



GLOBAL  
CENTRE FOR  
PLURALISM

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PLURALISME

## Annual Pluralism Lecture 2014

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### Introductory Remarks

#### His Highness the Aga Khan

Ottawa, Canada – May 29, 2014

Check against delivery

*Bismillah-ir-Rahman-ir-Rahim*

Madame Adrienne Clarkson  
Madame Michaele Jean  
Your Excellencies  
Ministers  
Distinguished Guests  
Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a pleasure to welcome you to the Annual Pluralism Lecture of the Global Centre for Pluralism. This is our third such Lecture – its purpose is to provide a platform for international leaders, people of stature and insight, to reflect on important issues that relate to pluralism. That purpose is surely fulfilled this evening, as we welcome our very distinguished Lecturer - the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, António Guterres,

As you know, Mr. Guterres was Prime Minister of Portugal for seven years - from 1995 to 2002. He has now been the High Commissioner for Refugees for an even longer period. He began in 2005 and was elected to a second five-year term in 2010.

Les défis que M. Guterres a affrontés ont été extraordinaires, tout comme le fut sa manière d'y répondre. Ces premières années du 21<sup>e</sup> siècle ont connu des défis humanitaires sans précédent. La situation mondiale des réfugiés a atteint des proportions de crises, souvent déclenchées par des conflits ethniques, religieux ou sociaux.

Nous vivons à une époque paradoxale. Les guerres à grande échelle éclatent de moins en moins, et l'on pourrait même dire que c'est une époque où les relations entre les grands pays sont relativement stables. Cependant, c'est également une époque de conflits violents incessants — de faible intensité, mais de lutte armée longue et féroce — particulièrement dans les régions sous-développées.

C'est également paradoxal que — chaque fois que la technologie nous donne une occasion sans précédent de communiquer — et de coopérer — partout dans le monde, les interactions humaines reflètent si souvent l'échec extrême de la compréhension du pluralisme — particulièrement au sein des États et dans des contextes relativement localisés.

Le résultat est une crise mondiale de réfugiés d'une ampleur et d'une gravité inégalée.

How to respond to this unprecedented refugee crisis is among the most urgent challenges of our time. And we are fortunate indeed that we can hear from Mr. Guterres, who has devoted decades to confronting these questions, not only at the global level, but also in Portugal and in Europe.

Thirty years ago, as a young member of the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly, Mr. Guterres chaired the Assembly's Committee on Demography, Migrations and Refugees. In 1991, more than twenty years ago, he founded the Portuguese Refugee Council, the only national NGO in Portugal today that works exclusively for the benefit of asylum-seekers and refugees.

That work, we should note, has had an impressive dual focus: it begins with meeting the immediate dangers faced by arriving refugees, the challenge of providing sustenance and protection. And it then it also goes on to address the challenge of integration - helping refugees achieve equality of opportunity in their new settings.

The challenges faced by refugees have been a central concern of mine for a very long time. My own community has, at various points in our history, been forced to seek refuge in new homelands - in Canada, among other places. And I have long admired the United Nations High Commission for Refugees. As you may know, my uncle, Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan, had the privilege of serving as the UN High Commissioner for Refugees from 1966 until 1977, playing an instrumental role in reorienting that organization from a focus on post-war European refugees to one with a deeper emphasis on global humanitarian crises.

Throughout his own, long career, António Guterres has been a passionate and effective advocate on these issues, articulating both the rights of the refugees - and the responsibilities of society to support and to integrate them. Underlying both his words and his work is a conviction, which I share, that any person's worth in this world does not depend on where he or she has come from - and that all people should be welcomed into the fabric of the society in which they may find themselves - so that they can contribute to that society's long term progress.

The Global Centre for Pluralism was established in partnership with the Government of Canada, and was inspired, in part, by Canada's experience as a highly diverse society, with a long-term commitment to welcoming and supporting newcomers. The Centre was founded as a place where we all can learn from one another about the challenges of diversity, and about the enormous possibilities that can open for us when we respect diversity as an opportunity rather than fearing it as a burden.

To that end, the Centre is also a destination for dialogue, a place to exchange ideas with true champions of pluralism. And that is exactly what we are doing tonight. Please join me in welcoming the Centre's very distinguished Lecturer for 2014, High Commissioner António Guterres.