

## Islam and Social Justice

**City Hall, Edmonton, October 28, 2014**

“Celebrating our Faiths” is a joint, ongoing program of the City of Edmonton and the Edmonton Interfaith Centre for Education and Action. The program, displayed at City Hall, gives citizens of Edmonton the opportunity to learn about various religious traditions, thereby increasing awareness and understanding between our faith communities.

In honour of Islamic History month, Edmonton Council of Muslim Communities (ECMC), in collaboration with the Edmonton Interfaith Centre made a presentation on Islam and Social Justice.

Following is a presentation made by Shayda Nanji , Director of ECMC, at the formal launch of the display.

“ The term 'social justice' implies fairness and mutual obligation in society: that we are responsible for one another, and that we should ensure that all have equal chances to succeed in life. And this is the message that Prophet Muhammed (peace be upon him) brought to us some 1,400 years ago.

A man once asked the Prophet "Which Islam is best?" He replied, *"That you provide food, and extend the greeting of peace, to those you know and those you know not:"*

Today's display cannot be more timely. What we are seeing and hearing today are atrocities being committed in the name of Islam. As the war on terror intensifies and civil liberties get gradually eroded, what we cannot lose sight of is that the majority of victims are Muslims. Innocent men, women and children from Nigeria to Somalia, Libya to Syria, Iraq, and Iran. No one, none of us, nowhere, if we were to look deeply within ourselves, would say that this is what Islam is about. The horrendous crimes against humanity being committed are by those whose agendas are far removed from the teachings of the Holy Prophet (pbuh) All his life he exemplified what he taught – justice, compassion, honesty, and integrity.

The political extreme fundamentalist agenda is pitting Muslims against Muslims. Sadly, human history is replete with wars and injustices perpetrated in the name

of religion. What makes it different today? It is everywhere we go. Modern technology transmits raw information instantaneously around the world. But how are we filtering this information and through which, and whose lens? We need to be very discerning in how we process all this information. This was so profoundly brought home to me when I heard Donna McElligott interview Colonel Chris Hadfield about his new book. "you are here, around the world in 92 minutes, photos from international space station"

She asked him how he recognized what he was seeing because from space "North is never up". He laughed and responded that he found it funny how many people would respond to his postings saying he had got the picture sideways. He found it ironic that they would be correcting him on his orientation in space. Apparently that was his motivation to get the book out to show us that there are different ways of looking at things we take so much for granted. This is how he explained it.

"People are so used to seeing the world in one way and if you are used to seeing the world only in one way, then you are not seeing it completely and you are not seeing it right." He went on to say

"The world is so infinite in its beauty, so refreshing in its nature, its variety and colours and texture and the fact that it is so interconnected and that you can go around it in 92 minutes, again and again and again and just soak it up "

Today it is information, true or not, biased or balanced, that goes around again and again and again and we just soak it up. Similarly if we are used to seeing Islam (or any other religion) "in only one way then we are not seeing it completely and we are not seeing it right".

Human beings too, are so infinite in their diversity, their rich culture, beautiful traditions, deeply spiritual practises and so interconnected.

"More information at our fingertips can mean more knowledge and understanding. But it can also mean more fleeting attention-spans, more impulsive judgments, and more dependence on superficial snapshots of events. Communicating more often and more easily can bring people closer together, but it can also tempt us to live more of our lives inside smaller information bubbles, in more intense but often more isolated groupings." Quote from the Aga Khan's Ogden lecture Brown University – Mar 2014

Unfortunately the chasms which opened up after the events of September 11, are now widening, not narrowing as they were in the immediate aftermath. And this will continue to happen if we isolate ourselves in our bubbles. I applaud our City Council and the Interfaith Centre for Education and Action for providing this platform and public space for various faith groups to come together, to learn about each other and understand that we are after all, one humanity created from the same soul which has many names but the essence is the same.

I would like to conclude with a verses from the Qur'an on justice.

**“O ye who believe! stand out firmly for Allah, as witnesses to fair dealing, and let not the hatred of others to you make you swerve to wrong and depart from justice. Be just: that is next to piety: and fear Allah. For Allah is well-acquainted with all that ye do.”**

Sura5-Ayat 8

Thank You”