

# **2009 National Model Arab League Opening Session Keynote Address**

**Speaker: HRH Abdulaziz bin Talal bin Abdulalaziz Al Saud**

*The 2009 National Model Arab League was held March 27-29 at the Georgetown University Conference Hotel in Washington, DC. HRH Abdulaziz bin Talal bin Abdulalaziz Al Saud addressed the Model's Opening Session the morning of March 27.*

## **Model Arab League: An Experiment in Leadership and International Understanding**

Bismillah...

Greetings Ladies and Gentlemen. Assalamu Aleikum. May peace be upon you. I am glad to be with you and I am delighted to participate with you in your efforts to understand the issues related to the Arab League and the Arab World, a region that is geographically strategic, important for its natural resources and is affecting the whole world through its outstanding issues of war and peace. I commend you for your choice and initiatives.

To Ambassador Hussein Hassouna, my family and all people of Saudi Arabia thank you for your tireless advocacy in furthering the League's mission in the United States. I thank my friend, Dr. John Duke Anthony, and his staff at the National Council on U.S. Arab Relations for making all of this possible and for inviting my participation.

As you know, the League of Arab States was founded in March, 1945, almost seven months prior to the creation of the United Nations. The League is a regional body that safeguards the sovereignty and independence of Arab countries while preserving their history, heritage, and culture in the face of an increasingly globalized world.

Did you know that Saudi Arabia is a founding member of the League and is one of its most active participants at every summit?

Saudi Arabia believes that the League is an important organization that benefits all countries in the region and creates a venue for Arab countries to engage in political discourses that serve to enhance the mutual benefit of all involved. Nothing is ever easy in diplomacy and international relations, but the League allows a region to coalesce for a brief period of time and find reasoned solutions to the challenges faced by those in the region. Whether there are questions to be resolved between neighbors, collective expressions of solidarity, or the enunciation of principles in pursuit of peace, the League of Arab States plays a key role on the global stage.

### **The Arab Peace Initiative**

The League has often been a forum for ideas to be shared amongst the Arab nations, and for negotiations that could lead to further stabilization of the region. My Uncle, The Custodian of the two Holy Mosques, King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz introduced the Arab Peace Initiative at the Arab League Summit in 2002. Its primary goal was to deal with the conflict between Israel and Palestine. The initiative is based two major principles:

- 1.) land for peace and
- 2.) the sincere belief that a military solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is untenable and will not achieve peace or provide security for either of the parties involved.

Using these two principles as a guide, the initiative seeks to address all major issues of the conflict including a return to pre-1967 borders, a just solution to the Palestinian refugee problem and the creation of a shared capital in Jerusalem.

The plan is the most comprehensive peace initiative ever put forth by an Arab state with the goal of seeking a just and lasting peace between Israel and the Palestinians while taking the first steps towards the normalization of relations between Israel and its Arab neighbors. The peace initiative was reaffirmed at the League Summit in 2007, unfortunately it has not yet been implemented. We continue to believe in the initiative as a promising start to what could be the beginning of the end of the conflict. The plan follows many of the accepted pre-conditions for peace recognized by the global

community while building a framework upon which both the Israelis and Palestinians can work towards achieving the creation of a Palestinian state while assuring the security Israel seeks.

### **Contributions to Regional and International Development**

The Kingdom has always sought to use its considerable influence and ability to help the global community. Saudi Arabia is one of the largest contributors of aid, giving large amounts of money to causes throughout the world to meet the challenges of global interdependence including poverty alleviation, climate change and education. In January of this year, King Abdullah was awarded the "Champion in the Battle Against Hunger" for 2008, by The World Food Program (WFP) for his recent \$500 million donation, described as "a beacon of hope for the poorest and neediest in the world." In February, Prime Minister of Pakistani Kashmir Sirdar Khan opened a medical clinic funded by the Saudi Relief Campaign to support the residents of areas hit by the 2005 earthquake. Earlier this month, The Saudi Fund for Development signed a Memorandum of Agreement with the Assilah Forum Foundation to grant \$6 million to finance the construction of two primary schools.

His Majesty King Abdullah recently announced that the Kingdom would donate 1 billion Dollars to rebuild Gaza. King Abdullah also formed a Palestinian relief campaign in order to raise money for those affected by the recent events in Gaza.

In addition, my father, Prince Talal bin Abdul Aziz has been involved in international philanthropic efforts for many years. In 1980 he established the Arab Gulf Program for United Nations Development Organizations, or AGFUND. With the support of the leaders of the Arab Gulf States that constitute its membership and contribute to its budget. AGFUND concerns itself with the support of sustainable human development efforts and targeting the neediest in developing countries, particularly women and children.

### **Building Academic and Outreach Bridges with the U.S.**

My brother, Prince Alwaleed bin Talal took it upon himself to fund the building of bridges of understanding in the United States. He contributed to several American Universities, including Georgetown and Harvard, to offer academic programs concerning Arab Culture and Arab-American issues. He also contributed to American organizations such as the American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC) and the National Council on U.S. – Arab Relations under the leadership of Dr. John Duke Anthony in support of their outreach programs to enhance mutual understanding.

### **Contributions Toward International Understanding**

Saudi Arabia continually seeks to rehabilitate the image of Islam and its followers in the wake of the criminal tragedy of 9/11. The United States and Saudi Arabia have always enjoyed a unique relationship that began with economic ties which developed into bonds of friendship. Nonetheless, the events of September 11, 2001 shook the foundation of that special relationship and tested it in a way that no one could have imagined. The Kingdom found itself in the position of reaffirming its unique identity and separating itself from those extremists who would use Islam as a justification for terror and bloodshed. We embarked on a mission that sought to reintroduce ourselves to the United States and reclaim the tarnished image of Islam. To this day, the Kingdom is working hard to show the world that Islam is a religion of peace and tolerance that has been falsely characterized by a small group of radicals who twist its tenets and teachings to their liking. Those who committed the atrocities of 9/11, their leaders, and their followers are not representative of the faith, do not ascribe to the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) nor take to heart the illuminating wisdom of the Qur'an. The reality is that they are political militants masquerading as religious ideologues, determined to use everything and everyone as a means to their ends, while proselytizing a dishonest and ultimately illegitimate version of a faith they never truly followed.

Since 9/11, Saudi Arabia has employed many strategies in the battle against extremism. Aside from the rigorous investigations conducted on a regular basis, we began incorporating an intense religious rehabilitation and counseling program to re-educate those who practice a corrupt faith. Since so many radicals formulate their ideologies in their youth, we have attempted to teach them the true Islam at a young age. Our system of prevention includes draining the sources of extremism by correcting the flawed understanding of Shariah. We provide treatment to those who sympathize with terrorists by encouraging them to look at their ideologies from a different perspective; one that can lead them back to the heart of Islam. Bringing all of this work full circle is the emphasis put on the role of the family and its ability to guide the youth through the rehabilitation process. Continual pressure from caring family members can do wonders for the most hardened of personalities.

### **Interfaith Bridges**

On a broader scale, Saudi Arabia has sought to build interfaith bridges across the globe. We feel that it is not enough to confront extremist elements in our own country. The entire world must hold itself accountable by preaching religious tolerance and moderation in these trying times. In the last two years King Abdullah met with Pope Benedict XVI and convened a conference in Madrid with political and religious leaders of all faiths and backgrounds from around the world. In November of last year, King Abdullah convened a United Nation's High-Level Meeting on interfaith dialogue with leaders and representatives from more than 75 countries.

In his UN address to these leaders and representatives, King Abdullah declared: "We state with a unified voice that religions through which Almighty God sought to bring happiness to mankind should not be turned into instruments to cause misery. We will continue what we have commenced, extending our hand to all those advocating peace, justice, and tolerance." His message was clear; extremism cannot be tolerated in any faith, and if we are to help each other combat extremism we must work to appreciate and understand one another.

## **Finally**

In many ways, this event seeks the same kind of appreciation and understanding. All of you are here, taking part in the Model Arab League, not just to learn more about a system of political discourse and discussion, but to put yourselves in the shoes of other countries and cultures. You are assuming the thoughts, ideas, and lives of those halfway around the world and doing your best to defend their wants, their needs, their hopes, and ultimately their dreams for a brighter future. This is no easy task, and one that should not be undertaken lightly. As you partake in the model, always keep close to your heart and mind the people you are here to represent. Be mindful of how well you represent them, defend their rights, and speak on their behalf.

Again, I would like to thank the National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations for sponsoring the Model Arab League, and for giving me the opportunity to address you all. Finally, I would like to thank you all for participating in the National Model. May you use the knowledge you gain here to change the world for the better, not just for those of us in the Arab world, but for people the world over. You are our future leaders. Your future is now. Thank you.



*HRH Abdulaziz bin Talal bin Abdulaziz Al Saud with student delegates at the 2009 National Model Arab League, sponsored by the National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations, in Washington, DC.*

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