

Keynote Address by HRH Prince Hassan bin Talal

Combating Discrimination and Promoting Mutual Respect and Understanding
OSCE Conference

Thursday, 7th June 2007
Bucharest

Mr. President,
Your Excellency Mr. Moratinos,
Ambassadors,
Distinguished guests and friends,

The 6th of June is a yearly reminder of my final examinations at Oxford University, where I had the opportunity to study Hebrew and where I am currently a member of the board of the Oxford Centre for Jewish Studies. My colleague, Lord Janner, is here today and together we founded the Coexistence Trust with the explicit aims of promoting tolerance, dialogue and mutual respect between Jews and Muslims through focusing on our shared heritage.

It was during the Balkan crisis that I had the privilege of visiting Auschwitz as Moderator of the World Conference of Religions for Peace (WCRP). Had I not gone, many would have accused me of hypocrisy for not wishing to triangulate the conversation between Jews, Muslims and Christians. Yet, as Karen Armstrong rightly points out *"Western people often complain that they never hear from 'moderate' Muslims, but when such Muslims do speak out, they are frequently dismissed as apologists and hagiographers. Until we learn to approach one another with generosity and respect, we cannot hope for peace."*

The world today seems more used to dealing with humanitarian concessions of the law of war than the development of a law of peace. It is time we re-humanise the world order and replace it with a New International Humanitarian Order by talking not about politics, but about policies which affect people.

In June 2004 I addressed the Senate Foreign Relations Committee Hearing on 'The Greater Middle East Initiative' and I asked "What do you mean by the Middle East?" The answers varied from Marrakech to Bangladesh, and from Casablanca to Calcutta. To add a human face to this description, I said "In that case, you are talking of the poorest, most dangerous and most populated region in the world (even more so than China).

We need to begin to share our emotions, especially when considering the psychology of the young. Of the 4 million Iraqis who have fled their homes since 2003, 50% are children.¹

¹ UNICEF. May 2007

Moreover, 90% of Palestinian children below the age of eleven experience severe anxiety, nightmares and physical expression of stress.²

Why do unilateral themes and relations prevail over a meeting of global and regional commons? In a MAD era – that is, Mutually Assured Destruction – it is very apparent that security can no longer be thought of merely within the narrow conception of ‘hard’ security. Strategies which target a shift in mindset, to one with human security at its core, are our only guarantee of MAS – Mutually Assured Survival. It is worth noting at this point that at the end of 2006, US spending on Iraq reached \$318.5 billion. On recent figures from the UN, \$318 billion would have been enough to pay for: the cost of keeping 400 million people from hunger for 13 years, stopping the spread of HIV/Aids worldwide for the next 30 years, or immunizing every child in the developing world for the next 100 years.

In his recent piece in Foreign Affairs, Richard Holbrooke states that between 1975 – 1980, President Ford and President Carter took in over 500,000 refugees from Vietnam and Cambodia. My small country has, according to Senator Edward Kennedy, taken in the equivalent of 38 million refugees landing on the shores of the United States. We need to develop a complementarity between our regional and global commons and bring justice and humanity to development or else we run the risk of allowing hardliners and extremists an opportunity to exploit the vulnerable and dispossessed within the region.

We are the European rim of Asia and the Asian rim of Europe which include the Caucuses, the Black Sea region and the Eastern Mediterranean. Yet, while the Peace of Westphalia, the Treaty of Versailles and the Berlin Congress all developed the concept of regionalism in the West, the region of West Asia – North Africa has no structure, no regional grouping and no regional forum for disagreement.

Often I have spoken of the importance of finding solutions from the region. Muslims should be assigned the task of drawing from the legacy of their jurisprudence such as the renewal of a call for an international Zakat Fund. There is enough talk of A-R-M-S. I think it is time we talked about A-L-M-S. We need a regional Marshall Plan if we are to win the peace. I would like to remind you that in 1941, in Europe, the draft of the Marshall Plan was being drafted even before WWII, as a method for winning the peace, and which stated that “our policy is directed not against any country or doctrine, but against hunger, poverty, desperation and chaos.”³ We need a change in attitudes, an investment in the grassroots, in empowerment schemes, education-for-employment programmes and civil society participation if we are to hold out hope for centrism.

We need to use military presence in the region to leverage peace. I need not remind you that in 1995, after the Dayton Agreement, Carl Bildt was able to utilize the build up in the region to introduce a CSC for South East Europe. There are over 200,000 troops in Iraq and the Persian Gulf alone. We must seize the opportunity to construct peace within the region to counter the madness that has overtaken it.

² Horton, Richard. “Palestinians: The Crisis in Medical Care”, The New York Review of Books Vol. 54, No.4;

³ The Marshall Plan (1947)

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The world *problématique* is primarily an ethical one. True universalism means the acceptance and appreciation of difference for the common good. Your very own, Professor Malitza of the Black Sea University has spoken of “one world and 10,000 cultures” and it has always been my contention that civilised people do not clash. When the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was drafted in 1948, ethical and cultural relativity were firmly rejected. According to the relativistic approach, it is necessary to tolerate as equals even the most distorted notions about the freedom and dignity of man, even those involving degradation and slavery. This is simple not acceptable.

What is needed is an ethical and legal foundation and one that recognizes that cultural identity and economic worth are not mutually exclusive. Following the Durban Round – the international conference on intolerance, racism and xenophobia – we were asked to address its deficiencies in Geneva, in a group of so-called eminent experts. We recommended that the international community find ways of measuring existing racial inequalities through the development of a ‘Racial Equality Index’ as one practical suggestion.

Feasible steps to ensure that all states and non-state actors are bound to an international template of standards *and* values are available. Allow me to quote from a draft Code of Conduct for the Middle East, a draft to which all conflicting parties have agreed to “*Conscious of the historical role of the region in the development of the world’s three monotheistic religions and as a cradle and crossroads of civilizations; Believing that all Peoples and States of the region have the right to live in peace with security, dignity and prosperity; Mindful of the difficult recent history of the region and determined to being a new era of peace and cooperation in the Middle East; Recognising the urgent need to develop a positive and new approach to their bilateral and multilateral relations; Deeply convinced that a regional Code of Conduct is essential as a framework for future relations in the region*”

Through a re-emphasis of the spiritual, ethical and moral values contained in our religious traditions, members of the monotheistic faiths must come to recognise that their beliefs must form part of the solution. We must shun exclusionist beliefs and move towards an ‘ethic of sharing’ as the Declaration of European Muslims⁴ states. This must counter glib and harmful phrases such as ‘Islamofascism’ or ‘Islamic socialism.’ Upon receiving an honorary degree in Ireland many years ago, somebody mentioned ‘Islamist terror.’ At the time, I asked whether in Northern Ireland it made sense to speak of ‘Christianist Terror’ and the answer was a resounding ‘no.’

In this context I am delighted to be involved with the Middle East Citizens’ Assembly a civil society organisation stretching from Azerbaijan to the Near East region, including Israel, all the way to Morocco, with the aim of empowering stakeholders and raising awareness of people’s vested interest in regional stability. I believe in moving from a culture of existing and surviving to a culture of participating and, although I recognise the urgent need to counter

⁴ Grand Mufti of Bosnia Mustafa Cerić “The Declaration of European Muslims.”

exclusion, discrimination and xenophobia in all its forms, I think it equally important that we work *for* something.

I would like to conclude in the words of my friend, Rabbi Tony Bayfield and say that “our failure to recognise that Judaism, Christianity and Islam are siblings yet to continue to act out the worst features of sibling rivalry that even the most dysfunctional family could possibly muster. Let me remind you that you are each the child of Abraham and that rabbinic Judaism, Christianity and Islam all share either the same scriptures or versions of the same scriptures. Yet you do not act with the love that normal, reasonably well-adjusted siblings show towards each other. Nor do you recognise the feelings of jealousy and rivalry that normal siblings also experience and have to recognize... you are so remarkably alike, both in your strengths and in your faults, yet you show no acknowledgement of this fact....Siblings. No need to dispute their birth-right. So, why the patronizing and the stereotyping and the scarcely concealed distaste?”⁵

Finally, in the words of Ibn Hujveri “You will not find God in the books of jurisprudence. See the mirror of your heart, because no book is better than this.”

Thank you.

⁵ Rabbi Tony Bayfield “September 11th: The Case Against Us”, January 2003