

Acceptance Speech of Professor
Izz Elr Din Omar Mousa
Co Winner of the 2003
King Faisal International Prize for Islamic Studies

Saturday 8.3.2003 (5.1.1424H)

Your Royal Highness, Prince Sultan Ibn Abd Al Aziz
Second Deputy Premier, Minister of Defense and Aviation
and Inspector General

Your Royal Highnesses
Your Excellencies
Distinguished Guests

Al-Salam alaikum,

At this significant point in my life, a mixture of unusual and contradictive feelings overwhelms me: happiness, sadness, gratitude and apprehension.

Happiness because my endeavors - modest though they are - have been recognized in this honourific way, in the holiest of lands, under the auspices of a great leadership and among a noble people that I have known for many years: friends, colleagues and students. And because the Prize, apart from its enormous international worth, bears the name of a great individual, the late King Faisal, may Allah have mercy on him, who dedicated his life pursuing Muslim solidarity and defending the greatest Muslim cause in recent times: Palestine.

I am also happy that this honour is bestowed upon me by the late King Faisal's sons - great men that have succeeded in commemorating their father not only by such a profound respect to scholarship, but also by setting an example of true statesmanship.

And I am happy for sharing this Prize with a dear friend, and a prominent scholar. By sheer coincidence, we had similar beginnings; by sheer coincidence we have followed almost identical academic careers, and by sheer coincidence, we meet tonight to share the same prize.

At this very moment, however, I miss three precious individuals: my mother, who was deprived of formal schooling, yet wanted me to become a scholar of the Holy Qur'an; my father - a poor carpenter, who wanted me to be the namesake of Ibn Al-Atheer and a disciple of AL-Izz Ibn Abd Al-Salam and the great scholar of Arabia, Shaikh Hamad Al-Jasir, who looked forward to the day I received the Prize. May Almighty Allah have mercy on them.

My thanks and gratitude also go to many other people - too many to mention. Without their support, I wouldn't have been standing before you tonight to receive this award. My book on the economic life in Maghrib during the 6th Century, A.H., for which I am awarded the prize, is an example of the influence of each of them on my studies. That book was written more than 25 years ago, and if I were to re-write it today, I might probably do that in a different manner. Nonetheless, it was and continues to be well received. Maghrib scholars, in particular, identify me with that book, which in their view deals with the history of Islamic economic activities in Maghrib from a different perspective than other publications on that subject, since it associates economic activities with population structures and political changes in Maghrib during that era, and uses statistical analysis in support of arguments, which was a deviation from the classical techniques of studying Islamic history.

My desire to be up to the expectations of those people was one of the

important factors that encouraged me to investigate other aspects of the Islamic civilization, such as the spread of Islam in West Africa, and the Islamic thought and revival in the face of challenges of modern societies. In those studies, I tried to explore the historical basis of present constraints and future aspirations of Muslim communities.

I was raised in the Sudan and educated through Sudanese taxpayers' money, and, hence, I owe a huge debt to my country. Circumstances beyond my control have driven me to live away from the Sudan for many years, and I hope that receiving this award could help take some of that debt off my shoulders.

My career as an Islamic historian started in Beirut, continued in Nigeria and flourished at Jordanian, Moroccan and Saudi Universities, and I am indebted to my colleagues and students in all those countries for their support that culminated in this award. I am particularly grateful to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, where I lived for the past twenty years, teaching at King Saud University, participating in local and international symposia in Riyadh and enjoying the round-the-clock cultural, social and sports activities of the Sudanese community in this town. I must thank my wife for her patience and my children for being able to make their way in life successfully, without much nurturing on my part.

I am of course profoundly delighted with this great honour, but I am apprehensive of its consequences, which require me to continue and improve my research endeavors. In my age, and with my ailing health, I need your prayers to help me rise to that responsibility.

I am also apprehensive of the thought of being deceived by Satan into seeing myself as a special person, for I am not. May Allah help me deal with my flaws and imperfections, and may He help me to absolve from my sins. At this point, [would like to announce that I have decided, after paying some debts, to donate the proceeds of the Prize towards the establishment of Al-Izz Ibn Abd AL-Salam Center for Arabic and African Islamic Heritage.

In conclusion, I would like to thank those who nominated, and those who selected, me: the Prize's board, reviewers, referees and selection committee, and to thank you all for your support. May Allah help and forgive me. And may peace and prayers be upon Allah's prophet. Al-Salam alaikum.