

Global dialogue and cooperation

INTERVIEW WITH HRH PRINCE SAUD AL-FAISAL ABDUL AZIZ AL SAUD

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PRINCE SAUD AL-FAISAL ABDUL AZIZ AL SAUD has a bachelors degree in Economics from Princeton University. He was deputy governor of Petromin from 1970-01 and Deputy Minister of Petroleum and Mineral Resources in 1971. He has been Minister of Foreign Affairs since 1975.

Do there exist common themes and responses to the diversity of problems and conflicts faced by the international community? How important is the concept of international legitimacy?

In any issue with which the international community is confronted, in any conflict that threatens us, and in any crisis that could have fearful consequences and implications for international peace and security, or for global sustainable growth and prosperity, regardless of the complexity of its details and the intricacy of conflicting interests and differing positions, proposed solutions and initiatives must be evaluated, positively or negatively, in the light of a single standard criterion, namely international legitimacy, international law and universal justice. Any deviation from this comprehensive and imperative criterion, regardless of the pretexts, put forward to justify it, and regardless of the deceptive promotional halo of publicity with which it is surrounded, would be likely to exacerbate rather than solve the problem, and would seriously undermine our collective ability to effectively address the other problems and crises with which we are all confronted.

What, in your view, should be the basis of an effective strategy to combat global terrorism?

Protection of human rights, the rule of law, dissemination of a culture of peace and initiatives to promote dialogue among cultures and peoples should constitute the basic components of any effective strategy to combat terrorism and extremism. Needless to say, respect for UN resolutions and the rules of international law is the only way to resolve chronic international conflicts and defuse focal points of tension, thus preventing terrorists from exploiting feelings of despair and frustration brought about by subjection to injustice, aggression and occupation.

With a view to contributing to the furtherance of international co-operation in the field of counter-terrorism, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia convened an International Counter-Terrorism Conference in February 2005 which was attended by experts and specialists from more than 60 States and international and regional organisations. The 'Riyadh Declaration', which was issued by the Conference, affirmed the unanimous international resolve to oppose terrorism and extremism and made practical recommendations to combat terrorism, cut off its sources of funding, and achieve closer multilateral co-operation in this field.

How can interaction between nations be best facilitated? How is the wisdom of Saudi Arabia promoting international cooperation?

The tremendous developments that have taken place in the transport, communications and information technology sectors have helped to facilitate and expand contact and interaction among all the people's of the world with their various religions, beliefs, cultures and languages. As a result, there is no part of the human family, in all its rich diversity and fertile pluralism, which is now living in isolation without affecting or being affected by others. Although these developments have generally improved human life, extremist minorities within every religious and cultural community are seeking to exploit these tremendous technological developments to propagate notions of intolerance, exclusion, racism and hatred. Therefore, we all need to work together in an earnest manner in order to create an environment conducive to promotion of the values of dialogue, tolerance and moderation and the furtherance of relations of co-operation and peace among cultures, peoples and States.

For these noble purposes, the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques launched his sincere universal appeal for the pursuit of dialogue among all the followers of the religions and cultures constituting the heritage of mankind. This initiative adopted a political, as well as socio-cultural, twin-track approach. On the political track, the Extraordinary Islamic Summit convened in Makkah by the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques reaffirmed the consensus of all the Islamic in rejecting violence, extremism and terrorism, and promoting the values of dialogue, tolerance and mutual respect.

On the socio-cultural track, Muslim religious scholars representing all Islamic denominations and schools of thought have affirmed the true nature of the Islamic religion and its message based on tolerance, dialogue and peace. Diligent endeavours are currently being made to establish a global centre for dialogue, comprising representatives of all the main religions, which will operate in an independent manner totally free from any political interference.

What lessons can be learnt from the current global financial crisis?

It has become evident that the environmental, economic, social and financial issues affect us all and no State can face them alone or single-handedly avoid the dangers

and challenges that they pose. No region anywhere in the world has been unaffected by the implications of the US credit crisis, which has had an impact on the international financial system, thereby undermining the world economy and confronting it with serious challenges that have entailed a slow-down in global real growth rates.

As we have seen, concerted international efforts and the adoption of a serious and credible approach to multilateral action have begun to produce fruitful results in which we can discern the first signs of improvement and a return to stability and growth in the world economy. My country has approved the largest governmental budget in its history in which US\$400 billion has been allocated for investment in development projects over a five-year period with a view to the adoption of an expansionist financial policy aimed at closing the deflationary gap and stimulating demand to counter the repercussions of the global financial crisis.

The best lesson to be learnt from this experience is the overriding importance of making every possible effort to remedy the laws in the international financial system and reach international agreement on ways to remedy the flaws in the world economy in such a way as to secure a financial system that offers equal opportunities to all the parties while at the same time, providing appropriate liquidity for the developing countries and safeguarding their monetary reserves from the collapse of any of the major international currencies.

What role does the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia play in helping to alleviate global poverty?

Notwithstanding the fact that the Kingdom is a developing country experiencing rapid demographic growth that implies a need for steadily increasing financial resources to cover the costs of human development, infrastructure and indigenous capacity building, the Kingdom has made considerable endeavours to assist other more needy countries to an extent that far exceeds the target set for international development assistance. The report issued by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs confirms that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia headed the list of donor countries funding humanitarian relief operations.

The Kingdom donated US\$1 billion to the Fund to Combat Poverty in the Islamic World, in addition to its contributions to the capital of 18 international financial bodies and institutions. The non-recoverable aid and soft loans provided by the Kingdom during the last three decades amounts to US\$100 billion, from which 95 developing countries benefited. This amount represents 4 per cent of the Kingdom's GNP, which is far higher than the target set by the United Nations.

In keeping with the concern that the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques is showing for the large-scale

promotion of education in the developing countries, the Kingdom announced its allocation of US\$500 million for education projects in these countries.

With regard to debt relief, the Kingdom has waived more than US\$6 billion in debts due to it from developing countries and has contributed its full quota to the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative of the International Monetary Fund. The Kingdom is renewing its appeal to the industrialised developed countries to honour their commitments in regard to direct aid quotas, debt relief in favour of the most needy countries and market access, without unjustifiable restrictions, for the exports of the developing countries.

Climate change, food security and increasing basic commodity prices are key topics on the global policy making agenda. How is the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia responding to these issues?

The urgent issues with which the world is faced, such as climate change, food security and rising prices of basic commodities, necessitate co-operation by all components of the international community in order to devise equitable solutions that take into account the interests of all in conformity with the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities between the developed and the developing countries. It would be unfair to burden some beyond their capacities while showing indulgence to others who have been more instrumental in exacerbating the problem and are more capable of bearing the burdens entailed by solutions thereto.

Shouldering its international responsibilities, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia announced, during the OPEC Summit, its donation of an amount of US\$300 million for the establishment of a special fund for research on energy, the environment and climate change. My country has also contributed US\$500 million to the World Food Programme to meet the rising costs of food, thereby assisting 62 developing countries in all parts of the world.

In view of the importance of international co-operation in the energy sector, the Kingdom has diligently sought to build bridges of dialogue between producers and consumers by hosting the secretariat of the International Energy Forum in Riyadh. At the Jeddah Conference of Petroleum Producing and Consuming Countries, held under his patronage, the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques launched his initiative known as 'Energy for the Poor' for the purpose of helping the developing countries to meet the costs of obtaining energy.

In this context, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia also announced its allocation of US\$500 million to be made available, in the form of soft loans from the Saudi Fund for Development, for the funding of energy projects in developing countries. **F**

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