

Acceptance Speech

Delivered by His Eminence

SHAIKH MUHAMMAD SAYYID TANTAWI

Grand Shaikh of

AL-AZHAR AL-SHARIF

Winner of the 2000

King Faisal International Prize for Service to Islam

Sunday 14 May 2000 (10 Safar 1421H.)

In the name of Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate

Your Royal Highness, Prince Sultan ibn Abd Al Aziz

Your Royal Highnesses

Your Excellencies

Distinguished Guests

Asslam Alaikum,

In addressing this distinguished gathering of intellectuals and scientists, I would like to limit myself to some important facts.

The first fact is that Allah is pleased with His servants who are recognized in life and remembered after death by their virtuous deeds - believers who fulfill any of the three criteria by which man is remembered, as specified by the Prophet Muhammad; namely: sustainable charity, beneficial knowledge and righteous offspring to pray for them. King Faisal - may his soul rest in peace - was a great monarch who devoted his life to the

service of Islam and the Islamic nation and to the defense of justice, and who stands as an example of those privileged individuals with whom Allah is pleased. He had left righteous sons, who memorialized him through their charitable activities and promotion of beneficial knowledge throughout the world, and who pray relentlessly for him.

The second fact is that by annually recognizing outstanding intellectuals and scientists who have served humanity through knowledge and research, King Faisal Foundation revitalizes an important Islamic tradition for which the Foundation's patrons shall be rewarded, in shaa Allah. Recognition of excellence is an inherent principle of Islam. Islam's appreciation of knowledge is illustrated by the fact that Allah preferred Adam - peace upon him - to the Angels because of his greater knowledge. Allah also ordered Prophet Muhammad to seek further knowledge from Him: (O my Lord! Increase my knowledge). Furthermore, Allah emphasized that fear from Him is a mark distinguishing those who have knowledge from those who haven't: "Those who truly fear Allah, among His servants, are those who have knowledge."

The third fact is that the General Secretariat of King Faisal International Prize has set its criteria for awarding its prizes in conformity with the principles of Islam, namely awarding the Prize in each of its five categories to the most deserving individuals, regardless of their creed, color or lineage. By doing that, the Prize fulfills a fundamental Islamic principle: Islam prohibits discrimination and considers racism loathsome and evil. To date, the prestigious King Faisal International Prize has been awarded to a total of one hundred and thirty nine recipients from thirty five countries, representing all four corners of the world: east, west, north and south.

The fifth fact is that King Faisal Foundation, which is a major Saudi Institution, provides undisputed evidence that the Kingdom is one of the leading countries that honor human achievements, observe human rights and freedoms and protect human dignity. This, too, comes in concordance with Islamic principles since Islam calls for justice in all aspects of life. Islam orders believers to be just in what they say: "Whenever ye speak, speak justly, even if a near relative is concerned, and fulfill the covenant of Allah."

Islam also orders them to be just in their ruling: "Allah doth command you to render back your trusts to those to whom they are due; and when ye judge between people that ye judge with justice," and in testimony: "and take for witness two persons from among you, endued with justice, and establish the evidence for the sake of Allah." Islam calls for equal justice for friends and foes: "O, ye who believe: stand out firmly for Allah, as witnesses to fair dealing, and let not the hatred of others to you make you swerve to wrong and depart from justice. Be just: that is next to piety." It is said that: "no ruling is possible without men, no men without wealth, no wealth without development and no development without justice. Therefore, justice is the basis of ruling."

The fifth fact is that Al-Azhar Al-Sharif - founded more than a thousand years ago - has been and continues to be - in the words of the Selection Committee for the Service to Islam Prize - a home for thousands of students of Islamic religion; in this way, it plays a major role in preserving Islamic and Arabic culture.

On behalf of Al-Azhar Al-Sharif, recipient of this year's King Faisal International Prize for Service to Islam, I would like to extend sincere thanks and gratitude to the prestigious King Faisal Foundation. May Almighty Allah bless the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's monarch, government and people, and favor the Kingdom, as well as its sister countries and the entire world, with the bounties of peace, prosperity and security.

Assalam Alaikum.