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Laudatio and Grusswort - Opening remarks at the 2006 Berlin Peace–Clock Prize Awarding Event for HRH Prince El Hassan bin Talal, Berlin, 7 November 2006

Your Royal Highness,
Dear Federal Minister,
Dear Frau Bürgermeisterin,
Dear Professor Hübner,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour and pleasure to present these enlarged opening remarks that combines two functions – *laudatio* which in line with a well-established academic tradition provides a rationale of recognized achievements and that of what is so nicely formulated in German as *Grusswort*. It is an assignment which is, on the one hand, a relatively easy one when taking into consideration a number of achievements of HRH Prince El Hassan bin Talal, and on the other hand, a difficult one, as I need to make a selection and thus risking omitting those which should be presented in the context of this wonderful ceremony. So I am asking for your indulgence and understanding.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am convinced that you will agree with me that today we participate in an event in which the Berlin Committee for UNESCO is recognizing the remarkable achievements of a remarkable personality. I had the privilege to discover this for myself during our first encounter in early 2003, during His Royal Highness's visit to Bucharest and our discussions which were organized by our common friend and distinguished Member of the Club of Rome, Professor Mircea Malitza.

It was immediately clear to all of us that our distinguished visitor is not only a great personality with first hand knowledge and profound understanding of issues confronting our world, but also a man of dialogue with goodwill and energy to face the challenges deriving from the complex realities of our present world.

Your Royal Highness,

In your message to the International Conference on *Ethical and Moral Dimensions for Higher Education and Science in Europe*, organized by UNESCO-CEPES and the European Academy of Arts, Science and Humanities - *Academia Europeanises*, in September 2004 in Bucharest, you gave the following diagnosis about the state of the world:

“The world has been for a long time now been going through a grim phase of suspicious uncertainty: ever since the tragic events that shocked the world three years ago [in September 2001], we have witnessed events and activities that unfortunately defy and regard the basic principles of civility. I feel that our world has lost its centre and focus; those events have disrupted our contact with the moral and ethical basis of our shared humanity. I feel that the world has become hostage to a big black box.”

I leave it to your own judgment, Ladies and Gentlemen, as to how much things have changed since then but I fear that we have not made much progress in this domain. I would even dare to say that our world is neither less divided nor more secure in a variety of ways. A “man-made tsunami” is being provoked by those interested in pushing the world towards a spiral of social, cultural, religious and moral clashes. I know, and appreciate, how much effort Your Royal Highness devotes in order to reinstate our hope and trust in the future based on commitment to universal shared values. It is in conformity with those principles that you have engaged yourself in such key issues for our common but at the same time touching each individual human being issues such as sustainable development, shared values and intercultural dialogue much earlier than it become recognized as a political necessity.

It is one of the strange phenomena of our communication revolution that despite technological possibilities the role of an individual has been often reduced to that of a passive viewer who can be easily manipulated by abusing political mechanisms or cultural and religious values. Under such conditions it is difficult to have a real dialogue. You have a point, Your Royal Highness, when you say that in addition to dialogues between states and organizations there is a great need for such dialogues which take place between individuals as; “More dialogue means more individuals in a position to talk **to** each other, not **at** each other; and it means creating a framework for civilized disagreement.” It is this lack of “civilized disagreement” which is a source of the advancing “globalized suspicion” which is going to move us further apart into isolationism at the time when we are observing that more and more issues must be dealt with at the global level . Just let me mention that one related to environment with a long list of challenges which cannot be met by individual countries acting alone.

The Club of Rome, an organization of which the Royal Highness is current President, has been one of the pioneering actors in rising our collective conciseness to this strategically relevant for the whole humanity issue. The presence of the German Federal Minister for Environment Issues should be seen as a recognition of the work and commitment of this organization and its President.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

“Knowledge sharing” is the most effective instrument for development. Our increasingly international and multicultural society, and the interdependent relations among nations and groups, require citizens with a global perspectives. This includes global awareness, knowledge, skills and values. Contemporary citizens need a global perspective, as much as they need knowledge and professional competence. Also in this area, initiatives undertaken by His Royal Highness and his role as the President of the Higher Council for Science and Technology merit to be fully recognised.

Distinguished Guests,

Apparently, human-being is the only creature capable of imagining the future, but our imaginations often construct futures that are at odds not only with rational expectations but which are indifferent to values which have been important for humanity for many generations. We need more than ever to be focused on what is common in our common destiny than on seeking areas and themes that can result in even greater divisions and resentments. I see a special role towards diminishing of that divide in initiatives such as the Culture for Peace, the Dialogue of Civilizations undertaken by UNESCO as well as that of the World Conference of Religions for Peace. Just to mention a few in which Your Royal Highness is directly involved.

We are all familiar with the famous predication of Andre Malraux about the present century: "*le 21ème siècle sera religieux ou ne sera pas*". It appears that he had a point. But on the same issue, I subscribe to a view of the contemporary Egyptian writer Gamal al-Banna who recently stated that; "If religion was correctly understood it would be a power of liberation. But it is misunderstood and so it is driving us backwards".

Evidently, the humanistic and moral values of religions, which must be interpreted in the context of modern times, are particularly important. I know how much attention Your Royal Highness attaches to these issues because you are well aware of the consequences of the forces intent on a pulling the world in a direction that is risky for us all. Recently, we could observe that you are not afraid to put in service of inter-religious dialogue your enormous intellectual prestige and religious authority.

Distinguished Audience,

I see our presence in today's event as a demonstration of conviction that ideas and values so consistently and eloquently represented by Your Royal Highness are gaining momentum, even if they are being stifled by those who try hard to drive us from the road of dialogue. Your involvement in the core issues of the present world is being carried out with a solid chess-like logical reasoning for searching for a "global ethos" through exchange of ideas between cultures. In conclusion, His Royal Highness Prince El Hassan bin Talal is a fully deserving a recipient of the 2006 Berlin Peace-Clock Prize. So let me close my *Grusswort-turned-laudatio* by congratulating Your Royal Highness, on behalf of all of us, on receiving this prestigious award and by wishing you many years of service to humanity.