

Acceptance Speech of
DR. ABD AL-RAHMAN BIN HAMOUD AL-SUMAIT

Winner of the 1996 King Faisal International Prize
For Service to Islam

In the Name of Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate

Your Royal Highness Prince Sultan Ibn Abdul Aziz,
Your Royal Highnesses,
Your Excellencies,
Distinguished Guests,

Assalam Alaikum,

The Islamic Nation has passed from an era of glory and leadership to a time of weakness and retreat.

An observer of the economic, social, and cultural conditions of Muslim communities today would be stunned by the impoverished situation of most of these communities in terms of living standards, health, and education. It is sad to see that Muslims form a significant majority of populations living below the poverty line. Undoubtedly, most of these painful conditions, unwanted for us by Almighty God, are of our own making: *Whatever misfortune happens to you, is because of the things your hands have wrought.*

Sadly, the Islamic Nation today lives in a difficult world. Apart from backwardness, poverty, and disease, our Nation suffers the dread of destructive wars that claim the lives of countless Muslims.

It is unfortunate that Muslim communities have made few contributions to the advances of modern civilisation, and that many of our youth have acquired the negative side effects of modernization rather than keeping pace with the achievements in medicine and technology.

But this Nation should not despair, for God Almighty shall stand by its side. We must realize, however, that cannot happen unless and until we return to the pure teachings of Islam, apply God's laws, and follow the good example of our forefathers. Watching the blessed awakening of Muslims and

the determination of the people of the Arabian peninsula to give generously to their brothers in less fortunate parts of the world is a heartening experience that fills us with hope for a better future.

The Nation's youth must recall that, at the dawn of Islam their ancestors—the companions of the Prophet Muhammad: peace and prayers be upon him carried the message of virtue love, and benevolence to all parts of the world and to all people' regardless of their beliefs, race, or colour.

In pursuing their noble mission, Muslim philanthropists follow the example of their predecessors. The Prophet, peace and prayers be upon him, taught Muslims to love the poor, support the weak, help the needy, and care for the widowed and the orphaned. He also taught them to act with benevolence purely for the sake of God and to expect no worldly reward for such actions. Alhamdulillah, the bountiful deeds of Muslims have flourished, taken various forms, and attracted increasing numbers of people. The King Faisal International Prize for Service to Islam stands as clear proof of the innocence of Islamic philanthropic institutions from accusations made primarily to distort the image of these institutions and cast doubt on their motives.

I pray to God the Almighty that this Prize be an incentive for making greater efforts to serve humanity for God's sake. On this occasion I recall the pioneering journey of King Faisal to establish friendship and cooperation with, and offer help to, the peoples of this forgotten continent. Then came his brothers who continued this message and extended it to remote parts of the continent: building mosques, drilling wells, and building schools and social welfare centres. Hundreds of artesian wells across the Sahara desert supplying thousands of people with water is but one example of the numerous humanitarian activities undertaken by the leaders of Saudi Arabia.

This is not surprising. Our forefathers went to Africa long before us. Two mosques built 1,300 years ago were discovered in East Africa. The grave of Salam bin Saleh, who died less than 100 years after the emergence of Islam, still exists in Zimbabwe. Tens of tribes of Arab origin have lived in Africa for more than 1,000 years. These and other examples refute the claims that the only reason for Arabs to go to Africa was slave trading and that Arab history in Africa was one of brutality. It also shows there was a deep-rooted and good relationship between Arabs and the natives of Africa and elsewhere.

I would like to express my sincere thanks to those who have honoured me with this Prize and all those involved in my selection. I shall always be proud of their confidence in me; this in itself is a reward.

May God bless this country, its leaders and people, and all other Muslim countries, and may He guide our leaders and help them look after the welfare of Muslims.