

Hessen Peace Prize, granted by the Albert Osswald Foundation,
AWARD 2009

Acceptance speech by Dekha Ibrahim Abdi

January 21st 2010

The Chair of Hessen Peace Prize,

The Minister President of Hessen,

The President of Hessen Parliament,

Members of Parliament,

The Secretary General of German section of International Amnesty

Especially the family of Albert Osswald

Honorable Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

In the Name of GOD Most Beneficent, Most Merciful

I am greatly honored and humbled by the experience of being the recipient of the Hessen Peace Prize 2009. I am deeply thankful to members of the panel and the staff, supporters who made this possible. Your mail came as a complete but pleasant surprise, I was in dilemma as to whether I should open the email since I did not know the author. In my work I have learnt two key ingredients those are the ability to take risk and ability to have hope and faith in the face of difficulty, I am now very happy and honored to have practiced both, for it has been rewarding and led me to receive the Hessen Peace Prize.

I am the public face of the 2009 Hessen Peace Prize, however it represent the collective achievement of the people of Kenya and the grass-root peace builders and social transformers in Africa , who have worked many years to hold the social fabric of society together and developed the peace structures, which enabled effective response to societal conflicts

Every cause has champions who has a vision and shares it with the others to make it a reality. Community leadership and non state actors were the critical catalyst for change who broaden the notion of Peace to mean more than a mere absence of visible violence.

I have observed that it is easier to engage in a process to heal the physical violence than the emotional and structural violence which leave deep scar in individual and communities.

Peace has many dimensions such as political, social, environmental, economic and spiritual. To build peace we have learnt to work holistically and understanding it from multiple perspectives to transform society from violent past towards peace which is a desired outcome. However in a divided society affected by violence it requires to understand this multiple perspectives and the dynamism of the issues which are complex and inter twined.

At the personal level I have learnt through my religion and culture that relationship is three elements. The relationship between human, the relationship with the environment and the relationship with the creator .Managing the three aspects of relationships requires a fine balance. To get this balance has been a challenge in the human history.

The Mother earth whom we all depend for our survival is under such stress, the impact of the earth's stress is expressed in the form of Natural disasters. Haiti is an example. Please stand up and join me in one minute silence to remember the people of HAITI at this difficult and trying time.

In Kenya we have come through a devastating violent conflict in 2007-2008 still many Kenyans are displaced in their own country unable to return home. They are seeking answers and wanting to understand what happened and why? The process of seeking the answer is a deep journey of self and societal reflection an ability to see the two sides of the coins (both as the victims and perpetrator have a story and a justification , both are right and wrong) how does one move forward both at the individual and collective level.

As a nation we have a deep unresolved trauma that goes back to the birth of our nation. We justified violence as part of the national struggle for independence and hence institutionalized violence as a way of resolving difference. Even after independence using violence both physical and structural has become the norm, this is a cancer which is eating into the soul of our nation. Military approach alone cannot be the solution to societal conflicts we have to seek for other innovative and creative approaches.

The process of rebuilding relationship often needs a collaborative safe space in which different actors can reflect and set agenda, ventilate their anger, bring their concerns on safety and security, blame others and listen to each others concerns, generate option for the way forward, and take up the role and responsibility to implement the practical actions. I observed many meetings that began with division of **US AND THEM** and moved towards inclusive and pluralism of **US ALL**. This process shaped and informed our guiding principles for a permanent mechanism and structure for peace. The process has shifted the parties from victims to resources who have realized that they are a part of the problem and can be part of the solutions. The partnership between state and

private citizens have resulted in the creation of **Peace Committees** that serve as an infrastructure that links the village to the national level of peace initiatives.

The culture of confrontation and inability to dialogue is a blockage to sustaining peace. This is compounded by other challenges of new and repeated conflicts, the change in the environment creates stress on the natural resources hence competitions. The institutional conflict linked to governance creates political tension at the national levels and generates further mistrust at the local, the ethnic and religious tension linked to local and global concerns of identity and struggle for power and inter-generational conflict.

The inter-generational conflict in Kenya expresses itself in many forms and shape, in every level and sector of the society, from the family to the national issues. Our youth feel that they are not understood, they are not given their space, the lack of space for dialogue has blocked their energy and any opportunity triggers their anger which is often displaced and channeled towards violence.

As a peace builders one has to reconcile with the conflicting elements of ones own identity. For me it feel natural to be a Muslim and professional peace worker. I have realized that other perception exists of what a Muslim woman can or cannot be. There is a lot of work that need to happen in order to create inter religious understanding.

In Kenya today like many parts of the world we are faced by sectarian tension linked to religion, this is not the norm. Kenya is a socially and geographically diverse. Our conflicts are of national politics and governance linked to ethnicity but seldom in religious terms. Tensions do come when national issues like constitution making, such event raises concerns that is debated and reach a consensus through peaceful means. There is a repeated pattern we have witnessed of conflict and violence related in religion for example 1998 -1999 and 2010 the triggers both times are not internal but external factors and actors (American Christian Preacher, and Jamaican Muslim Preacher) I am concerned that Kenyans take religious diversity and harmony for granted, I hope we don't loose our diverse heritage and precious value of tolerance, because to recreate it will be an expensive process.

In other parts of the world, I have seen society struggle to recreate what violent conflict has destroyed. In November 2005 I visited a community in Israel called Niva Shalom /Wahat Salam an inclusive diverse community, I liked their ideas and thought about it, my insight was that my country is a living proof of Niva Shalom/Wahat Salam. Muslims, Christians, Hindus, Sikh live in harmony and (Mosque, Church and Temples) coexistence

Peace builders have created local, regional and global networks to support each other to learn and unlearn, such coalition building are vital in disseminating vital lessons and build solidarity. No one Nation is an island and survive on its own, our conflicts are linked and hence we are part of one peace system.

I share the vision, thinking of Albert Osswald service to World Peace. Today I re-dedicate my self to the cause of global peace through education , we have started the first step towards the establishing a Peace University in Kenya , one of the fundamental pillars of the Peace University has been the Centre for Peace and Applied Research which has been instrumental in supporting the development of building human resource capacity. To strengthen our ongoing initiatives the Peace Prize funds will go toward establishing Peace Library and Peace Museum contributing to vital components of our vision for Peace University in Wajir Kenya.

I would like to appreciate your recognizing me a Muslim, an African, a Woman, a Non State Actor and especially a Kenyan in honoring me for this peace prize.

Thank you and God Bless you