

Address by His Eminence, Grand Mufti of Australia, Dr Ibrahim Abu Mohammed

16 March 2016

I would like to begin by extending my deep appreciation for arranging this gathering. It truly reflects your noble efforts in strengthening the bonds of friendship and love between the different communities under the patronage of various spiritual and religious leaders.

Having been honoured with this invitation to be with you this evening, let me start by making a few observations.

Firstly, great nations are not defined by their skyscrapers or concrete jungles. Rather, by the mind, heart and soul of its people. We give thanks to God for the warm, tolerant spirit of this great continent which embraces so many cultures and languages, including Chinese, Vietnamese, Turkish, Arabic and more.

This reflects the rich and vibrant multicultural fusion that makes up this great country. I would like to affirm that the heart of this country is its ability to host and embrace the world's great religions together. A land where the mosque, the church, the synagogue and other places of worship stand side by side. A land where the sound of the Islamic call to prayer mixes with the Christian hymns of the church.

The spiritual leaders of the various religions gather here today, as you see, in a great symphony, calling to love, cohesion, peace, freedom and safety.

As for the Australian mind and intellect, it continues to excel and develop. It manifests through its extraordinary achievements in innovation through its scholars in their new research, discoveries in universities, and scientific labs.

This has made our country a role model for others to follow. This is where there is life for the spirit of multiculturalism to live in harmony.

Its heart rises with strong faith, and its mind develops on a daily basis with the innovation of scientists, and the words coined through the pens of great intellectuals and literary scholars.

Secondly, the societies that enjoy peace and security must have great people who desire love, justice and freedom. Love in its general meaning, and freedom in its wider meaning for all human beings.

When we speak to intellectuals and politicians, and you are at their forefront, considering they are at the advanced position of society, we must focus on our responsibilities before demanding our rights.

Communities that appreciate peace and security will naturally love justice and freedom, universally for all mankind.

When we engage with the cultural and political leadership as a vehicle for progress, we must be aware of our responsibilities before demanding our rights. This balance makes preserving Australia's social fabric of paramount importance, as well as giving appropriate value in contributing towards peace, safety and security, and respecting the rule of law.

We can also observe the evolution of Australian consciousness, through its continuous progress in both industry and research. This has made us a beacon of knowledge on the world stage. It has provided the space for great minds and spirits to thrive and excel in mind, body and soul.

We are quite fortunate that in Australia we have the most beautiful Churches and Christian institutions side by side with the most beautiful Mosques and Islamic Institutions.

Thirdly, for members of society to interact and coexist with one another, we must first agree on a paradigm of coexistence and tolerance, and a spirit of rediscovering each other. This dialogue, this interaction of ideas with others, will inevitably lead to a better awareness and understanding of the other.

Only then will we will start to see the vast commonalities we all have with each other, and how these commonalities can help us to create a rich and creative synergy, rather than the isolation and chaos caused by obsolete struggles for dominance.

We, the Australian Muslim community, consider our country's safety as part of our creed. It is with this appreciation that we adhere to a framework of values that respects the beliefs of others, even beliefs contrary to ours. This framework reminds us that the beliefs of others are natural rights that must be respected and even protected. We are forbidden from insulting others' beliefs, as well as of course attacking others for their faith.

Through this very paradigm of respect we see illustrated the light of wisdom, tolerance, and coexistence that embraces others and thrives as a part of a diversity of religions and cultures.

Fourthly, together we serve as a collective of cultures and religions, and as a vehicle for progress and policy. We need to always remember the positive aspects of others. We need to study each other closely, honestly and genuinely, and not allow ourselves to be distracted by some elements of the Media or Think Tanks with clear hate mongering or pro war agendas, who work hard to vilify us to each other, utilising their vile methods and dirty tricks.

I remind you that historically, the Islamic Civilisation embraced Jewish and Christian culture and religion into its realm. As the German historian and writer Adam Mitz states in his book “The Islamic call in the 4th Hijri Century”, Eisa Ben Nestor, a Christian, was a Minister for the Caliph Al Ma’moon. Also, Moses Ben Memon, otherwise known as Maimonides, who was Jewish and born in Cordoba, was a Medical Advisor and Minister for another Caliph.

I also don’t need to remind my respected hosts that the Islamic Civilisation in its cultural richness and embracing spirit also gave the world the then forgotten translations of the great philosophies of Socrates and Aristotle, despite their different cultural and religious backgrounds. Were it not for the Islamic civilisation then, Socrates, Aristotle and other philosophers would not have been known.

Fifthly, if Samuel Huntington argued for the theory and practice of the Clash of Civilisations, then we Australians, along with all the honourable men and women here, can provide a new vision for the world to follow.

A paradigm of respect, coexistence and cooperation of various cultures and religions. We remind you that the world today is in great need of human guidance, that as leaders of religion, we can contribute to this discourse. This must manifest, particularly after all the war, hatred and extremism we have witnessed.

Sixthly, the future of mankind is constantly threatened by the storms of war and chaos. This occurs whenever there is a disregard for the divine revelation that so graciously descends from the heavens. Corruption permeates society whenever religious leaders cease standing up to oppression and defending the oppressed.

It is can never be enough to speak to our people about heavenly grace, when their stomachs are empty and their backs are broken from the whips of their oppressors, or when their land, people and their rights are occupied, colonised, oppressed and humiliated. If spiritual leaders are seen to be passively silent in the face of oppression and degradation of others, people will inevitably incline to wickedness. It may be that this is the reason for the great wave of oppression and cruelty that overwhelms our world today.

If peace and security in society is our true priority, then surely justice and independence of all peoples is one way to bring about global peace. In this way, colonisation and oppression become evils of the past.

If we truly want to bring humanity into a divine grace and the kingdom of God, we must work towards establishing God’s justice on earth. We must stand up for human rights, particularly the right to freedom of choice. We have to emancipate man’s ability to choose, and save humanity from the bondage of greed, and from the slavery of the occupation of those who hate.

Finally, I see a great opportunity for Australia to become the medium to communicate values of freedom, justice and peace. We can present to the world a noble example of peaceful coexistence and multicultural harmony in Australia. This cooperation between religious leaders strengthens and enriches Australia, safeguarding its families from domestic violence, crime, drug abuse, corruption and evil. These things try to change our normal course of life. They threaten the family home and our women in particular.

In Australia, we see how the cockatiel lives side by side with the kangaroo and koala. Let us move forward with our different cultures in a beautiful tapestry of coexistence.

I would like to thank every person who believes in harmonious co-existence and justice, respecting and loving one another.

Thank you Mary for arranging and hosting this gathering.

May the peace and blessings of God be upon you all.