

## **Solicitor General**

### **Speech to the opening of the 1001 inventions exhibition**

#### **Museum of Science & Industry, Manchester**

**7 March 2006**

I thank Professor Salim Al Hassani for his invitation to attend the "1001 Inventions Exhibition".

We live in challenging times with the tragic events of 9/11, the bombings in Madrid, the bombings in London on 7 July and the recent Jordan bombings.

There are some who argue that Islam and the West are inherently incompatible. Samuel Huntington has argued that "a clash of civilisations" is inevitable. This is wrong.

People forget the long-standing links between Islam and the West and the enormous impact of Islamic civilisation on the West, in language, mathematics and medicine. The UK and Islam have interacted for centuries with Syed Ameer Ali, and the poet Muhammed Iqbal and Abdulla Yusuf Ali all having close links to the UK.

Today Islam is part of British life and the Muslim community forms an integral part of the mosaic of modern Britain. The contribution to the UK made by Muslims of the first, second and third generations of migrant families now form part of our national economic, social and political reality, from engineering, social science and transport to health, education and politics. Muslims are contributing to every walk of life.

Today we know that Islam and the West are not only compatible but can prosper together. That's what this exhibition demonstrates.

It demonstrates too that for the vast majority of Muslims in Britain 7/7 was abhorrent.

Most Muslims are succeeding in the UK. We must not allow a tiny minority of extremist radicals to undermine that progress.

I am told that classical Islamic thought distinguishes between lands which are Muslim and non-Muslim, between the Dar al Islam and Dar Al Kufr.

Today in Britain Muslims are protected by laws, by respect for human rights and have freedom to practice their religion. Indeed, together

with Christianity, Judaism and Hinduism, Islam is a mainstream religion in Britain. Some Muslims have suggested that Britain may be more than a modern Dar Al Sul (a land of covenant) but rather a Dar Al Amaan (a land of security).

Dar Al Amaan is traditionally a description only given to a Muslim state but given the extent of freedoms here, many of the conditions of Dar Al Amaan apply. Therefore when terrorists attack Britain, they are attacking Muslims as well as non-Muslims – indeed five of the victims of 7 July 2005 were Muslim.

The reality of the modern world is that there is no monolithic infidel West as the extremists claim, but rather that the lives of British Muslims and non-Muslims are inextricably linked. We are proud of creating a multi-cultural society in Britain and we want that multi-cultural society to be a success. We all have a vested interest in that success. Those who undermine it by terrorism, damage us all.

However we sometimes need a universal language which can cross boundaries and reach people no matter what their creed, race or religion. Art, architecture and science is are such a universal “language”.

The universality of the contribution of the Islamic civilisation in art, architecture and science is capable of reaching across in a language that everyone understands and can appreciate. That language is the language of progress, advancement and enlightenment.

Whether it is in the medical discoveries of Ibn Sina, called Avicenna in the west, the astronomy of Ibn Shatir or the gravity defying beautiful architecture of Sinan, this message of dedication to human advancement resonates throughout Islamic history.

And it is this dedication of Islamic civilisation that the 1001 Inventions project portrays in its true glory to the wider world.

It is particularly encouraging that the 1001 Inventions exhibition and its parent organisation The Foundation for Science Technology and Civilisation (FSTC), has its roots in Manchester.

And we all should be proud to proclaim that 1001 Inventions is a British project. A project run from Britain to build bridges between peoples of different faiths, ethnic groups and nationalities as well as over the gaps in our collective knowledge of a shared and progressive period in the history of mankind.

The themes and material covered by the exhibition, and the unique content that it highlights, is a valuable additional route for the UK

Muslim community to express their heritage and identify – and share that with the wider British society.

Plucked from history, the work of FSTC and the content of the exhibition on the history of the Muslim contributions to science, technology and civilisation provide an array of positive, motivated and exceptional Muslim figures from the fields of science, technology and civilisation.

There is a fascinating breadth of content covered that is immediately relevant to all people living in the modern world. East or west, north or south. It applies to all.

The breadth of the exhibits offers a challenge to us to ensure that we are all fully appreciative of the contributions made to our way of life by different civilisations including Islam. Islam is often portrayed as a religion with a tradition, but here today we celebrate forward-looking, innovative, dynamic Muslims who are inventing new things which have changed the lives of us all.

The 1001 Inventions exhibition highlights the role of faith inspired people innovating, in a spirit of cooperation for common human advancement.

Let me finally thank Professor Hassani on behalf of all of us for this contribution to mutual understanding between cultures.

Thank you.