

Inaugural Sir Donald Hawley Lecture

by Sayyid Badr bin Hamad Albusaidi

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Good evening,

May I first begin by expressing my gratitude for the invitation to join you here today. Thank you Richard for your kind presentation and for the splendid arrangements of this gathering of so many distinguished friends and colleagues.

I am sure everyone will agree that Richard Muir is an outstanding custodian of the Anglo-Omani Society and we are all very grateful for his efforts.

Today is a very special occasion. We are here to celebrate with you a number of things: first and foremost is the contemporary relationship between modern Oman and modern Britain, which many of you here personally represent.

We are also here to celebrate a dear friend in Sir Donald Hawley, whose loyalty, integrity, and sensibilities are hallmarks of a special friendship between our two countries, Britain and Oman.

It would seem cliché to say that nothing sufficient could ever be said of Sir Donald's wisdom and experience. But I am certain that his family and others, who knew him well, some of whom we are fortunate to have with us here in attendance, would completely understand and agree.

I especially want to acknowledge Lady Ruth Hawley, who joins us in this auspicious occasion today.

I'd also like to mention Sir Donald's children, through whom his legacy evidently lives on. His eldest daughter, Sarah, is a school teacher. Caroline, the second eldest, many of you will know; she is a BBC journalist, often broadcasting from Baghdad and other Middle Eastern locations. Then there is Susan, who has persevered in her father's pursuit of wisdom as a theologian. And lastly Christopher, who is another Middle East hand, currently a director of Rothchild in Dubai.

No doubt Sir Donald was very proud of them and of his grandchildren. In their achievements they honour his legacy.

When I started preparing for this talk, I began by thinking about the certain values, which Sir Donald possessed, values that are shared by many Omanis, and many British people too, and perhaps by reflecting on them, we may get a little more insight into the Anglo Omani relationship.

Among these values are a profound respect for history and tradition, a deep appreciation of tolerance, and a strong passion for education. I would like to reflect upon how these values, which unite our very diverse societies and cultures, are critically important today, in guiding our process of ‘modernisation’.

Relationship to History

Perhaps it seems unusual to begin with ‘a profound respect for history’ as of primary value in modernisation and development.

I believe it was the British writer G.K. **Chesterton** who warned those who sought to destroy tradition that before they destroyed it they’d better understand what it was they were to destroy.

Tradition is a form of history. I consider it a summary of the lessons of a society's experience, a sort of cultural facade of the wisdom acquired by its people over time. History and tradition, then, go hand in hand.

History attempts to understand how and in what context these lessons were learnt, and why they've been passed down and preserved, in order to learn from the lessons of the past and adapt them to contemporary challenges. This country, modern Britain, generally considered one of the most 'modern' in the world, possesses a keen reverence for and a pride in its past.

I am sure you can understand, then, how Oman's vision for modernity is driven by an understanding of its past. My country has undergone so many changes, such rapid development since His Majesty Sultan Qaboos assumed the throne in 1970, that it appears that Oman is 'modernising'. But as the honoured Wilfred Thesiger observed in his accounts of Arabia, the entire concept of modernism must be considered carefully. Modernism is an ongoing process of evolution, not a series of events leading to a specific goal or point at which something can rightly be called 'modern'.

When we treasure our past, modernisation becomes a process in which we do not strive to achieve someone else's vision of modernity, but in which we develop our own institutions, our own traditions, our own ways of doing things – socially, economically and politically.

By attending to some basic historical principles, we can create a uniquely Omani future. We realise that Oman's democratic institutions may not look quite like democratic institutions from elsewhere in the world, but that this diversity can in fact be highly positive and a force for unity amongst cultures.

In reality the 'new', 'modern' Oman has its roots deep in Omani history. Look at our political system. The Basic Statute of the State of 1996 is rightly identified as Oman's modern constitution. It provides for a distinctively modern set of human rights, and lays the foundations for state institutions of a modern character, including an elected legislature.

The Basic Statute might even be described as exceptionally modern. It establishes the free market as a basic economic principle of the state. Such a commitment is not usually to be found in constitutional documents. But even in this modern constitution you find something of the past. Free trade and the spirit of enterprise

have long been integral to the prosperity of the Omani nation. And just as this most modern of Oman's constitutional provisions turns out to have its roots in the past, so do its provisions for political institutions.

From the days in which Oman first began to distinguish itself as a nation, it did so because of a commitment to a distinctive political culture, one in which consent, consultation and accountability were essential elements of political leadership. The practice of this consultation and accountability – which we call shura – has been continuous, across centuries in Omani life. Shura functions as a key principle of government at national, regional and local levels. Its incorporation in the Basic Statute, and in contemporary political institutions such as Majlis ash-Shura and Majlis a-Dowla, represents a formal codification of longstanding traditions. This is about the modernisation of existing social and cultural norms.

In the political arena, then, development and modernisation in Oman have roots. They are native growths, and while they are open to the grafting on of other ideas, they are not simply transplants, brought from one culture and transferred to another. Their success depends upon the fact that they are indigenous species.

Over nearly 40 years now, Oman has been able to proceed gradually through a series of ever-expanding institutions of political participation, up to and including a parliament or majlis, elected by universal adult suffrage.

In November of last year, a National Committee on Human Rights, and another specifically to combat Human Trafficking were established.

However this doesn't mean that Oman is being 'updated' or brought up to speed, or that the principles at the root of these actions were neglected in the past.

It means that they were addressed in different forms, through cultural norms, aspects of the penal code and the labour law, but recently the government has recognised a more contemporary need to address them in specific "modern" legislation.

Enacting these developments stems from a political culture in which the principles of consultation and accountability have been widely understood and practiced. It also comes from a longstanding culture, which seeks to respect and promote the dignity of the person, and to foster healthy relationships amongst employers and workers that benefit the entire community.

Of course the scale of the change that has taken place in Oman since 1970 must not be underestimated. There are periods in the history of all nations in which change is more rapid than ever before.

It is undoubtedly the case that this period represents Oman's most remarkable periods of development.

Oman's Leadership here is not merely responding to the aspirations of the citizens, or taking the lead in launching new initiatives by drawing upon lessons handed down from our past through tradition, but also by keeping an open mind to lessons of other cultures and societies. We value the experiences of other societies for the knowledge and wisdom they provide.

This brings me to the second characteristic I'd like to discuss, shared by both Oman and Britain: the value of tolerance.

Tolerance

Tolerance, as you know, can be a problematic word, taking on a negative connotation that implies 'to bear' or 'to endure' (especially so when it is translated into Arabic).

Our two societies in particular, however, exhibit a far more positive version of this word, as did Sir Donald - it is for this reason that he was loved by so many and had so many genuine friends, and it is why his legacy endures today and will undoubtedly continue to do so. The Anglo Omani society itself might not exist, in fact, if Sir Donald had not embraced tolerance in this more positive sense.

Tolerance, viewed positively, as you and I understand it, implies a *value* for diversity, that it is not simply to be borne but to be embraced, appreciated, cherished, and perhaps even *sought* as an integral and constructive force within society.

Some might suggest, upon first consideration, that similarity lies at the root of friendship, Sir Donald's life would suggest otherwise and present a far more complex picture of human, and cultural relationships.

It would suggest that difference can be an even more powerful unifying force, a force that in fact produces *deeper* friendships, as it requires a further look beneath the surface, earnest efforts to grapple for understanding, and a setting aside of assumptions in order to encounter something previously unfamiliar.

Difference strengthens bonds among people as it broadens experience, challenges thought patterns and refines world views. It can also bring people closer together by providing subjects for humour, and sources of debate. Consider, for example, the entertaining rivalry of sport.

Tolerance, then, seen in this light, does not mean endurance. Nor does it necessitate conformity. Sir Donald remained a British gentleman through and through, as we know, and yet he was able to accommodate a profound love for the Arab world. Differences for Sir Donald were fascinating. Differences were sources of wonder, awe and even reverence.

Education

Enmeshed within the concept of tolerance is, of course, the authentic value of education, another trait uniting our two societies and characterising the legacy of Sir Donald. He was an Oxford man, a soldier in the Sudan Defence Force and later the Sudan Political Service, a judge in the High Court in Khartoum, and a diplomat in posts from the Trucial States (now the UAE) to Egypt, Nigeria, Iraq, Oman and Malaysia.

Later he established this Anglo-Omani Society, thanks to which we're here today. He also founded the British Malaysian Society and served as chairman of the Royal Society for Asian Affairs. He also published a number of books, one of which was a well known book on Oman, which was the standard work for many years.

Valuing education is not just about formal systems and teaching mechanisms. Sir Donald wasn't just formally educated to a very high level. He also possessed the deep understanding that only so much can be gained from an institution: that most education comes from our interactions with one another and with life.

Education is inextricably linked in with tolerance. It requires an openness, a humility, if you will, to experiences, persons and complex realities. It requires authentic engagement with aspects of life that are far from simple, but rather often messy and occasionally uncomfortable. That Sir Donald knew and embraced these realities is made evident by the fact that we, from many different backgrounds, are here today, united by the legacy of this man.

Foreign Policy

Tolerance, a strong sense of history, and a commitment to education, have shaped our societies in many ways. These are also values that guide Oman's foreign policy, producing a history of engagement with the world, engagement with neighbours, and with major powers both near at hand and far away.

Engagement and good neighbourliness are indeed the cornerstones of the Sultanate's foreign policy, and for very practical rather than ideological reasons.

The conflicts that plague the Middle East are in our back yard. Consequently, peace is immediately relevant to us. We believe that power politics only entrench conflicts and further embitter enemies.

Our experience has proven time and time again that the nature of diplomacy is such that the more isolated a person becomes, the more deeply he or she will entrench walls of self defence. The more threatened a person feels, the more power he will try to assume in order to protect himself. Countries and groups are affected in much the same way.

In recent years the pattern of international engagement has aimed to further isolate and alienate countries or parties labelled renegade and problematic.

Does this approach serve other than to deepen lines of rejection and division? What message does it send? It is certainly not an invitation to join in a brotherhood of nations.

The use of violence, terror, rhetoric, or isolation and demonisation, in order to solve conflicts, are nothing more than tactics driven by hopelessness and fear. Yet in order to put an end to such tactics, one must seek to understand where they come from and why they arise, so as to target them at their roots. To do this requires that we acknowledge and engage everyone as a fellow human citizen, regardless of how foreign their ideologies may seem.

Current debate surrounds whether the “carrot or stick” method is more effective: I will suggest that both options are problematic, as they are equally premised on the basic objective of compelling another to do what one deems appropriate, whether through incentives or force.

At the centre of Oman's foreign policy is the recognition that as countries are comprised of persons, international diplomacy is rooted in interpersonal relations. Just as at the personal level confidence needs building, so at the political level one needs to abandon the mindset of zero sum, and embrace win-win thinking, or peace plus, as we used to call it when the Middle East peace process was on track.

Dialogue and engagement are the only steps toward solving these crises peacefully, the only ways to achieve some sort of tolerance where differences can be constructive rather than destructive.

This does not mean being 'soft' or doing what is popular. It means doing what one considers appropriate with a desire to understand, and full respect for the legitimate concerns expressed by all parties concerned.

As many of you know, Oman has a long history of support for the Middle East peace process. It is thirty years since His Majesty Sultan Qaboos supported President Sadat's peace treaty with Israel in 1977 in the first round of the Camp David Accords.

His Majesty was confident in the possibilities to advance the peace process when visited by former Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in 1995, and Oman shared the grief of those devastated by Rabin's tragic assassination at the hand of an extremist. In the wake of his death, Oman persisted in its efforts to continue the groundwork he had helped to lay, promulgating a mutual agreement with Israel which led to the opening, in Muscat, of the first Israeli trade mission in the Gulf.

In Muscat, furthermore, we continue to host the only continuous initiative to emerge from the multilateral peace process set in motion in the 1990s. MEDRC, the Middle East Desalination Research Centre, strives to contribute to the peace process by finding common solutions to the real, integrated problems of water scarcity and security.

Created over ten years ago by the governments of Oman, the USA, Israel, Japan and Korea, the Centre's current members now include Jordan, the Palestinians, the Netherlands and the State of Qatar.

I have been honoured to chair the Centre since its inception and have truly benefited by working with the extraordinary individuals from all member states.

My only regret is that Britain is not among them, but I hope this will be put right some day.

Peace is not a luxury. It is a necessity. It is not an abstract ideal or a dream to be achieved down the road. It is not a goal to be achieved if conditions are right. We all must make conditions right, and we all must do so now. In the current Israel-Palestine conflict, there are options on the table: they may not be perfect, but they must be a starting point.

The Arab Initiative is one of the most promising starting points I have seen. It is an admirable extension of diplomacy that recognizes the complex realities of the modern situation, and which attempts to build peace now, despite layers of historical complication. When one party concedes an inch, it deserves a response in kind. This is the way diplomacy works. And we know from experience this process of conceding is difficult, but it is a reflection of courage, dignity and pride. The benefits that spring from mutual partnership far surpass any that can be achieved by threats and pressure.

Only a real peace will allow people to realize those visions of security that, for now, remain tentative at best. Only a real comprehensive peace can open borders

and provide great opportunities for trade and investment, offering a way out of the global economic crisis that is currently hurting us all.

The Economic Crisis

A final remark along these lines, if I may, before concluding my address.

I have spoken about the importance of drawing upon the lessons of history when confronting contemporary challenges, and about the interpersonal, microscopic roots of macroscopic problems and global affairs.

The G20 Summit convened in London last month has begun to address the global economic crisis in ways that I believe are promising, but I'd like to suggest, from the historical experience of Oman, that these realities must remain the basis of efforts to address the situation, in order to yield anything effective, sustainable, and worthy of the human persons it is intended to serve.

The International Community must not give in to fear and shut down its trade borders, but learn from experiences which have proven time and time again that opening borders, engagement and cooperation will undoubtedly facilitate economic growth and prosperity.

Oman's economic policy hinges upon thinking realistically and inclusively, locally and globally, and this approach continues to yield success. The key seems to be that our economy remains rooted in service to the human person and human relationships. The Omani culture that values courtesy, respect and community seems to place natural limits upon economic interactions and thus precludes exploitation of the individuals participating in the economic system. For this we are fortunate. But one must learn from the crisis, as well, in that the International financial system should develop better regulatory mechanisms to prevent exploitation and abuse and to ensure better global financial practice.

I hope that you will see parallels in the ways we must tackle these global problems, whether we are talking about the Peace Process or the financial crisis. Each requires a serious look into the local and global dimensions, but begins not on the macro level of politics but on a level that is fundamentally human and basic common sense. Each requires that we acknowledge and embrace the realities at hand, good and bad, and deal with them responsibly.

This in itself requires that we examine our own attitudes and seek to recognize the real person behind the face of those we think we may never understand, or for whom we think we are enacting policy. Once we have established a basic respect

for the *persons* with whom or on behalf of whom we are engaging, only then can our common political and economic gains be fruitful, and lead to genuine brotherhood among peoples and nations.

Conclusion

Awareness of these links, between the macro and micro levels, the political and the personal spheres, were, I think, partly responsible for Sir Donald's success and the strong rapport he enjoyed with so many. For though we have listed aspects of his impressive achievements as a soldier and civil servant, a judge, a lawyer, a diplomat, a writer, and so on, all of this falls far short somehow.

I believe the greatest lesson we can learn from him concerns humility and understanding, and the knowledge that relationships are the real key to peace.

Many of you may know that tomorrow would have been Sir Donald's 88th birthday. Please join me, on this occasion for celebration, in thanking his family on his behalf for the admirable person that he was and for all the good that he accomplished. May God bless his soul and may he rests in peace.

Thank you.