

Tuesday 11 April 2006 - The University of Chicago Speech
The Harris School

WISDOM AT “FAITH” VALUE
Tolerance and Integrity in Policy

Ladies and Gentlemen, Distinguished Guests,

It is both a pleasure and an honor for me to be here today, at one of America’s oldest and leading institutions of higher education. I stand before you in the University that has expressed, and continues to express, its commitments towards deeper understanding between individuals, through intellectual leadership and effective policy.

It means a great deal to me to be part of an innovative new program being established here, a unique, and much needed program, fostering a perception of the relationship between the culture and institutions of Islam and public policy, worldwide.

When I became Lebanon’s Prime Minister in the spring of 2005, one of my aims was to encourage constructive dialogue, between all Lebanese entities. And I still believe today that only through dialogue could we fully understand the needs of others, and feel their concerns and apprehensions. I was not alone in this challenging path. I soon came to realize that building trust and respect was a universal, yet an elusive, priority. There was so much to do, to reach peace and harmony.

When there is discord, we must find the wisdom to reach for the group that is isolated outside the national accord. Our prime objective is then to preserve life, by showing tolerance, and solidarity. To lay down the foundations of a society united by the will of all its citizens to live together, freed from tensions, chaos, and tragedy.

In today’s unpredictable times, I stand before you in my attempt to set out the logic, implications and applications of the policies of tolerance (*yes implications and applications*). These policies will show their relevance to justice and equality in plural societies. In an uneven world, Muslim tolerance is perhaps more apt than liberty, friendship, or power.

The Prophet Mohammad- peace be upon Him- said: lann you’min ahadoukoum hatta yahoubbou li akhihii ma yahoubbou li nafsihii’. Which is:’ None of you truly believes until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself’.

Jesus said: ‘Respect your father and your mother and love your neighbor as you love yourself’. It is the same teaching, the same way of life. All true believers have similar foundations, establishing good governance and social justice, and prohibiting all expressions of discrimination and racism.

Such is the essence of tolerance in faith. Striving to be wise, allowing oneself to be guided by it, learning to understand the other, and coming to accept him or her.

Naturally, one would expect the same attitude from that other, and would renounce anyone who does not listen to logic.

America's late president Eisenhower most clearly reflects this. He said: 'Though force can protect in emergency, only justice, fairness, consideration and cooperation, can fully lead men to the dawn of eternal peace'. Today, more than ever, the twin flames of democracy and the rule of law should guide us in our struggle to reach modern political and legal consistency.

Gone are the days when a conqueror would subordinate another and dictate his own way of life. Today's one accepted subordination is to the voice of reason. And the only imposition we could admit is that of the aristocracy of the mind, and the elegant thoughts it harbors.

In our hope to solve the problems of growing economic inequality, we need to promote individual creative capabilities, to come hand-in-hand with further growth and development of our economies. This duality is the challenge of our time. The Harris School in this respect is crucial in our efforts to solve political conflicts. And these efforts should be covering much of the Middle East and the Islamic world.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The late Pope Jean Paul the 2nd hailed Lebanon as more than a country, as a message of freedom, a symbol of pluralism, and for mutual understanding between East and West. We Lebanese are closely bound to one another, a patchwork of communities, as many as 18 and more. Our destiny, and choice, is to live together. United, respectful to one another, as well as tolerant.

I know the world is watching Lebanon with interest. Watching a political and moral exercise where such principles would lead to national stability and to development. We want to build sound agreement, to create trust and confidence in good things to come, because this is the key to solving present and future conflicts.

It is not an easy road to take. We cannot build a meaningful understanding without building a culture of learning about the other.

All religions have goodness in them. They celebrate equally what they have in common, rather than what divides them.

Where intolerance creates instability, there is, however, one way to proclaim diversity. 'Iqraa', Read preached the Holy Koran through learning. In a co-dependent world, learning opens that world to us. It teaches us what we owe one another.

American Muslims are a fine example of this. They preserve the essence of their faith. They practice its fundamental belief in human freedom. And here, they demonstrate how the merging of civilizations remains the most effective way to counter a growing belief in their destiny to clash.

How then to best address the complexities of our unpredictable world? I would say with the tools of knowledge, of wisdom, and of talent. In one word: education.

The Harris School has and continues to contribute in this process, communicating knowledge to the very people who one day would design solutions in a world threatened by radicalism and extremism.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As with all distinguished centers of learning, this University was founded in the belief that scholarship should be put to work for the common good. After the time for reflection comes the time for action. I rejoice to see gathered representatives of academic, cultural, economic, and business backgrounds- here to express their wish to engage in the Islam and Policy Studies Program, and to develop analytical thoughts in the face of ideas highjacked by radicalism.

The Arab Human Development report was written by Arab scholars and published in 2003 by the United Nations. This report states that the combined GDP of 22 Arab countries is inferior to that of Spain. Approximately 40% of Arabs, 65 million people, are illiterate. 25 million people will be unemployed by 2010. One third of the region lives on less than 2 dollars a day. As long as the region's political and economic disparity grows, we will witness an increase in radicalism.

It is now appropriate to explore pragmatic solutions. By strengthening the institutions in their own communities. And by acquiring a good sense of positive religious identity. All the while, knowing that policy issues are not best marked by the progression of time, but by the progression of outlook. For this to produce impact, we need to develop broader exchanges- both at inter-personal, and inter-communal levels.

It is the responsibility of each and every one of us, in their communities, to see social problems and to address them, so that the economic diversities between classes are narrowed. Not between Muslims and Christians and Jews- we all share the same moral values, not between East and West- we face the same policy issues, but between rich and poor, employed and unemployed, literate and illiterate.

Let the pragmatic solutions provide creative policies for education that is more effective, employment more attainable, welfare more just, and for life that is more honorable.

With the guiding light of the Holy Koran's words: 'Ya ayyouhalnas inna khalaknakoum min thakarrin wa ountha wa gaalnakoum sououban wa kabael litataarafou', which is: 'we have created you of a male and a female, and made you tribes and families that you may know each other' I conclude by wishing the Harris School and the new IPSP every success in the continuing pursuit of knowledge, towards a better understanding of the world, and ultimately of ourselves.

Thank you very much.