

Respect leads our Interfaith Work in Canada

Key points of my award acceptance speech (Jan 21-16)

Dr. Hamid Slimi

First and foremost, thanks to many of you for your kind words of congratulations for the Peace Award I received on Tuesday night. I am very humbled and more than ever motivated to work for better relations among the different faiths of the world especially in this beautiful country of Canada.

Being here in this country is one of the rarest and greatest opportunities for many of us to learn about different world faiths and cultures and develop respect and appreciation for our brothers and sisters in humanity. In spite of the differences in our creeds, preferences, tastes and backgrounds, we still owe one another the minimum requirement between all human beings and all nations that is Respect. Yes! The latter is the most basic and fundamental thing that needs to be between any two human beings in any relationship even if it lasts seconds such as holding a door open at a public place for another person or giving priority to an elderly person in a bus or a subway. Respect is the foundation of a healthy society, a healthy institution, a healthy marriage and a healthy environment.

Respect is the fruit of the ability to transcend our differences as a result of our deep understanding and genuine appreciation of what humanity is all about. In a world of hate and very often political manipulation of religions and religious extremists, interfaith work that highlights the common grounds and focuses our attention on core and vital issues is more needed than ever before. Interfaith workers focus on building bridges between religions and their adherents whereas extremists focus on building barriers between them thus dividing the human family into broken pieces.

When I attend different international interfaith conferences, everyone relates how they have developed good and healthy interfaith relations among different faiths everywhere in their countries. They speak of how they have dialogue and developed respectful relations with their neighbours. But for us here in this great country of Canada, I believe we have gone beyond simple encounters and interfaith

presentations. The nature of our interfaith relations and work is taking much more advanced, broadminded and forward-thinking forms. We are making a difference in people's lives, not by telling them what our scriptures say about poverty, but we are collectively feeding the poor and working to eradicate poverty in our cities and building homes and shelters for the homeless. We are not quoting what our scriptures say about love but we are sowing the seeds of love in people's hearts by showing respect and love indiscriminately. We are not reciting what our scriptures teach about the neighbor but we are building good, respectful and friendly neighbourhoods.

We model for the world what 'global citizenship' is, as the former US vice president Al Gore put it when he described Canada 10 years ago. So, let us export this universal model to the world and reclaim the core message of our faiths that is based on understanding what humanity is all about.

As I always say and will always say till my last breath in this life: "you can't be a good Muslim until you become a good human being..." Thus, when we lose our humanity, we lose the essence of our faiths.