

Abdulaziz Saud Al-Babtain Chair for Peace

On my side and on behalf of the European Centre Altiero Spinelli of Roma Tre University, I wish to add, together with my welcome and thanks to all of you and in particular to the distinguished guests present, a few words about the significance of this inaugural event of the “Abdulaziz Saud Al-Babtain Chair for Peace”. In the presence of its creator, Abdulaziz Al-Babtain, Chairman and patron of the Al-Babtain Cultural Foundation promoting and supporting the establishment of the Chair. To him my special welcome and thanks for being here.

One thing worth mentioning right away is that it isn't the first time that Al-Babtain is with us. He was in this University, and in this same hall, five years ago, on November 2012, when it was inaugurated the Euro-Arab Institute for the Dialogue between Cultures, again in partnership between the Foundation and the Centre Altiero Spinelli.

It is therefore more than an honour. It has become indeed a privilege to have his personal attendance at the beginning of a new pathway along the many he has already paved as promoter of plentiful initiatives in the field of education and culture, in addition to his tireless humanitarian action also in other fields, to bring together intellectuals, academicians, politicians and people from all over the world.

What I'm trying to say is that in order to better appreciate the significance of today's event, it's important to know the merits and efforts of Al-Babtain figure and work, to the benefit of those, especially the students, who do not know him yet.

Obviously, it isn't an easy task. However, and in short, one may say that Al-Babtain is above all a poet: a poet of renown in contemporary Arab world and beyond. He is also a successful businessman. And the founder of many cultural and educational institutions. Last but not least, he is an engaged philanthropist. All in all, he is a man of deep human, cultural and social sensibility founded on local roots as well as in global experience.

The first time I met him was in Verona, when he was elected as honorary president of the World Poetry Academy in 2011. Since then, participating in various international gatherings and conferences organised by the Foundation, I became well aware of the many people he has touched around the world in his pursuit of dialogue and peace. He is internationally known for his commitment to build bridges of dialogue, peace, and of love I would say. Love is the essence of his poetry and vision of the world. Peace outside in the world cannot be reached without love inside us, in all its declinations, especially love for the neighbour, for the other, for the weak, all in all for humankind. At the end of this highly intensive little book he wrote on peace, titled "Contemplations for Peace" (I had it yesterday in my hands and I felt fascinated) Al-Babtain says, just in point: "Let me introduce myself to you. I am a dove of peace soaring all over the world. There is no homeland to that dove but you". *Mi presento a voi. Sono come una colomba di pace che aleggia sopra il mondo. Non c'è altra patria per me, se non voi.*

This spirit is the one at the base of his activism, wherever he works in the manyfold engagements he takes, especially in promoting meetings, where people from different countries can talk each other, with the aim to bring them closer, using culture for the advancement of better understanding between peoples.

His renown extends worldwide precisely for this continuous and generous commitment as peace activist, and active promoter of dialogue between cultures, testified by the numerous awards and honorary certificates and degrees granted to him at international level and from universities in many countries.

By acknowledging the global significance and impact of Al-Babtain work and that of his Foundation, particularly in educational contexts, we may then appreciate the significance of today's event.

I do not enter here into the contents of the Chair for Peace project: he will tell us about this, as well as the guests who have been invited to speak.

But what I want here to underline is that thanks to Al-Babtain creative efforts, today a seed is thrown and a message is sent out clear and loud.

In our globalised world, peace is no longer only an abstract possibility, but becomes a real necessity for humankind survival that carries with it a moral duty as well as a social responsibility at all levels. To quote again from his book: “We need a culture of necessity of peace”. We need to be aware of this necessity and of the ways how to achieve peace.

Indeed, especially with regard to youth, and to new generations, in order to give them real hopes of future, we need to develop new skills and new training methods for the advancement of peace as global public good, to be achieved and sustained in particular through educational means, based on a more competent, comprehensive intercultural approaches to mutual knowledge and respect for cultural diversity and the dignity of the person both of them enshrined in human rights, in a society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, Justice and solidarity prevail.

In this sense, therefore, I consider today’s event very special. As a concrete opportunity to cooperate together, at university level and beyond, in order to foster and carry out that vision, expressed again in Al-Babtain verses, of one “family of humankind united in desires and in descent”.

So with this farsighted vision in mind, calling for cooperative efforts and collective responsibility on the side in particular of educational institutions, I express once more my welcome and thanks to all of you and to Al-Babtain for his inspired and inspiring action and message pointing rightly and precisely in that direction.

Prof. Luigi Moccia