



Annual Pluralism Lecture 2015

Introductory Remarks

His Highness the Aga Khan

Toronto, Canada – May 28, 2015

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Bismillah-ir-Rahman-ir-Rahim

Chief Justice Beverley McLachlin
Madame Adrienne Clarkson
Your Excellencies
Ministers
Distinguished Guests
Ladies and Gentlemen

Chers amis, permettez-moi de vous souhaiter la bienvenue à la quatrième Conférence annuelle sur le pluralisme que nous avons le plaisir d'organiser pour la première fois au Musée Aga Khan de Toronto. Ces conférences offrent une plateforme unique pour le dialogue international et soulignent le leadership de ceux et celles qui font une différence concrète en faveur du pluralisme et de la citoyenneté inclusive. Nous avons l'immense honneur d'accueillir aujourd'hui, la juge en chef du Canada, qui partagera ses réflexions sur les défis et les perspectives du pluralisme au 21^e siècle.

I am delighted to welcome the Right Honourable Beverley McLachlin to deliver the Global Centre's fourth Annual Pluralism Lecture and to welcome you all to the Aga Khan Museum.

The Chief Justice is a great champion of pluralism, with a wide range of judgements that demonstrate a profound respect for inclusion and accommodation.

As you may know, she also made history in the year 2000, when she was the first woman to be appointed Chief Justice in Canada; you understand the hint about gender issues [clapping] and in 2013, when she became the longest-serving Chief Justice of the Canadian Supreme Court.

When the Chief Justice first came to the Supreme Court in 1989, The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms had recently come into force. The justices were hearing numerous controversial human rights cases - and often rendering divided decisions. But the Chief Justice's appointment ushered in an era of consensus-building among her colleagues. Through her thoughtful, articulate leadership, she has reinforced respect for the Supreme Court, while also fostering greater public understanding about the justice system.

By working to uphold the rights of all Canadian citizens, the Chief Justice has contributed in a major way to Canada's robust pluralism. Certainly, Canadians will insist that there is still work to be done. But on the world stage, there is a great need for experiences of pluralism that work - and Canada is providing a powerful example.

In her LaFontaine-Baldwin lecture in Toronto in 2003, the Chief Justice said and I quote, "One problem, more than any other, dominates human history – the problem of how we deal with those who are different than us."

Those words have sharp, continuing relevance as we move further into the 21st century. Whether the challenge involves new waves of migrants moving into European societies, or political participation for the indigenous peoples of Latin America, or working towards democratic change in the Middle East and North Africa, there is a profound need to focus on the values and hopes that unite all human beings.

As the Chief Justice has stated and I quote again, “The creation of a harmonious society where every individual feels not only accepted but truly welcome is the responsibility of all citizens.” This responsibility is why the Global Centre for Pluralism exists -- to help us learn from one another about the challenges of diversity. And on evenings like this, we are fortunate to realize the Centre’s mission to convene change leaders and inspire dialogue about the benefits of inclusion and respect.

Ladies and Gentlemen, together with you, I eagerly look forward to hearing from the Centre’s honoured lecturer for 2015, the Right Honourable Beverley McLachlin.