

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION IN FIGHTING THE TERRORIST THREAT - HRH Prince Saud Al Faisal

their actions. Since September 11, 2001, Saudi Arabia has arrested more than 800 suspected terrorists of various nationalities. We have broken up numerous Al-Qaeda cells and seized their arms caches. We have introduced new regulations and mechanisms to ensure that our financial system and charities cannot be exploited by evil-doers.

We have frozen the financial assets of suspected financiers of terror. Joint Saudi-American Task Forces were established to go after the terrorists, as well as suspected financiers of terror. We believe that the new Saudi regulations are among the most effective in the world: this has been confirmed by independent international bodies, such as the Financial Action Task Force of the G-8 (FATF).

In addition to the steps we have taken, we also recognize that we must directly confront intolerance and those who sow the seeds of hatred and violence in our mosques and schools. As a result, we are updating our educational curricula and educating our Imams and putting in place better monitoring systems. And yet, societies are not transformed overnight, and effective and lasting change takes time. But we have started, and I believe --turned the corner. And we shall persist, God willing, and prevail. This is a struggle that we are determined to win, and cannot afford to lose.

Due to the unique position of Saudi Arabia in the Islamic World as the cradle of Islam, we have a moral responsibility to defend our religion against those who would subvert and usurp it. We have accomplished a great deal. But, in spite of those gains, our national efforts alone are not enough. International cooperation is a must.

In February of last year, Saudi Arabia hosted an international counter-terrorism conference in Riyadh. The conference brought together some 60 nations and international organizations from all over the world. Participating counterterrorism experts represented a wide range of cultures, religions, and political systems. They were immediately able to agree that terrorism has become the primary threat to international security in the 21st Century. They worked together to draft common and practical recommendations to fight terrorism and its causes. The resulting Riyadh Declaration called for fostering the values of tolerance, dialogue, coexistence, and

understanding among cultures and rejecting the logic of the inevitability of conflict (the so-called clash of civilizations). It also called for harmonization between cultures by bringing them together, and rejecting any form of ideology that promotes hatred, incites to violence, or condones terrorist acts.

The Declaration stressed that terrorism has no specific religion, ethnic origin, nationality, or geographic location. In this respect, it is pertinent to say that any attempt to associate terrorism with any given faith will in fact help legitimize the terrorists, and this we should reject completely.

The delegations supported the Saudi proposal for the establishment of an International Counterterrorism Centre under United Nations auspices for the exchange of information, in real-time, on terrorism and the means to combat it. This centre should be staffed by experts and facilitate the sharing of intelligence, training methods and appropriate technologies among nations. It would work in parallel with, and not in place of, bilateral relationships. We have submitted a proposal to this end to the United Nations and are awaiting approval. We understand the sensitivity of sharing real-time intelligence. There is a need to exchange information that can be used whenever it is apt to prevent acts of terror.

Last month, on December 7th, Saudi Arabia convened in the Holy City of Mecca an Extraordinary Islamic Conference. This conference recognized that terrorism is a global phenomenon not related or acceptable to any religion, race, or country. In its final Communiqué, the Summit condemned terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, rejected any justification for it, and declared solidarity with member states that have been victimized by it. It emphatically asserted the need to criminalize all terrorist acts and all forms of their support, whether in the shape of finance, instigation, or otherwise.

The Summit also adopted a 10 year plan for reform that includes confronting extremism, reforming education, streamlining the issuance of fatwas, combating disease and hunger, liberalizing economies and trade, and building centres of learning. The measures recommended, when implemented, would virtually close the door on any attempt to use Islam as a pretext for violence.