

**Address**  
**by**  
**His Royal Highness Prince El Hassan bin Talal**

**at the**

**Third Conference and Cultural Workshops on the Dialogue  
among Peoples and Cultures in the Euro-Mediterranean and  
Gulf Areas**

**Alexandria, Egypt**  
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Your Excellency, The First Lady, Mrs Suzanne Mubarak  
Ladies and Gentlemen:

In the spirit of this great ‘civilizational’ and cultural edifice which brings us together at this wonderful Library of Alexandria, and in honour of the Founder of the Institute of Peace Studies which is co-hosting this meeting, I wish to address myself to you in the English language which has, essentially, become the language of our world and, by extension, the language of exchange between Muslims. This is natural, as Muslims who live in countries governed by non-Muslims, may number even more than those Muslims living in countries which are truly Islamic in government and state apparatus.

Ladies and gentlemen: *“Culture or tradition is not something that exists outside of or independently of individual human beings living together in society. Cultural values do not descend from heaven to influence the course of history. To explain behaviour in terms of cultural values is to engage in circular reasoning. The*

*assumption of inertia, that cultural and social continuity do not require explanation, obliterates the fact that both have to be recreated anew in each generation, often with great pain and suffering.”<sup>1</sup>*

There is a need to go beyond these oversimplifications of cultural determinism. Culture, of course, should not be overlooked, but the trap of talking around cultural “fault-lines” and stereotyped “mindsets” must be avoided.

I know that many of you will agree with this sentiment. Indeed, I am delighted to share this platform with Mr Federico Mayor – We have worked together often over the years, most recently with the Academy of Latinity. His presence here reminds us of the dangers I have just addressed. The often quoted commentator Samuel Huntington, when finished with we Arabs and Muslims, aimed his sights at the Spanish and Latino communities of our world. We must not allow these dangerous “cultural” generalisations to destroy bonds of friendship.

Indeed, we must emphasise that while the concept of culture should not be overlooked or undervalued, we must studiously avoid the trap of “cultural fault-lines”. The assumed ‘fault-lines’ between Europe and its neighbours in the Mediterranean have been the subject of much debate. But so-called fault-lines within the region need to be addressed and better understood. Dialogue must be extended if we are to realise the Barcelona Declaration objectives to establish a common area of peace and stability, to create an area of shared prosperity and to develop a partnership in social, cultural and human affairs within the broader area extending to the Gulf. In short, I do not believe in dialogue of

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<sup>1</sup> Barrington Moore, 1966

“civilizations” in the plural. Rather, I believe in “one world and ten thousand cultures”<sup>2</sup>.

In discussing “culture”, I believe that political and social factors must be understood within their historical context. In this regard, I hope, Federico Mayor, that you and I can produce a film together which will offer an answer and a complementarity to Al Gore’s *Inconvenient Truth*. He speaks of the physical environment. Is it not time for us to speak out on the worsening condition of our human environment?

This is an occasion where facts speak loudly of suffering. I spoke recently to an advisor to the President of Iraq during a meeting held in Amman to discuss a draft Social Charter for the West Asia-North Africa region. She told me that she is responsible for the three million widows and two million orphans that the Iraq war has produced. As a result of conflict and destruction, some 60% of the population in Iraq today are women. These facts override culture and politics – they call for renewed policies to improve the human condition. Similarly, what is happening in Gaza is unconscionable and almost unimaginable for most of us. In our region the human dignity deficit continues to grow.

In the Mediterranean environment, both West and East, we need to celebrate those who strive to improve the lives of our fellows. I recall with thanks the support given by the Holy See over a decade ago to suffering Muslims in the Balkans. They offered more than all our Muslim leaders put together. We Arabs took the view that those Muslim Bosnians were Europeans. We neglected them because of the colour of their skin.

Ladies and Gentlemen: unless and until we recognise the words of WH Auden, that “*Civilizations should be measured by the degree*

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<sup>2</sup> “One World and Ten Thousand Cultures”, Professor Mircea Malitza, Black Sea University.

*of diversity attained and the degree of unity retained.*” we cannot talk about making the Mediterranean, this *mare nostrum*, our sea, into a *terra media*, a middle ground for meeting and dialogue.

I would mention those discussions at the very highest levels in Germany and other countries in the north, not bordering the Mediterranean, where fears have been raised that such a union may upset the *status quo* of the region. Their opinion is that Germany is not just a proponent of an *Ostpolitik* for Europe, and France should not become the counterweight with its *Sudpolitik*. But I believe that North and South complement each other. I would also suggest that a major “fault-line” may arise in the area running from the Baltic to the Black Sea. Our world is indeed complex if we make it so. I ask our friends in Italy and France, to please remember that we in the Mediterranean and Black Sea areas incorporate traditional cultural conflicts – Byzantine conflicts. Historically, we are masters of dissimulation! So please do not come to us from across the sea to express your surprise that we are so divided.

In a recent article in the Economist, the following question was posed: Why did President George Bush, on his latest Middle East tour, find the Arabs in a gloomy mood? The answer was indicated in the following: “In your own country you have few rights. Travel abroad and they take you for a terrorist. Your leaders don’t count for much in the wider world. Some are big on money, others on bombast, but few are inspiring or visionary.” As the writer says, these are, of course, gross generalisations, but I want to add that in the world at large, things have not looked good for Arabs for quite some time. As in Palestine, so in Iraq. There we see the deleterious affects of the American ‘invasion’ or ‘liberation’ – depending on your point of view. In Iraq, and indeed in Afghanistan, intervention has produced almost universal popular outrage.

Ladies and Gentlemen: These are the facts on the ground. And so, we are here to talk about conversations between peoples not

governments. I would ask you to read my article in the last issue of *Europe's World*, where we called for the creation of Citizens' Conferencing facilities as an instrument to build effective citizenship in our region.

On this note, I would like to thank Mrs. Mubarak for reminding us of the *Erasmus-Mundus* programme for education. It is worth remembering that in 1945, Europeans could not talk to one another. Similarly, for us today, the longest distance is between the mind and the heart. If rhetoric were a weapon, we Arabs would have conquered the world a long time ago! The reality is that in terms of 'mindset', our Arab nation has been lobotomised.

Yet there is hope that all is not lost. I was amazed to discover the other day that there are more Arab scientific patent holders in the US than there are from India or China. At our annual Science Week in Jordan, I was delighted to receive a group of 45 Jordanian scientists, representing our country's contribution to the North Carolina region alone.

So, what we seek from Europe is partnership, not patronage. In discussing Euro-Mediterranean cooperation, the importance of supporting "the will to stay" cannot be over-emphasized. But this is a two-pronged challenge for leaders of the Mediterranean Region: The more economically developed nations of Europe must 'fund wisely', with aid seen as capital to finance *policies*; while the states of the Eastern Mediterranean must invest in their own people. That means invoking effective citizenship, inclusiveness and respect for the rights of all.

In its report on the proposed Mediterranean Union, the Assemblée Nationale de France tells us that the EU will create a financial initiative to address the issue of migrants. Let me remind you that in the presence of President Mubarak in the mid 1990s, we met in Casablanca for the Middle East-North Africa Summit. We

requested \$35 billion in funding from Europe for a decade of infrastructure development from Morocco to Turkey inclusive, to encourage the will to stay. The vision was rejected in Europe – Projects came first, on a “first come, first served” basis. The question we must address now is how do we put projects into a visionary framework now that the EU has taken the initiative to declare 2008 a year of cultural dialogue?

It was in Lisbon in last November, that it was agreed to declare 2008 the Euro-Mediterranean year on dialogue between cultures. But I would like to remind you that this year, in December, we also commemorate the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

I hope that my Egyptian friends will not consider me inappropriate when I say that when our Western friends point the finger regarding ‘human rights’ violations, they often forget the many infringements of human rights in the West. I refer here to the book by Baroness Helena Kennedy of the United Kingdom, entitled *Just Law*. In addition, I would point out that my colleagues at Peace Direct, have helped to produce a theatre re-enactment of the siege of Fallujah where some seventy violations of human rights legislation took place. We do not need to be divisive on human rights. We urgently need to act jointly. Again, only then can we deal with the realities on the ground.

As we look at our cultural heritage, I am saddened that in many parts of our Mediterranean region, medicine cannot be bought for our children because we have signed liberal trade agreements with more powerful nations. Once again, this situation reminds us of the need to develop a citizens’ charter and to emphasise the importance of citizenship.

Overriding all our discussions on dialogue we must remember that respect for the sanctity of human life is the cornerstone of all great

faiths – It must be the cornerstone of all great enterprises in human cooperation. And this must be reflected in real terms – The comparison between expenditure on security and expenditure on social cohesion is too vast to accept. Without addressing these issues, we cannot continue to talk about a Union of the Mediterranean.

It is of the utmost urgency that we give hope to our peoples. In that context I express my deep hope that this meeting, these workshops, those conclusions that you draw, will address this need. To take this further, are we not looking for a union of governments but a union of peoples? Indeed, can a union of governments truly address the concerns of our people?

In Geneva, at a meeting to discuss The UN Global Compact between government and industry, I stated that to address what I call the growing *human dignity deficit*, this dialogue must become a triologue, to include civil society. We are not losing our people to ideology, we are losing them because of poor governance.

I hope that the French-inspired Summit proposed for July 14<sup>th</sup> will begin with this quest for a vision, this sense of urgency, from all participants: We have had enough acronyms, enough alphabet soup.

It is of grave concern to me that no comprehensive ideas or concepts for intra-regional cooperation have been launched from within our Eastern Mediterranean region. The absence of an internally generated vision has been conspicuous. The region, the Mediterranean and the Gulf, has simply reacted to initiatives from our friends outside. The continued inability of our region to discuss, if not create, a regional process for cooperation and security must be recognised as one of the greatest destabilizing factors in the Middle East.

I would like to thank those of you who participated in ‘Voices from West Asia’ conference which led to the drafting of a Social Charter for our region – our partners from South East Asia and from South Asia – in your emphasis on the development of supra-national thinking have begun a change of mindset for our leaders and people.

Time is running out for workable solutions to be found. Let me remind you that by 2050, the Nile Valley will require a volume of water equivalent to five Niles. Let me also remind you that according to the World Bank we need to create 100 million job opportunities by 2025 to avoid disaster.

In drafting our regional Social Charter, we were inspired by the Geneva-based Human Development Centre’s experience in South Asia. The focus or prioritisation of certain elements of the Charter must be done by citizens and governments. It will most likely differ from country to country. It is not possible for a small group of people engaged in drafting a Charter to set a certain list of priorities to the whole West Asia-North Africa region. It can therefore also be beneficial to include a number of important issues in the Charter from which different people in different areas can choose their priorities.

Both our region and the world are facing an imminent carrying capacity crisis: We must avoid the collapse of societies due to energy scarcity; we must stop climate change; and we must integrate these imperatives into any initiative on cooperation in our region.

Ladies and Gentlemen: If there is a glimpse of hope to move from MAD to MAS – from Mutually Assured destruction to Mutually Assured Survival – I hope that at the conceptual level the shortcomings of cultural determinism will not limit us. Culture



must not be seen as an afterthought to security and economy but as an essential policy guideline for us all.