

## **Closing Ceremony Address on Wednesday 7 November**

I am privileged, honoured and humbled to be asked to give some closing reflections on this **truly memorable** Conference of Parliament of World Religions.

We have had a great stimulating week with **much food for thought**. Learning from people of different faiths and beliefs and listening to spiritually uplifting dialogues on how **to improve self, that enables us to love our fellow beings**.

We need to understand that we are all equal members of one human family, irrespective of our, faiths, ethnicities, colours and races. This understanding is necessary in working together for a **cohesive society** so that we can bring peace and justice in this **disunited** world.

We have learnt a lot but learning needs to be **practiced** otherwise it is **meaningless**.

My Sikh faith teaches: *'Recognise there is only one race and that is the race of human beings.'*

Sikh scriptures remind us,  
*From the divine light all creation sprang.  
Why then should we divide human  
creatures into high and low.  
God the Maker, has moulded one mass of  
clay into vessels of diverse shapes.  
God the True One pervades in all.*

Friends, one thing I have learnt this week is the **importance** of respecting and learning from the views of others. **All too often religions behave as if they have exclusive truths, denied to others by the one God of us all.** This leads to the absence of true dialogue, and to notions of **superiority and inferiority and conflict between sister faiths.**

It is like a boy (it's always boys) telling another boy my dad is bigger, stronger

and better than your dad. The inevitable result, a fight.

We have learnt this week that there is much in **common between our different faiths, and of the urgent need to put our egos and prejudices** to one side. We need to recognise the shared truths and the importance of respect for one another.

Guru Nanak taught 'na koi Hindu na Musalman'. That is, that God is not interested in religious labels but the way we conduct ourselves. **The one God of us all does not have any enemies or favoured people.**

Our different religions are like different paths up a mountain leading to an **understanding of God**. The paths are not mutually exclusive and frequently merge to give us a heightened understanding of our own faith. All paths should be respected.

Our Parliament of World Religions Conference of 2018 will have achieved much, **if it helps us move from exclusivity and superiority to understanding the wealth of similarities that are common in all our religions.**

We can make a start by promising to ourselves that 'I will try to overcome any prejudices that I have against other faiths and beliefs and will respect other views', I think this will bring us **closer to true community cohesion and harmonious living.**

Sikhism teaches that mere tolerance for other religions is **too weak and too negative a word.** A Sikh should be willing to defend to the death the right of others to believe in their faith. Sikh Guru Tegh Bahadur was cruelly martyred upholding the right of Hindus to worship in the manner of their choice.

Moving on from the personal to bringing change in **practices in public life**. We need to bring the ethical teachings that have been discussed during the seven days of the Conference back **into our daily work places**. If we promise with ourselves that from today we are going to practice these teachings of **equality of all human beings, including gender equality, respect for other people's views and a commitment to social and political justice, into our work places**. Then we can say we have been successful in implementing the aims of this Conference.

Let us look at the international scene. There is much to do in a world that seems to have lost its **ethical direction**. We talk of a common brotherhood and of **One World Week** and yet are prepared to accept our brothers and sisters being **destroyed by bullets and bombs** manufactured by ourselves, super-power colleagues and super-power rivals.

Most industrialised nations see the arms industry as an **important earner** as well as a means to **political leverage** on the less developed world. We need to raise our voices against this sordid **death trade**. **We don't want our grandchildren and their children to look back on today's time with loathing and revulsion** at a generation prepared to continue the suffering of millions **just for its own economic prosperity**.

Pope Francis in his book 'Path to Change: Thoughts on Politics and Society' writes that people complain about the increased number of refugees coming into our country. Yet we are the ones that supply **tyrants with weapons that fuel conflict turning settled communities into terrified refugees**. Pope Francis further explains that, 'When I say we, I mean the West.'

If we truly believe in the **Promise of Inclusion and power of love**, we should be prepared to live to our ideals no matter what the cost. It is not always very easy but as Sikh Gurus taught, life has little meaning if we constantly **compromise our ideals**. In Sikhism, we believe in the ideal of **Gurmukh**- a person who moves in the direction of Godly or ethical teachings as opposed to **Manmukh**- a person willing to compromise truth and justice for worldly gain, or in today's terms, a higher standard of living.

How many times have we heard it said, **keep religion out of politics**. To a Sikh this is like saying keep truth, justice and compassion out of politics. Shared ethical imperatives are necessary in building a **just, stable and peaceful** society. A good politician is one who bases his/ her **policies on ethics**.

We will be commemorating the centenary of the end of the **first world war** on 11

November only four days away. We remember the millions who died and every year we say, never again. Yet since then, we have had the Second World War and countless other conflicts. We have had genocides against whole communities **including my own Sikh Community in 1984 in India in this very week of November. Thirty four years on still, not a single person has been punished. We would like justice so that can live in peace. We would like to build bridges and have a closure to this episode. We still hope for justice.**

Why? Why these conflicts keep happening? This was a question considered by the human rights activist Alexander Solzhenitsyn. In his London Guildhall speech following Templeton Prize award, he **recalled the suffering and purges in the Soviet Union and how his mother would say, it's all because we've forgotten God.** He continued to say, having since seen and



endured even greater horrors, **I can do no better than repeat those pithy words, it's all because we've forgotten God.**

Today let us get God back in our lives, let us pledge ourselves to bringing Godly values back into **all** we do. **Let's make the Promise of Inclusion and the Power of Love a reality.**