

IAU International Conference 2009 on the Role of Higher Education in Fostering the Culture of Dialogue and Understanding

Plenary Session II Instilling the Culture of Dialogue in Higher Education

Address by **Saleh Hashem**, *Secretary General, Association of Arab Universities, Jordan Notre Dame University, Lebanon, 4-6 November 2009*

Honorable Guests,

On behalf of the Association of Arab Universities, I extend my warm greetings to everyone attending the IAU 2009 International Conference on *The Role of Higher Education in Fostering the Culture of Dialogue and Understanding*.

I also seize this opportunity to thank all who devoted their time and efforts in preparing and organizing this event wishing your efforts to be fruitful.

The call for Dialogue of civilization has become one of the features of the twentieth century. As you know, the call for a "dialogue of civilizations" was a substitute to rethink the idea of the "clash of civilizations". It was adopted by western educators following the end of the cold war between East and West.

Many international organizations and bodies supported such initiatives in both the Islamic world and the west. The focus was on the importance of eliminating disparities through a better in-depth, extensive and comprehensive knowledge and through investigation in order to erase negative stereotypes and prejudices, which were promoted by the media, and some political and civic organizations who considered the others as source of threat or enemy. The need was to concentrate on employment of the media, school curricula, information technology and modern communication to achieve a more realistic and neutral vision for the habits, thoughts, behaviors and practices of the others.

The convergence of civilizations is considered a landmark in mankind history of civilization. It is for sure an inevitable fate that there is no way avoid. Islam as a religion and a civilization is against centralization of a dominant culture. On the contrary, it encourages that the world becomes a forum of civilizations that interacts and cooperates to strengthen the common bases of universal values.

Islam in its spirit and essence guarantees freedom of religions. In fact Qur'an requires Muslims to believe in all the prophets and forbids to believe in some and not to believe in others. Thus Qur'an clearly accepts plurality of religions and ways of life and different laws and treats it as a challenge for humanity to live and coexist with tolerance towards each other and strengthen forces of peace and moral order. Values and moral order is much more basic than differences of faith and devotion. So Qur'an in no way adopts hostile attitude towards other religions

The world must shape a tolerant universe philosophy which derives its principles from all different cultures by laying the basis for a non-violent resolution of controversies. Islam contains a great spiritual heritage, as demonstrated by the *Universal Islamic Declaration of Human Rights* of UNESCO in 1981. It was proven that the philosophy of human rights does not conflict with the heavenly religions, but it conflicts only with their fanatical interpretations. Religions, such as Islam and Christianity focus on and promote human dignity, and hereupon there is no contradiction between the rights of God and human rights if we understand religion in a true and reasonable way.

Thus, the intellectuals, clerics, scholars and educators in east and west should continue their efforts towards enhancing the recognition of differences between religions and doctrines aiming at achieving mutual understanding through a genuine receptivity to other viewpoints. They should also work to reject intolerance or forced confrontations. New educational policies and community measurements should be set to help coexistence and mutual understanding so as to achieve our goals through a rational perspective. We need to create a society that shares the values of love, tolerance and recognition of the other. Here comes the role of our educational institutions at all levels to develop educational frameworks and plans to help in the process of formulation of our educational systems within this concept.

May God help us for the benefit of human rights and dignity.

Thank you for your time and I wish your meeting all success.