

# ACHIEVING A MORE PEACEFUL WORLD THROUGH DIALOGUE

*HM Ambassador writes an article every three weeks in the Arabic language Al Riyadh newspaper. This piece was published in December 2008.*

On Sunday evening I was honoured to be invited to dinner by Sheikh Mohammed al Saleh at his home in Riyadh. Sheikh al Saleh is a man of great wisdom, learning and faith. Before dinner we discussed the relationship between the Islamic world and the West.

The Sheikh selected an interesting Athaar which I had not read before. It was narrated by al Mastoor bin Shadad (God be pleased with him), while he was sitting with Amru bin al Aas (God be pleased with him). Amru bin al Aas (God be pleased with him) described five qualities which "Rome" or the West had. They were the ability to show kindness in difficult situations, to recover after a catastrophe, to get up after being knocked down, to be compassionate to the weak and the poor and to resist a leader who rules with tyranny.

This noble Athaar again shows the depth of history which binds the Islamic world and the West together. I strongly believe that we will all live in a more secure, prosperous and peaceful world through co-operation and dialogue between religions. That is why I applaud the leadership shown by the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques in inaugurating the dialogue between religions. The United Kingdom takes this dialogue very seriously. In his speech to the New York Conference, the Prime Minister Gordon Brown said:



"Never has such a global dialogue been so critical. Never has this global leadership working for its success been so strong and so inspirational. And never have the global opportunities that might flow from this - an end to conflict, division, misunderstanding and poverty - been so profound and so necessary."

One of the reasons this dialogue matters so much to the UK is that British citizens come from every faith and religion. There are over two million Muslims in the UK. About 25,000 of them are here in the Kingdom now to perform the Hajj. A larger number perform Umrah throughout the year. Islam is now very much part of British society and

culture. The British pilgrims in the Two Holy Places have a unique identity. They are both Muslim and British.



The British government understands that for many Muslims the Hajj will be the most important few days of their lives. We want to help our citizens to have a peaceful and safe Hajj, so they can fully focus on the spiritual aspects of the pilgrimage. This is why the British government supports a Hajj delegation led by Lord Patel, which provides essential services and support to those in need on the Hajj. We are the only non-Muslim country to do so. But I personally believe that this commitment is one of the most important things we as an embassy do every year.

I want to take this opportunity to say thank you to all those Saudis who are showing hospitality to the British pilgrims this year. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is blessed to have the responsibility of governing the Two Holy Places. The hospitality and friendship that you extend during every pilgrimage gives you great honour. Finally, may I wish those of you not going on pilgrimage this year a blessed Eid al Adha. I hope that you and your families are able to celebrate this joyous festival together. Kull sanah wa antum bi-khayr.