

KFP speech

For me this prize represents a huge honour, generously bestowed on me by representatives of the Arab world with which I have been happily involved since I was 21 years old. What began as a young man's hobby, enthusiastically pursued, and full of adventures, surprises, and moments of intense revelation, has grown into a lifetime's vocation. As the Chinese philosopher Confucius allegedly said, "Choose a job you love, and you will never work for the rest of your life." Here I am at 81 testifying to the profound truth of those words, and still going strong, my enthusiasm, love and respect for Islamic architecture undimmed. It has been a great joy and privilege to open the eyes and minds of thousands of students in the West to the glories of Islamic architecture and art, and by this means introduce them to the culture of Islam at an early age. As a way into a previously unknown, even unsuspected, world it cannot be surpassed. The effect can be electric – it is as instantaneous and unprocessed as the response to music; its appeal is beyond words. That experience often has lifelong repercussions for such students. Some of these monuments, from the Alhambra in the west via the Dome of the Rock to the Taj Mahal in the east, have entered the English language as symbols of grace and beauty, love, and faith, and contribute to the common refreshment of humanity. But they appeal to the mind as well as the eye, and to write about this spectacular visual heritage, to define exactly what makes these buildings great, is exhilarating. It is both fun – there is so much to discover – and an intellectual challenge of the first order. May the Muslims of the future take on that challenge.