**PRESS RELEASE**

Haifa and ‘Akko – A Visit by Way of the Sea

**Historic cruise concludes the celebrations of the recognition of the Bahá’í sites in Haifa and ‘Akko as World Heritage Sites**

Haifa, 3 June 2009 – About 200 intellectuals, writers, poets, academics, journalists and other public figures set sail today on a cruise from Haifa to ‘Akko. The guests were welcomed at the passenger terminal in the Haifa Port by Mayor Yona Yahav and the Secretary-General of the Bahá’í International Community, Albert Lincoln.

In his remarks on board the boat, the Mayor surprised the guests by announcing that this cruise would inaugurate a new water tour route between Haifa and ‘Akko. “Haifa and ‘Akko have much in common, and both cities have a lot to offer to tourists and travelers,” said Yahav. “I am certain that all three - Haifa, ‘Akko and the Bahá’ís - will benefit from this collaboration.”

The cruise emphasized the historical connection between Haifa and ‘Akko, and it was also a reminder of the arrival, in 1868, of Bahá’u’lláh, the Prophet-Founder of the Bahá’í religion, as an exile and a prisoner, and His journey by boat from Haifa to ‘Akko. Ever since that time, there has been a strong spiritual link between the two cities for Bahá’ís.

During the cruise, the guests enjoyed a lecture on the Bahá’ís’ connection to Haifa and ‘Akko, given by Prof. Moshe Sharon, Chair for Bahá’í Studies at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Following that, the guests received a detailed explanation on the subject of UNESCO’s recognition of the Bahá’í sites as World Heritage Sites, from Prof. Michael Turner, Chairman of the Israel Committee for World Heritage. Ms. Bracha Sela, Secretary-General of the Haifa Municipality, served as mistress of ceremonies.

Upon reaching ‘Akko, the guests participated in a short guided tour of the Old City. From there they continued on to visit the site of Bahjí in the north of ‘Akko to celebrate the inscription of the Bahá’í sites on the World Heritage List.

During the reception at Bahjí, the Mayor of ‘Akko, Shimon Lankry, greeted the guests and the Bahá’í hosts. “As someone whose city was declared a World Heritage Site, I know that a site declared by UNESCO is not only declared for its uniqueness, but mostly for the people behind it. The Bahá’ís are special, agreeable, civilized people, a species that is almost extinct from the world. We love and support them”, said Lankry.

Fatchi Forani, Deputy Mayor of Haifa, extolled the good relationships between the different populations in Haifa – Jews and Arabs, Christians, Muslims and Bahá’ís. Forani praised the Mayor of Haifa and the city’s leadership for the inclusion in the City Council Coalition Agreement of articles regarding the commitment to equality and democracy, together with the rejection of all forms of racism.

Prof. Shevach Weiss, former Speaker of the Knesset, recalled his childhood experiences visiting the Bahá’í shrine in Haifa. “I have a golden connection to the Bahá’í community,” said Weiss. “In his youth, my brother, Dr. Aharon Weiss, managed the group of workers that installed the gold tiles on the dome of the Bahá’í shrine in Haifa.”

Albert Lincoln, Secretary-General of the Bahá’í International Community, said that the two cities, Haifa and ‘Akko, are important to Bahá’ís and closely linked together in Bahá’í history. The purpose of the cruise was to highlight the importance of the connection between the two cities and to strengthen it for the benefit of the residents, as well as the Bahá’í pilgrims and visitors.