

The International Symposium on Bektashism, its patriotic and spiritual values

Tirana, Albania, 3rd March 2012

Your Excellencies, your eminences, distinguished participants,

It is a privilege to be invited to speak here today at this event in honour of Dede Reshat Bardi. I have been asked to speak on behalf of the International Association for Religious Freedom on the subject of religious freedom; a subject which is dear to my heart. It is a value shared by many people but it is also many things to many people. It seems appropriate to speak on this subject in a country that has suffered greatly under efforts to extinguish all traces of religion. Dede Reshad Bardi's life testifies to the suffering that religious persecution brings to all people of goodwill. But not just that. His life is also an example of the futility of efforts to stamp out religion. No matter how forceful the persecution, religion prevails. One can kill the believer, never the beliefs. Sadly, many things have been irretrievably lost. Objects of culture; knowledge passed down through generations; social structure that bonded people and bound peoples, families, and nations together. Yesterday I've heard a little of how the Bektashi are in the process of repairing and reconstituting their organization.

I have said it is hard to kill a religion. Why? Religion is at the root of every person's existence. It is not just what one holds to be true, it is not just what one thinks is the right way; it is the very essence of being. That is why religion is a value worthy of protection, and why it has been ranked among the essential human rights and been made the object of article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It has been recognized as being as essential to human existence as is life. But not any belief is a religion. Religion is a shared belief and therefore holds a rightful place in the public domain. It needs to share in the social freedoms to express, to organize itself, and to have the freedom to teach children and adults alike and thus continue its existence. That is why IARF is there to promote this human right.

IARF the International Association for Religious Freedom. When it started its existence over 100 years ago there was already a sense that the world was getting smaller through improved communications and transport. To maintain and achieve peace among the nations it was regarded as essential to improve understanding of each others' ways. Sadly, only 14 years later the Great War brought all this to a halt. But right after, IARF set up office in The Hague, [Netherlands], the city where the League of Nations had been initiated. The IARF is an association of religious groups which are open to new ideas and allow a diversity of beliefs to exist within. They grant maximum freedom to their individual members. Thus the individual members tend to be, on the whole, open to new ideas as well; they have full freedom of choice and in that way are able to grow spiritually to their full potential. To summarize, they have a positive attitude towards diversity, they favour the development of new ideas, and thus responsible behavior and a positive reaction to change are being encouraged.

To come to a conclusion- Religious diversity is as vital to a society as freedom of conscience is to the individual. In this respect it is important to stress that religious diversity does not in itself increase hatred. On the contrary: Research has shown, that in societies where religion is allowed to develop freely and where individuals can make a conscious choice there actually is an increase in people taking an active part in religious practices and, on the whole, an enhancement of spirituality, leading to the well-being of all people. All this can be summarized in the guiding principles of IARF: Different religions exist. They can exist alongside, they must exist alongside, and they will, one day, exist side by side. For that we are working constantly, so that future generations may live in a better world, a world of peace.

Wytske Dijkstra, Tirana, Albania, 3rd March 2012.