the wools from which they make their cloths. Their houses are small and made from adobe (clay bricks), or in some places stone, with thatch roofs. For cooking they burn twigs, brush

and sheep dung, and the fires are inside the houses for protection against the severe cold. The smoke thus produced is thick and collects on the walls and ceilings in a dark soot. The campesinos sleep on sheep or llama skins (which are badly cured and very hard), placed on a low raised adobe platform at one or both ends of their little dwellings. In one place we were 10 or 12 people sleeping in a 7' X 14' room.

Schooling offered by the government is greatly lacking. All the classes are in Spanish, which is not spoken by the Indians. Only two or three years are offered, and in this time very little can be learned, especially because of the language problems. The teachers are generally deficient, and more interested in political activities than in teaching the children. In one small village we visited, the children must walk over ten miles to reach the nearest school. As a result of all these difficulties, and because education of any kind is relatively recent in these areas, the illiteracy rate among the campesino Bahá'ís is still something over 90%.

The local political structure* consists of sindicatos, which, as I understand it, are technically a labor organization, but which in fact hold all the powers of government on the rural level. Their control over the people is based on the sponsoring of fiestas involving semi-pagan, semi-Catholic ritual observances and the drinking of the indigenous alcoholic beverage, chicha. In addition, the syndicate "secretary" has his own police force, and acts as the local judge, without law. They have been known to use force with the Indians to achieve their ends-- pillage, rape and murder being within their realm of action-- and thus they are in a position to do great physical harm to the Bahá'ís.

There are provincial centers in every region, where the campesinos can buy chicha and coca leaves, and perhaps sell some potatoes. I shall describe the one such center we visited, Sacaca, which lies in the northern area of the Department of Potosí, and which is the nearest town for about 50 Bahá'í Assemblies. We made the trip from Oruro by open truck, which was a little cool (it snowed), but very enjoyable. The trip takes six or eight hours, though as the crow flies it is only 50 miles-- typical of travel in Bolivia. On the return we were fortunate enough to get on the bus, which has 25 seats, and was carrying over 40 people, plus luggage, chickens, etc. The town itself is very simple, consisting of adobe houses, arranged on dirt streets around a central square, the village being surrounded by pleasant farm lands. Water flows down a stone channel in the center of each street, and is taken from there for use in the home. Sanitary facilities are provided by the pigs. There is some evidence of electric wiring, but there has been no connection to a power source for some time. The traveller may spend the night in the "hotel and restaurant", owned by a Bahá'í, which consists of an ancient and dilapidated building in the Spanish style, with one large room containing about eight beds for all visitors. The roof leaks, and flea powder is highly recommended, but the cost of a bed is the standard price for Bolivia-- 42¢ (US) per night.

The cities of Bolivia do not provide luxury living, either. Even in La Paz, the water is cut off every evening for conservation purposes, and in Oruro it is only on two or three hours a day, in the early morning. Electricity is likewise inconsistent. But even the Bahá'ís who live in houses cannot in general afford heating or hot water, and they are lucky even to have a bath tub with an emersion heater. (Bathing in Bolivia is

*The following information was gleaned from discussions with Athos Costas. See his report on Bolivia.

always difficult.) The water, of course, is not potable in most places, and refrigerators are seen only in the most expensive restaurants, for drinks. Bolivia also has very few telephones, and no telephone directories, so getting in touch with people is difficult. Mail is unreliable, and telegrams often arrive after the visitor who sent them. There is only one paved road in the entire country, running from Santa Cruz to Cochabamba, except for a small piece of the Pan-American Highway. In brief, though the cost of living is remarkably low, so also is the standard of living, and the Bahá'í who travels in these areas must be prepared to live with the native Bahá'ís, and share their style of life.

Though certainly lacking in material advantages, however, one must appreciate the spiritual qualities of the people of Bolivia to properly appreciate the country. The indigenous Bahá'ís, though they own nothing of this world's goods, and can in many cases carry all their possessions in a bundle on their back, nevertheless excel in an understanding of and appreciation for the gifts of God, and are much quicker than their civilized brothers to manifest such important qualities as love, consideration, hospitality, and indeed complete selflessness, and to understand man's true relationship to his Creator. Many of these Bahá'ís, I am sure, are ready to die for their Faith, and it is possible that they may be called upon to do this.

Before passing on to plans and recommendations for the future of the Bahá'í community in Bolivia, I should like to outline briefly the present position of the Administrative Order in the country. There were, when we were there, some 172 Local Assemblies on record with the NSA, though the number varies as reports of elections keep filtering in, or Assemblies are removed from the list. This represents an increase of almost 100% since 1964, when there were 91 Assemblies.* The Nine Year Plan goals for Bolivia call for 600 Local Spiritual Assemblies by 1973, (slightly more than the corresponding goal for the United States). Of the present Assemblies, over 90% are illiterate, and perhaps 5% may be said to function, (depending on the criteria applied). Elections can only be held with the assistance of a literate visitor. Communication with these Assemblies and all deepening must be achieved by sending teachers on foot to visit each community, which in many cases can be a journey of several days or a week or more. At present there are only 15 or 20 indigenous Bahá'ís engaged in this work full time, plus four pioneers who are physically capable of making such trips into the country. Because of this lack of teachers, some rural communities are visited only once every one or two years.

Clearly there is a tremendous amount of work to be done. Those who have never had contact with simple people of this type, however, must understand that enrolling Bahá'ís is not the prime task. Finding people who are willing to learn about and believe in Bahá'u'lláh is very easy. It is only then that the work begins. The people are not accustomed to the learning process, and teaching them requires years of applied effort. Tens or hundreds of Bahá'í teachers must be sent out on foot to visit these isolated communities, preferably staying for several days or a week in each place. It is a slow process, and any major change takes generations.

One fertile area for increased effort is in the founding of village schools. We had the opportunity to visit two Bahá'í villages near Sacaca which have their own Bahá'í schools. The community builds a building in the traditional manner, with adobe and thatch, the doors and windows being contributed by the National Assembly. A teacher is then sent in, who is

*Analysis of the Nine Year International Teaching Plan

supported by the community: i.e., he is given a room, (perhaps part of the school building), food (on their level), and perhaps 100 pesos (\$8.33) a month. Most Bahá'í villages, however, are either too small or too poor to afford this arrangement, and there are as yet only about ten of these schools. The need, however, is very great, not only because the education provided by the State leaves much to be desired, but also as a means of deepening and consolidating the Bahá'í communities, and providing an example for the people of a better way of living (i.e. stone floor, chimney, cleanliness). A further advantage of Bahá'í private schools over public ones is that classes need not be conducted in Spanish.

In addition, a continuous stream of young people from all over the country should attend courses of ten days or more given at the National School for Instructors at Cochabamba, or in other places, where they can learn a few Bahá'í teachings and can memorize some Bahá'í songs and prayers, which they then take back with them to their villages. At present, the number of such courses which can be held is severely limited, from what I was told, by the monetary resources available, even though the cost is remarkably low. (The course we attended at Cochabamba, for example, cost only \$200, for 17 students, for a course of 10 days, including meals and all transportation costs from numerous areas of the country.)

I had a chance to discuss the long-range needs of the Bolivian Bahá'í community with several people while I was there, and among the most cogent analyses I received was from Athos Costas, the Auxiliary Board member.* He described to me the purity of the campesinos, emphasizing the need to teach them the Bahá'í Faith before they are reached by materialism, from the cities or via missionaries, and explained his feeling that these pure, selfless people, ignored by the present civilization, will form the material from which the new Bahá'í civilization will eventually be formed, if they are deepened in the Faith. The great strength of these people, and the great contribution they have to make to mankind, is precisely their detachment from material things. For this reason it is important at this stage, when they are only beginning to form spiritual perceptions, not to approach them with material gifts and assistance, as missionaries do, because this succeeds only in training them in materialism. What we must provide is more Bahá'í teachers, and if possible more Bahá'í schools.

In regard to more teachers, Athos emphasized the importance of the provincial capital as a center for working with the indigenous people. (See description of Sacaca, page 7 above.) He described how the campesinos come to these towns to buy and sell a few things, every two weeks or a month, and are confronted there with the local political boss and townspeople who make their living selling chicha, the alcoholic drink, all of whom attack the Bahá'í Faith, and even threaten the Bahá'ís. The latter do not have the knowledge nor the personality to defend themselves, and this type of confrontation can be very harmful to the Cause. The need is very great, then, for young, hardy pioneers who can live in these towns, after becoming fluent in the language, versed in the attitudes of the people, and accustomed to the way of life, in order to counteract these negative influences at the local level, and replace them with a strong positive influence emanating from these centers. Athos listed 19 such towns where qualified pioneers could be used right away: 4 in the North of Potosí, 2 in the South of Potosí, 4 in Chuquisaca, 2 in Oruro, 2 in the mountainous areas of La Paz, and one each in Cochabamba, Pando, Beni,

*See his report on Bolivia.

Santa Cruz and Tarija. If such a program were instituted on a larger scale, the whole indigenous population of the country could be Bahá'í (and not just enrolled, but in the process of deepening), in a few years.

Ehsanolláh Rezvani outlined to me the teaching and consolidation plan recently drawn up by the National Assembly. I shan't repeat the details here, but in general it provides for at least one pioneer for each major region of the country, working out of a city. Travel is very difficult and very time-consuming in Bolivia, and regional workers are essential if work is going to be carried on at all. Under these regional pioneers there would be at least two indigenous teachers familiar with the language and geography of the area. Part of the proposed plan is the acquisition of two more Jeeps by the National Assembly, which would have the two important objects of greatly facilitating transportation for the pioneers, and of adding to the prestige and influence of Bahá'ís when they arrive in rural centers to talk with syndicate leaders. Persecution by these leaders can be potentially very serious, and an individual who arrives by open truck to talk with them, dusty and cold after a long journey, can have only limited influence. Like all relatively isolated people, they are impressed by something as simple as a Jeep with "National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Bolivia" written in Spanish on the side; private vehicles are very rare in these areas.

The present Jeep was acquired through donations from Persian individuals. Its cost in Bolivia was about US\$4,250.00, including \$1,000 tariff. This cost could perhaps be greatly reduced if Mr. Sabet could obtain the Jeeps through business connections, and have them shipped directly from the United States to the Bahá'ís of Bolivia. The NSA is also working on obtaining a tax-exempt status from the government, so as to avoid the tariff; but it is not clear if this status will be forthcoming.

It is also necessary, if Jeeps are provided, to supply some funds for their upkeep. The present Jeep, for instance, has luckily needed no major repairs since it was bought, but the first set of tires is now completely torn up from the bad roads, and there is no money to replace them. A chauffeur is also an absolute necessity for any such vehicle in Bolivia, unless a pioneer can be found who has professional driving experience. The present chauffeur of the Jeep receives US\$58 a month. (In all of my travels in Bolivia, I saw a total of perhaps three or four private cars on roads outside the cities. Only trucks and buses venture between cities, and even these frequently plunge off precipitous mountain curves.)

In conclusion, I should like to emphasize two points. First is that pioneers, to make a meaningful contribution, must be able to work full time for the Faith. They should also have some training in the Spanish language before they go to South America, or else they will find their first year very difficult, and will be relatively unproductive for the Faith until they have mastered the language. (Grammar is particularly important in this respect, since it is far more difficult to acquire by ear than vocabulary.) They must also have some idea of what to expect before going, mixed with a strong adventuring spirit. They should preferably be people who enjoy the beauties of nature, the silence and peace of the wilderness, the clarity of the air, the inspiration of the stars and the sunrise. They should thrive on physical exercise and hardship, and appreciate the charm of farm animals and the value of meditation. They should not be people who yearn for the comforts of material civilization, for the lights and diversions of the city, for the morning paper, the hot shower, the comfortable bed, the good food. Above all, they must be people who are willing to sacrifice for the

Cause of God.

Secondly, I should like to explain that Bolivia is an impoverished country, and the Bahá'í community within it is equally impoverished. There is not one individual in the country who is able to contribute substantially to the Fund, and those who contribute at all do so under extreme sacrifice. Even those who live in the cities do not, in large part, have the money to properly feed their families. Only a handful of Bahá'ís in the whole nation may be said to live comfortably. Under these conditions it is essential that financial assistance be supplied from outside the country; if not, no matter what level of sacrifice the Bahá'ís attain, they will still be unable by a large margin to meet the increasing demands of their expanding Bahá'í community.

PERU:

Peru I will only mention briefly, in keeping with the length of my stay there.

Most important for the future of the Faith in Peru is the huge indigenous population: some 6 million (compared to 2 1/4 million in Bolivia). The same comments may be made about these people as about the Bolivian campesinos; indeed, they share the same Inca background, the same languages of Quechua and Aymara, the same mountain range, the same climate, and much the same way of life.

As for the cities of Peru, they are more advanced materially than those of Bolivia, though certainly not comparable to modern countries, (except for downtown Lima). The barriedas or slums surrounding Lima are famous the world over.

The Bahá'í community of Peru is still in an early stage of development, perhaps comparable to a European country like Norway or Finland. Very little has been done yet in approaching the vast gold mine of indigenous peoples hidden away in the mountains, though with the arrival in Cuzco of a Spanish pioneer couple from Brazil, work has begun. In a country of such vast potential, it is a tragedy that Bahá'í teaching among the Indians is beginning so slowly.

VENEZUELA:

Venezuela is in many ways very different from Bolivia. Though somewhat smaller in land area, the population is almost 2 1/2 times as big; of its 9.2 million inhabitants, only 7% are Indian, 7% are Negro, 21% are European, and 65% are mestizo. Revenues from the largest export oil business in the world make Venezuela one of the richest countries in Latin America. Geographical areas of interest to Bahá'ís include the Guajira Peninsula, lying to the north and west of Maracaibo on the boundary with Colombia: an arid, hot, sandy terrain punctuated with brush and cactus, and populated by approximately 77,000 Indians, of whom roughly 17,000 live on the Venezuelan side of the border; the Sierra de Perijá, a mountain range lying to the south of the Guajira Peninsula, where the Moltipón-

Yukpa Indians are found; the eastern central region of the country, to the east and south of Ciudad Bolívar, where the Carina Indians live: a beautiful region of savannas and low hills, wet with reainfall and decorated by many streams and rivers; and the thick jungles of Territorio Amazonas, bordering on Colombia and Brazil, inhabited by the Piaroa Indians. I can speak only for the Guajiro and Cariña Indians, with whom I had contact, but these at least were very much more advanced than the indigenous peoples of Bolivia, described above. The government has provided relatively good education, (except for the Colombian side of the Guajira), and illiteracy has dropped probably to half. Daily life is not really unpleasant, largely as a result of the favorable climate. The Carina, for example, are farmers, tilling fertile soil (but with primitive methods), wearing western type clothes, living in wooden frame houses with mud walls (sometimes white-washed) or no walls at all and thatch or metal roofs, and sleeping in the traditional hammock. They do not, however, have sanitary facilities or electricity, nor very many products of industrial society.

The Guajiros, in their turn, live in a similar fashion, except that their land is more arid, and they seem to do very little work. How they make their living I don't understand, except that some of them farm coconuts which, along with coffee, are commonly offered to a visitor. The dress, however, differs markedly on the Guajira, the women wearing a lovely flowing garment known as a manta, the men traditionally wearing only a loin cloth, and now perhaps a shirt and even pants.

Travel is much better in Venezuela than in other Latin American countries. There are paved roads between cities, and graded dirt roads leading into some rural areas; though to actually reach the Indians one may have to drive on wheel tracks across the savanna or sandy desert, plunging in holes and bogs and fording streams. In more remote areas there are as yet no roads.

Life in the cities is likewise more advanced, and can indeed be comparable to life in the U.S., if one has money to spend.

Venezuela has a total Bahá'í population of almost 2,000, of whom not more than 200 are found in the cities. Of the remaining 1,800, about 1,000 are Guajiros (out of 17,000 total Guajiro population), about 250 are Carinas (out of approximately 600 or 800 total Cariña population), and the rest are mostly found among the Guajibo, Yaruro, Piaroa and Moltipón-Yukpa Indian tribes. The Bahá'í enrollment on the Colombian side of the Guajira Peninsula is about 2,000, out of a total Indian population of about 60,000. Of the 31* LSAs in Venezuela this year, 19 are among the Guajiros, 4 among the Carina, 3 among the Guajibo. Only one Assembly in the country--Caracas-- may be said to function.†

Teaching among the Indians is carried on by dedicated Bahá'ís from the cities who take trips of a few days or a week into areas where the Indians live, visiting and inspiring them, and often giving courses of a few days' duration. Outstanding among these teachers is Peter McLaren, who leaves his Maracaibo home every weekend to visit the Guajira, and who is largely responsible for the wonderful work which has been done with these people. On the Venezuelan Guajira there are, in addition, some 30 or 40 indigenous teachers, of whom about 15 are actively engaged in teaching in their spare time, and perhaps 5 of whom could be counted on to carry on the teaching work without support from a pioneer. This is not yet true in

*or perhaps 32

†The above statistics were all gleaned from conversations with Peter McLaren.

other areas.

Teaching methods used with the Indians in Venezuela and Colombia are imaginative and interesting and therefore bear mention. The central materials used are songs and drawings. Indians in South America are very much like children in many ways, and teaching methods must be similar to those one would use with children. The songs, for example, are mostly childrens' songs or songs of that type, from English, Spanish, or composed by Bahá'ís, many illustrating Bahá'í principles such as cleanliness, unity, mercy, or the joy of being together. The Indians love these songs, particularly the ones which involve physical actions, and sing them for months after learning them. (I should like to insert, however, that not all South American Indians are as musically inclined as those of Venezuela: for example, the Bolivians.) The drawings are used in courses of a few days or a week in duration, and are the most successful means of teaching illiterates and simple people that I have seen or heard of. There are currently two sets, one produced in Venezuela, with about 20 pictures, the other produced in Colombia, with about 50 pictures, both sets covering subjects ranging from Bahá'í history and administration to principles such as cleanliness and obedience to civil laws. These drawings are very simple, (see example attached), and are colored with crayons by the students at a course, after the subject has been presented to them verbally and the drawing explained. In this way the teacher has his material organized for him, and the students get a simple visual image to help them understand. They also identify more with a subject because they have themselves colored the picture, in addition to having a great deal of fun. Finally, when they leave the course they take with them a completed book of drawings, bound with string, which serves not only as their diploma from the school, and to remind them of what they have learned, but also as an invaluable tool for their own teaching work. They are now known as "maestros Bahá'ís", or Bahá'í teachers, and in the evenings you might find them sitting with some friends or with their family, explaining one of their drawings. The international Guajira committee is presently working on expanding and improving these sets of drawings, although they badly need the assistance of a talented artist.

The courses, then, are lively and entertaining, with songs, games and coloring, and are immensely popular among the Indian Bahá'ís all over Venezuela. In contrast, Bahá'í administration is a very difficult problem. Since many are still illiterate, and all have a hard time understanding procedures, elections of assemblies drag on many hours. Each member of the community has to think a long time before giving his vote verbally to the person doing the recording, while all the others wait. Even still, the votes are usually random, rather than concentrating on the most capable people, and therefore there are many ties. The concept of breaking a tie becomes difficult for these people, and at this point problems arise, particularly if there is no outsider assisting in the election. For this reason ties are often broken on some day following April 21st. The short attention span of these people is also a serious difficulty in such procedural matters.

Other central problems with the Indians are drink and politics, both of which reach to the very remote villages, and both of which are self-explanatory. (Some Indian villages are quite successful in getting a new school, new houses, or a childrens' breakfast dispensary through political maneuvering, in exchange for their votes.)

Peter McLaren emphasized to me the same point which I found to be true

in Bolivia-- that deepening is a much more difficult problem in these countries than enrolling Bahá'ís. To enroll a village in Venezuela, one need only go there, presenting oneself as a Bahá'í, gathering the people together, explaining some of the Bahá'í teachings, singing some Bahá'í songs, saying some Bahá'í prayers, and, at the opportune moment, asking if people want to enroll. Usually they all do. Deepening, however, requires continuous visits over a long period of time, and if possible the training of a few outstanding individuals in a Bahá'í course-- just as it does in Bolivia. If the Indians are isolated, this presents grave problems. The Yaruro Indian Bahá'ís, for instance, have not been visited in years. The Piaroa of Amazonas have similarly been abandoned for lack of able workers, and the last visit to the Moltipón-Yukpa of Perijá was made by Peter in December of 1966. It does not seem just to enroll these people if follow-up is impossible, especially if it is done for the sake of statistics. (This, I am afraid, is a great weakness of North Americans.)

Peter McLaren also underlined the importance of having a vehicle for the teaching work in the Indian areas. Not only would transportation for the pioneer be almost impossible without a Jeep, but in addition the Indians would not attend courses, since they will not go if they are not taken. At present the Venezuelan Bahá'ís have a Scout International, used mostly by Peter, and the Colombian Bahá'ís have a small Jeep, which is kept at the Institute in Riohacha and used for teaching on the Colombian Guajira.

There is no reason for me to outline plans for the future of the Faith in Venezuela, since these are already well under way; nor do I have any recommendations or observations to pass on, except for one: that a pioneer who intends to live on the Guajira and do Bahá'í teaching there, (for which there is great need), must be self-supporting, both because there are no jobs available in the region, and because there is easily enough work for a full time pioneer.

III. THE INTERNATIONAL YOUTH PROJECT-- COMMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS

The first thing I would like to say about the international youth project is that I feel the entire summer experience was an enormous success. From the point of view of a learning experience for the two youth involved, which is certainly one of the major objectives of a trip such as this, it could not have been more valuable. I personally learned more about world problems and life in foreign countries than I could have learned in years of study in a university, not to mention the practice in Spanish which I am sure was more effective than a summer spent in the U.S. studying could ever have been. In addition, I think we both learned a great deal about ourselves, and had a better chance to develop spiritually than one can have in any place in the United States. There is no substitute for the experience of giving up one's country and all the comforts and security it offers, to venture forth into unknown and dangerous lands for the sake of the Cause of God. One learns through such an experience what belief in God really means, and one learns how to rely on God, as Bahá'u'lláh Himself calls upon us to do, as the "best provision" for our journeys.* In the United States, with the distractions of the City and materialism about us all the time, it is very hard to feel these things, unless one brings the feelings from another place.

And more than this, we were exposed to and lived amongst Bahá'ís of a completely different cultural and historical background, a different economic and educational level, and a different style and pace of life. Every time one meets a Bahá'í, one learns more about this wonderful Faith, and how much more so when the people are so different! We tend to view all things from our own limited cultural viewpoint, but something so vast and unlimited as the Religion of God for this day cannot be so confined. To begin to understand its function and application on the world level, one has to personally experience its effect on different cultures and different peoples. One of the very greatest miracles of this miraculous religion is that it can truly unite people of such diverse types; and, like any beautiful thing, to be fully appreciated this miracle must be experienced. Such experience cannot be obtained, in its fullest measure, within the confines of national boundaries.

For these reasons I think it is very important that as many young people as possible have the opportunity to travel as Bahá'í teachers, while they are still forming their attitudes towards life and eagerly gathering new experiences, so that they can come to understand deeply "Bahá'u'lláh's purpose for the human race"[†], and can form attachments to His teachings which will guide them through the rest of life. It is through service and sacrifice in the Path of God that we grow; and there are vast fields of service, and limitless sacrifices, awaiting us in every "backward" part of the world.

From the point of view of the host communities, too, I am sure the project was also a success, and I imagine at least some will submit reports and observations of their own. For the simple indigenous peoples, however, who are not able to report in writing their impressions, I should like to say that the experience for them of seeing and talking with a Bahá'í not

*Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 334.

†Universal House of Justice Ridván Message 1967.

only from the city, but from another country, is very important. They have very little concept of the physical and cultural variations within the human race, and so a Bahá'í principle such as world unity cannot take shape in their minds until they see and experience a Bahá'í who is unlike themselves. Then they understand, and they learn to overlook physical differences in human beings, a lesson which will be important for them in the future, and for the future of their country.

I should also like to say that youth have certain qualities which are particularly in demand in a nation like Bolivia: health, stamina, and unimpaired enthusiasm, for example. Visits to the natives of Bolivia are physically not an easy task, and there are few foreigners wealthy enough to travel who can sustain such hardships, besides the young. (See suggestion concerning Persian farmers, page 20.) Youth likewise excel in song, which is an important way of reaching simple (and more complicated) people. In these ways youth are particularly suited for travel and Bahá'í teaching in some of these more rugged and demanding countries.

In regard to specific suggestions, I think it is very important for the success of a project, both from the point of view of the traveller and of his hosts, that the youth have some knowledge of the language before they go to a foreign country, and a willingness to learn while they are there. A pioneer can, if necessary, spend a year in a country learning the language; but a summer traveller can not. In this regard, 'Abdu'l-Bahá's exhortation in the Tablets of the Divine Plan should certainly be followed.*

Even if a group of youth are going together, I still feel that each should know at least something of the language, so as not to be dependent on the others for translations. Such dependence is not only hampering, but is bothersome and emotionally difficult for all concerned. It also reduces the effectiveness of the deficient youth, and the amount he can learn from the trip. In particular, the rewards of communication with the foreign Bahá'í hosts are either lost or limited.

All youth considering such trips should also be in good health. The risks in these countries are in this respect very real. Even with the protection offered by American medicine, it is possible to contract diseases, as was Steve's unfortunate experience upon returning to the U.S., when he contracted hepatitis. A youth who is not in good health will find his enjoyment of the trip severely limited, as a result of his greater physical hardships and discomforts, and his difficulties could put a damper on the whole project.

But probably the most important prerequisites for the traveller to these regions are an adventuresome spirit, and a willingness to sacrifice for the Cause of God. Both the spirit and the willingness will inevitably be tested, so they must both be deep and genuine.

Youth considering such travel, however, or those selecting them, should not be carried away by an adventurous spirit. Youth should not be sent who are not suited to the demands of such a trip, and who therefore would neither contribute very much nor enjoy or learn very much. It is easy to be miserable in a foreign country, but it benefits no one. For this reason, whenever possible, youth should have as clear an idea as possible of what they are getting into before they commit themselves to an international youth project.

*see The Advent of Divine Justice, page 41.

THE COST OF THE INTERNATIONAL YOUTH PROJECT

(Figures are for my three months' trip, except for Steve's air travel, which is not included in the total.)

Air travel Miami-La Paz-Miami (Steve)	(\$297.00)
Air travel Miami-La Paz, Lima-Panama-Maracaibo-Miami	458.85
Bus and train travel	74.26
Lodging	4.17
Food, taxis, city buses, miscellaneous-- approximately	<u>200.00</u>
	<u>\$737.28</u>
Plus film, purchase of presents, clothing, medicines, travel to and from Miami	-----

IV. GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

1. It was my direct observation, substantiated by talks with South American Bahá'ís receiving international correspondence, that the language barrier between English and Spanish is in part responsible for the lack of communication between some South American countries and, in particular, the United States. Under the present system, all communications must be in English-- at least, all those received are in English. If the people in a country find English difficult, the communication suffers. I do not see why one country imposes its language on a number of others, which then individually have to find means of translating. Such a system discriminates strongly between a country such as Venezuela, where the people involved in international correspondence are Americans, and Bolivia, where their counterparts have only a limited fluency in English.

I would therefore recommend that the United States find some Bahá'í within its national community who is fluent in both Spanish and English and has other necessary qualifications, and pay that person a small sum to translate all communications arriving from Latin America in Spanish, and in addition to translate whatever messages are sent from the United States to all Latin American countries in general, (the translation to be enclosed with the English original). The South American Assemblies could then be informed that they could write in Spanish when necessary or more convenient. It makes a great deal more sense to have one efficient and accurate translator in the United States, than to have many hesitant and deficient translators scattered throughout these countries. (Nineteen out of the eighty-one National Assemblies of the world are in Spanish speaking nations.)

2. I would like to suggest that there be much greater international cooperation in the near future in the sharing of songs and teaching aids, particularly for use in teaching illiterate people. In these areas the quality and imaginativeness of the songs and visual teaching materials can make an enormous difference. In some countries, like Bolivia, the use of such materials has not been begun. In others, like Venezuela, the Bahá'ís have developed marvelously successful teaching tools, which should be shared with all countries involved in mass teaching on the peasant level. A general problem in almost all countries that are doing this kind of teaching is lack of resources, making them unable on an individual basis to provide adequate money and talent for the development and distribution of good materials. More international cooperation and interchange can relieve this problem and bring the benefit of world-wide talent and experience to each country. This should of course be done through the International Audio-Visual Centre, which has already been set up for that purpose.

I would like to point out that although language and cultural differences can make interchange of materials less fruitful between some countries than between others, some types of materials are universal, like songs (for which translations can always be made in each country) and drawings. Even drawings which are inappropriate because of style of dress or cultural differences can still provide valuable ideas for other National Assemblies.

3. There could be far greater utilization in publicity and teaching of the incredible diversity of the world Bahá'í community, if photographic and audio materials were exchanged between countries on a much vaster scale. Human rather than intellectual appeal is the most effective way of conveying a Bahá'í teaching such as the unity of mankind, and peoples' emotions and sensibilities can be touched very effectively through the miracle of modern photography and tape recording. Booklets of photographs illustrating the extreme diversity and contrasts found within the world Bahá'í community could be produced in the United States. Tapes or records of Bahá'ís singing around the world could likewise be compiled and reproduced. To this end National Assemblies could be asked to cooperate, and, for the less developed and organized countries, the services of individuals, pioneers, and travelling teachers could be enlisted. Materials of this kind, it should be pointed out, would not only be entirely international and usable in every country of the world, but would also be effective in presentations ranging from the United Nations to childrens' schools in slum areas, and from Harvard University to the mountains of Bolivia.

4. Peter McLaren suggested that Bolivia and/or other similar countries could publish through Bahá'í News or otherwise make public some rough estimates of the cost of different types of pioneering and travelling teaching in those countries, per year. I think many potential pioneers are discouraged by what they imagine to be great costs required to go to and live in another country. For some countries, however, such costs are very low indeed. My expenditures on lodging during three complete months of travel in South America amounted to only \$4.17-- to give an example. A pioneer working full time for the Faith in Bolivia would hardly be able to spend more than \$100 a month while in the country. Round-trip air fare from Miami to La Paz can be as low as \$297. Perhaps more people would consider deputization if they had a better idea of the costs and corresponding rewards involved.

5. I have several observations about pioneering which I will lump together: First, I support the idea presented in Rúhiyyih Khánun Visits India, that parents who provide sixteen or more years of education for their children might consider providing them two more years of training in Bahá'í qualities and service to mankind by sending them pioneering. This would indeed be an education for these youth, and perhaps as important as all their other years combined in determining the orientation and future development of their lives. There is no education quite as effective as the experience of international Bahá'í teaching.

Secondly, as already mentioned, I think many more individuals might consider deputization if they were made aware of the small costs and great rewards which are involved. These rewards might include correspondence, a greater identification with and knowledge of international Bahá'í teaching activities, and even an exchange of gifts by mail.

Also, it might be possible for groups of individuals or even Local Assemblies to support a pioneer or travelling teacher in the field. They would all then share in the rewards mentioned above.

Fourthly, some individuals might be able to work and sacrifice for six months or a year to set aside enough money to travel or pioneer in some underdeveloped place where costs of living are low. For \$900 one could

spend 6 months in Bolivia as a full time pioneer, and could accomplish more to meet some of the needs of that country than several part time pioneers could accomplish in a year. (Language in this case would be an essential prerequisite, of course.)

And finally, Roy Mottahedeh made the very fine suggestion that peasant Bahá'ís from Persia might be deputized, perhaps with funds from the United States, for teaching work in South America. They would be particularly suited to the physical demands of Bahá'í teaching in these countries, and would probably be more than thankful for such a wonderful chance to serve Bahá'u'lláh. The United States, by providing the funds, would be helping to fulfill its Nine Year Plan goals for South America, (the consolidation of Bolivia and the teaching of Indians in southern México).

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