

Acceptance speech of HRH Prince El Hassan bin Talal for the Freedom of Worship Award

Four Freedoms Awards Ceremony, 2014

Your Majesties; Your Royal Highnesses; members of the Roosevelt family; excellencies; board members of the Roosevelt Foundation; fellow laureates; distinguished guests:

It is a very great honour to receive this prestigious award - and especially on the day that His Holiness Pope Francis arrives in my country, Jordan. **The Holy Land is home to Jews, Christians and Muslims, a testament to freedom of worship and a shared heritage of illumination flowering millennia ago.**

Allow me, as a Muslim, to quote from the Holy Quran:

There shall be no compulsion in religion (2:256).

Freedom of worship is a fundamental human right; without it other freedoms, including the basic right to dignity and respect, cannot surely be upheld. It is intrinsic to our understanding of self and to the creation of strong, stable, pluralist communities. In its absence, not only is the rule of law undermined, but also the very possibility of creating legitimate democracies.

The Quran emphasizes that God created humankind to comprise of *many* communities adhering to *many* religions. In doing so, it exhorts us all to:

Vie, therefore, with one another in doing good works (2:148).

Thus, our differences are vital as a source of enrichment. Indeed, the tide of history demonstrates that mankind's progress has been vastly advanced by cross-cultural exchange.

As such, and as a centre for such exchange, the management of holy spaces, which in my region are so often central to all three monotheistic sister faiths, must be taken above the political fray. Jerusalem could, *and indeed must*, become a centre for dialogue and conviviality for all – beyond bargaining and debasement – *a patrimony for all humanity*.

All religions teach *insaniyat*, or humanity, as a fundamental principle. I have long sought to place a *humanitarian vision* at the centre of our drive to advances in the scientific and socio-economic fields. Knowledge of our respective achievements can promote respect and remind us that we have more in common than we realise.

To know, however, is not necessarily to love, and today, in this increasingly interconnected world, we are seeing a terrifying rise in extremism and ethnic-sectarian hatred, all too often promulgated under the name of religion.

We need to become clearer in our approach to its root causes, such as the human rights abuses that deprive our youth of hope, and make them desperate and easy prey, to economic inequality and the unevenly shared spoils of our global community.

All too often, however a small part they are of their respective faith communities, the loud voices of extremism drown out the silent majority. We must move beyond the threat posed by

radicals of whatever creed, and move towards the promise of liberalism, acceptance and tolerance, as espoused in all our holy scriptures – in doing so, we will see what we share: a collective humanistic moral code. We are the silent majority, and though we are oft in the shadows, I know that our fundamental goodness shall break through. As Rabindranath Tagore said of a different time:

We shall thank God that we were made to wait in silence through the night of despair, had to bear the insult of the proud and the strong man's burden, yet all through it, though our hearts quaked with doubt and fear, never could we blindly believe in the salvation which machinery offered to man, but we held fast to our trust in God and the truth of the human soul.¹

This reminds me of what my late mother-in-law, the Begum Shaista Ikramullah, said in 1948 when debating and drawing up the Universal Declaration of Human Rights:

It is imperative that there be an accepted code of civilized behaviour.

Adding later, that:

The ideas emphasized in the [Declaration] are far from being realized, but there is a goal to which those who believe in the freedom of the human spirit can try to reach.²

Ladies and gentlemen, to combat a world order that represses

¹ *Nationalism*, Sir Rabindranath Tagore, 1918; (p. 46)

² *From Purdah to Parliament*, Shaista Suhrawardy Ikramullah; OUP Revised and Expanded Edition, 1998; (p.191-2)

the weak to support the strong, we need what President Roosevelt called:

A greater conception, the moral order.

Its framework could be the 'New International Humanitarian Order', as first adopted by UN General Assembly in 1981, based on the ethics of freedom, peace and human solidarity; the values which from time immemorial have been a part of our collective consciousness: respect for life **of men, women and children**; a responsibility towards future generations; the protection of the human habitat; and, altruism nurtured by a sense of mutual interest, the empowerment of the poor to become citizens and a recognition of human dignity and worth.

All of these underpin our individual faith, promote a humanitarian outlook and demand a new kind of order: *politics for people*.

Finally, I pay tribute to my fellow laureates, those who have preceded us, and those to come.

Borrowing the words of Isaac Newton in his letter to Robert Hooke (15 February 1676): *If I have seen further it is by standing on ye shoulders of Giants.*