

OSCE CONFERENCE
RACISM, XENOPHOBIA AND DISCRIMINATION
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Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dear Friends,

I will start my presentation with a message, which Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) had delivered in the year 632, i.e. one thousand three hundred seventy one years ago at the hill of Arafat nearby the city of Mecca before a big crowd of Bedouin Arabs, when he said:

يبرعل لصف ال ,بارت نم مدآ و مدآ نم مكلك
الو ,يبرع يلع يمجع ال و ,يمجع أ يلع
إلا ,ضيبا يلع دوس ال و دوس أ يلع ضيب ال
يوقتلاب.

You are all children of Adam, and Adam is made of clay. Let there be no superiority of an Arab over a Non-Arab, nor a Non-Arab over an Arab, and neither shall there be superiority of a white over a black, nor a black over a white person but by good character.¹

I don't know whether the American Baptist minister and the leader of the civil rights movement Martin Luther King J. had heard the above mentioned message of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), but I do know that we are in a desperate need today to listen to his statement as well which he had delivered in the year 1963, i.e. forty years ago, in Washington before a crowd of Black Americans, when he said:

I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by a color of their skin but by the content of their character².

¹ See: A. J. Wensinck et J. P. Mensing, *Concordance et Indices de la Tradition Musulmane*, Leiden, 1969, vol. VII, p. 300.

² *The Oxford Dictionary of World Religions*, ed. John Bowker, Oxford University Press, 1997, p. 548.

Should I remind you that it was only on May 17, 1954 that the U.S. Supreme Court reached the unanimous decision that the enforced segregation of black schoolchildren in certain states and localities was contrary to the principles of the U.S. Constitution. It is needless to say that after the abolishment of the apartheid in South Africa in 1993 by a new constitution, there is no legislated racism and discrimination in any state in the world today.

Nevertheless, we feel that these unacceptable social phenomena still exist *de facto* in many parts of the world. The issue here is not what is written in the book, but rather what is kept in the heart. After all, the law is not in the book. The law is in the heart. This is exactly what the message of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) is all about and this is precisely what Martin Luther King J., had been trying to tell us all these years about the idea of affirmative action – people have to work on their heart so that it does not hate the other human being because of his race, skin, faith etc. We need, therefore, good education for our children who will see that moral integrity of a person is the most valuable wealth that one should strive for, as an Arab poet would advise us by saying:

مُفْتَخِرًا بِالْمَالِ وَالنَّسَبِ كَانَ مَنْ
فَخَرْنَا بِالْعِلْمِ وَالْأَدَبِ فَإِنَّمَا
بِلا أدبٍ حُرٌّ فِي رَجُلٍ خَيْرَ ال
لِعَرَبِ كَانَ مَنسُوبًا إِلَى ا وَإِنْ ا، ال

Tell the one who is proud of money and ethnicity
We are proud of knowledge and integrity
There is no good in a free man without morality
No, no, even if he belongs to the Arab nationality³

And the free man needs to know that there are two kinds of freedom: freedom of and freedom from something. The first is freedom of *thought* and freedom of *expression*. The second is freedom from *fear* and freedom from *poverty*.

Which of these two kinds of freedom are more important: freedom to think and speak or freedom not to have fear and not to be poor?

If we take the fact that for someone to dare to speak out he/she should be safe and for someone to be able to think, he/she should have a full stomach, then it is obvious that freedom from fear and poverty comes before freedom of thought and expression. Nevertheless, this argument could be put the other way around by saying that for someone to be free

³Yaqūt al-Ḥamawī (1179-1229), *Mu'jam al-'Udabāi'*, Bayrou, vol. I, p. 72.

from fear and poverty, he/she should have freedom of thought and expression in order to be able to speak out about his/her fear and poverty.

I guess, we have full freedom here both to think and to express our thoughts about our fear from xenophobia, racism and discrimination. If that is so, then, I dare to say we today live in fear, every one of us. In fact, we are in the midst of a global culture of fear. We fear nature and nature fears us. We fear bombs and explosions. We fear cars and shoes. We fear letters and white powder. We fear AIDS and SARS. We fear hatred and mistrust. We fear war and genocide. We fear refugees and hunger. It seems that it is going to be a long way because anger, hatred and mistrust rule our hearts. We speak about revenge and retaliation. If you kill our people, we will kill your people.

Being a Muslim in Europe, I fear ethnic cleansing and genocide. I fear European history and Europe fears my Islamic identity. Whose fear is more legitimate: mine because of Srebrenica of July 11th, 1995 or theirs because of New York of September 11th 2001. Is there any comparison between these two attacks on human soul? The former was carried out at the time of war and the latter was executed in the time of peace. It looks like we live in a world in which there is no big difference between the state of war and the state of peace as far as our safety is concerned.

This state of affairs might be overcome by our sincere appreciation of the fact that there are more tenants, which are common to all of us than those, which make us apart. I would like to mention three basic of those: time, meaning and soul.

* We are all deeply immersed in our memories in the time of our past, in the immediacy of our present and in the dreams of our future. We are not children of the moment. Therefore, every one of us has his own personal history and memory of his past. And every one of us has his memory of his future as well. The secret of success is in our ability to balance the memory of the past by the memory of the future.

* We search for meaning of all things we can see and feel because we are not passive recipients of life. The meaning of some things is unfolding by itself, but the meaning of others, we have to find by ourselves and that is what makes our life interesting.

* And we have the soul because we are not machines. We laugh and we cry, we love and we hate, we succeed and we fail, we are pleased and we are angry, we have hopes and we have fears. In short, we are human beings not so good to be sinless angels and not so bad to be useless items in God's plan of human history.

* We have the soul that is capable to trust the other human soul because of the good state of humanity, but also we have the soul that may mistrust the other human soul because of the bad state of humanity. Real

spirituality of a man is to be able to hold two opposing propositions in his mind without losing his identity.

Is it not necessary, therefore, that we discover the way to morality in the same manner as it has been discovered for science? If the discoveries of science have brought the physical distances of our world close like never before, we have the right to believe that the discoveries of human morality will bring the human hearts close as never before.

Can the argument of the Might of big nations be replaced by the argument of the Right of small nations? Can the argument of historical Myth be replaced by the argument of historical responsibility? Can the argument of poor political compromise be replaced by the argument of strong moral commitment?

Can the argument of sinful behavior be replaced by the argument of Adam's humble repentance? Can the argument of falsehood be replaced by the argument of Abraham's truth? Can the argument of revenge be replaced by the argument of Jesus' love? Can the argument of injustice be replaced by the argument of Muhammad's justice?

If we all know that no one has the monopoly on pain, why is the pain of victims denied? If we all know that no one has the monopoly on morality, why is the righteousness of some people not appreciated?

Why are those who are bad rewarded because they could be worse? Why are those who are good punished because they could be better? Why are those who are weak blackmailed because of their weakness? Why are those who are arrogant given concessions for their arrogance?

What is human happiness but sharing good and bad times with others? Are rich nations willing to share their wealth with the poor nations? Can a man of full stomach understand the grief of hungry people? Can poor children share happiness of education and success in society with their peers? Can the refugees come back to their homes and share the blessings of safety and freedom with the rest of the world without racism, xenophobia and discrimination?

I believe that neither the meek, nor the aggressive will prevail in the world, but the cooperative for the common good of humanity