

Speech by
Minister Mhammad El Sammak

In the name of Allah, the most compassionate, the most merciful...

Allow me to convey to the King Faisal Foundation, to its managers and the rest of its employees, the highest expression of my praise and appreciation. May Allah guide their steps to sustain their endeavors in serving Islam and Muslims out of their commitment to the objective of scientific development that is led today by the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Salman bin Abdulaziz and his Crown Prince, His Highness Prince Mohammed bin Salman - May Allah preserve them.

Allah has graciously honored and enabled me to closely follow the constructive efforts the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has achieved, and continues to do so, in a bid to build bridges of communication and constructive dialogue with people of different religions and various cultures throughout the world. I have found a great measure of complementarity when it comes to the noble Islamic objectives, which Saudi Arabia has been striving to achieve with those sought by many other Arab, Islamic and international institutions with which I am privileged to work.

Honorable Brothers,

Islam champions the dignity of man in view of his human nature. Islam also recognizes existing differences among people. These differences do exist and will continue to exist until the Day of Judgment by virtue of Allah's divine will. Of course, openness to, and dialogue with the 'Other', is no easy task. It is rather necessary and constructive. Indeed, dialogue is the art of searching for the truth from the Other's perception. The 'Other' can not be anything but different. Thanks to His wisdom, Allah wants to make people different, but He calls upon us to seek to know each other. In this sense, dialogue is both the path and the instrument.

The narcissism of difference, as Freud the philosopher said, and the respect for those with whom we disagree as Islam teaches us while averting the claim of monopolizing the absolute truth is a commitment to the divine rule that Allah, and Allah alone, is the one who will judge between us on the Day of Judgment regarding whatever we differ about.

Herein lies the importance of the call for the search for unity and common word. It is a call that does not exclude any people or group, no matter how different their beliefs or their laws, based on the Qur'anic rule: "You have your own religion and I have my own".

I was encouraged to continue on this dialogue path by a personal experience at the Vatican during the Synod on Lebanon in 1993. That Synod was convened under the leadership of Pope John Paul II. The meeting's date fell on a Friday, so I excused myself from participating to be able to perform my prayers in the Roma Mosque. On that day, the Pope personally commented before the participants in the conference on my apology by saying, "We hope Mohammed Al-Sammak, our guest and partner in the dialogue, will pray for the success of this synod". When the Pope invited me to his personal table to be seated next to a small group of cardinals, he made sure that beverages on the table included just water and orange juice out of respect for my Islamic faith.

In 2010 when the Synod Conference on the Middle East was held at the initiative of Pope Benedict XVI, I was the only Muslim and Arab participant to address the expanded religious council in the presence of cardinals, bishops and bishops of the Church of the East, besides the Pope himself.

On that day, the Pope raised two slogans 'religious freedom' and 'citizenship' instead of the slogan of 'tolerance', which are in fact the same two slogans which Muslims advocate, especially in non-Muslim countries where their number constitute some 20 percent of the total number of Muslims worldwide.

I wish to reiterate my appreciation and my gratitude to King Faisal Prize, which entrusts me with the responsibility to carry on my work in the service of Islam by seeking to build bridges of acquaintanceship, respect, and love towards people of other religions and cultures. By honoring me with this prize of which I am so proud, the King Faisal Foundation gives me the moral strength to carry on this mission till Allah accomplishes a matter already determined.

Wassalamu'alaikum warahmatullahi wabarakatuh

(May Allah's peace, mercy, and blessings be with you!)