



Annual Pluralism Lecture 2016

Introductory Remarks

His Highness the Aga Khan

Toronto, Canada – May 19, 2016

Check against delivery

Bismillah-ir-Rahman-ir-Rahim

Justice Albie Sachs,
Madame Adrienne Clarkson,
Your Excellencies,
Ministers,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

What a great pleasure it is for me to welcome you, most warmly, to the Aga Khan Museum and to this Lecture. I am particularly pleased to extend this welcome on behalf of the Global Centre for Pluralism and the members of the Board of Directors.

This is the fifth time that the Centre has sponsored this annual event - we call it the Pluralism Lecture. It is one of the highlights of the Centre's activities each year. It is something we look forward to, beforehand, with great anticipation - and something we remember, afterward, with great appreciation. And this year, it is our special honour to welcome as our Pluralism Lecturer - Justice Albie Sachs.

Au nom du Conseil d'administration du Centre mondial du pluralisme, permettez-moi de vous souhaiter la bienvenue à la cinquième Conférence annuelle sur le pluralisme que nous avons le plaisir d'organiser pour la deuxième fois au Musée Aga Khan à 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 d'une citoyenneté basés sur le respect mutuel. Aujourd'hui, nous avons l'immense honneur de recevoir le juge Albie Sachs.

Justice Sachs' career has been a truly inspiring one.

He has been a heroic freedom fighter, an insightful legal scholar, a compelling author and for fifteen years a member of South Africa's Constitutional Court. And, as most of you undoubtedly know, he was a chief architect of South Africa's new, post-apartheid Constitution - one of the most admired Constitutions in the world. The creation of that Constitution is a story with continuing relevance as nations across the world look for better ways of governing themselves. And it is about that Constitution – and how it was created - that Justice Sachs will speak to us tonight.

Justice Sachs' commitment to the cause of justice and equality has been the central theme of his life. Even at the age of seventeen, he was a passionate anti-apartheid activist. As an engaged freedom fighter, he was arrested, held in solitary confinement without a trial and forced into exile. And he was not deterred even when a bomb was planted in his car, resulting in the loss of his arm and the sight in one eye.

As a senior member of the African National Congress, he helped to draft the organization's Code of Conduct - a key document in advancing the ideal of an inclusive South Africa. And then, of course, came his role in creating the post-apartheid Constitution, and later his long career on South Africa's Constitutional Court.

All of us who try to understand the challenges of pluralism in our modern world also understand that viable constitutions are the sound foundations on which healthy pluralism must rest. They

are the vehicle through which the nations can reconcile the quest for national identity with the protection and the bridging of differences. In the pursuit of an effective pluralism we can learn a great deal from studying the South African constitution - and how it works - and how it was created.

Constitution-making requires a strong sense of idealism, married to a practical sense of realism. It requires a willingness to listen as competing priorities are expressed, and a readiness to negotiate as differences are reconciled. As the challenges of governance grow in complex and changing societies, a widely respected Constitution is essential to the preservation of peace and the pursuit of progress.

Canada's own Charter of Rights and Freedoms has played a central role in making Canada a leading example of a successful pluralist society. And I should also point out that Canada was a helpful contributor to the successful Constitutional transition in South Africa.

That Canadian contribution in South Africa was principally made through the work of the International Development Research Centre - IDRC as most Canadians know it - a resource created during the Prime Ministership of Pierre Trudeau - whose dedication to effective pluralism was so important in Canadian history, and is, not surprisingly, mirrored in the commitments of the present Prime Minister, Justin Trudeau.

The mission of the Global Centre for Pluralism is to convene Global leaders and to learn from their experience how to bring about a more inclusive, pluralistic society. On an evening like this, we see how well that mission can be achieved in practice.

Ladies and Gentlemen, we are grateful that all of you are here to share in that experience, and to join me in welcoming, most warmly, the Centre's honoured lecturer for 2016, Justice Albie Sachs.

Thank you.