

Dear Guests,

I would like to start my presentation by bringing regards and greetings from Turkey to you. My name is Erdoğan Arslan. I am a retired military officer. I would like to share my own opinions as a simple citizen from life-long experiences.

Yesterday and today, some of the examples which the speakers gave came from Turkey and Islam. My family, myself and people around us have never experienced any difficulty in living our religion. I also think that people who belong to other religions don't have any difficulty in living their religions in Turkey because tolerance is very important in my country and religion. For example, in many cities like in Antakya and Istanbul, the Churches, the mosques and synagogues are side by side. I don't think you can find this kind of tolerance and understanding anywhere else because I know that Moslems who are living in different countries have difficulty in fulfilling their religious obligations.

Atatürk founded the Turkish Republic on 29 October 1923 and brought secularism. According to the Turkish Constitution Article 24, 5<sup>th</sup> clause under the title of the freedom of religion and conscience, everybody has freedom of religion and speech. People cannot be forced to worship or attend religious ceremonies. They cannot be forced to have a religious faith or opinion. They cannot be condemned or accused because of their faith or opinions. Religious and ethics education and religious training are given under the supervision of the government. Religious and ethics education is compulsory in Elementary and Middle Schools. The other religious education and training are only offered if the individual makes a request. If the individual is underage, then his parents or guardians can make the request.

No person can misuse the government's socio-economic, political and legal status by forcing religious rules for political and personal gain or nobody can misuse religion and religious feelings or holy things for personal influence. This is under the assurance of the government.

However, time to time, we have had problems with religious headscarf and stating one's religion on personal ID cards as this subject was mentioned with some examples yesterday. 10 days ago, a new law passed and it now gives freedom to wear turban anywhere except military, police and legal places. A former regulation ID cards did not have your religion written and if someone does not want their religion to be written then they can request to be blank.

Actually the essential solution is not the changes in laws but the changes in people's mentality. In addition, the birth of Christianity and its progress persecuted many other religions. And as a result of this secularism was born. Of course the birth of secularism took a long time for the countries to adopt.

The freedom of conscious and religion and its relation with Islam has always been controversial and it will always be controversial. But in general the organized religion of Islam does not force anyone. Before the Republic of Turkey, the Ottoman Empire respected other religions and

allowed them worship and they were able to be recognized as a religion and even they were given sovereignty based on their religion.

The secularism in Turkey means that government cannot interfere with religious affairs in terms of education, teaching and public service. On the other hand the religion cannot interfere with rules and laws of the land.

This truth, along with Constitutional judgments emphasize the decision made by Supreme Court. Since 1924 Constitution there is a ministry called Religious Affairs. The secularism established by Ataturk means the following:

1. Religion has been used and is being used for the affairs of politics. There are people and groups have politic interests who uses religion for their benefits.
2. Our society is dependent upon religion and they are sensitive in this subject and hence they can abuse the system.

Because of this, the principle of sovereignty with no clause is for the citizens of the country is accepted and the Republic of Turkey is found. Ataturk showed that there is no favorism against any person or group and there cannot be any privileges can be given to them and this is written in Ataturk's declaration.

Ataturk knew in terms of Turkish prosperity, education and science that as just in other centuries in the history in the name of religion there could be some superstitions that would impede the progress of the country. He also knew that and stated in his declaration that public's sincere feelings would be misused by the politicians and he showed many examples of that.

By these we understand that the Republic of Turkey has attributes that belong in Constitution's 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> articles that there is no overarching freedom of religion and expression.

The human rights are brought by the rules in the government with the nature of being a human and they are independent. For the person to be progress individually, there is one clause that the human rights only can be found in the democratic states. The rules of human rights states that there is a basic equality and this is global and there is a moral attribute. All rules protecting the people's dignity are included in the human rights. Dignity is important to understand whether the rules of law are appropriate and this is a great tool for the justification of the rules.

Anybody, any organization or any government does not have the freedom to destroy any freedom. The human rights goes backs to our origins. The first time we saw human rights was among the Sumerians. There are tablets from Sumerians that show the relationships between the labourer, experts and the employer.

There were many human rights in Turkistan where the Turks believe this to be the motherland. There were many citizens with different religions that lived under one government. Nevertheless, the governments that the Turks organized previously in the history were secular.

In modern age, in 2004, Turkey and Spain had started a union of civilizations as an international forum and this union has the most memberships besides the UN. At past, there was a controversy in regards to the cartoon being printed and now our prophet Muhammed is filmed there were some Islamic phobias. With these instances, there were a need of understanding and tolerance. Because of this, I am happy to be here. I know that this conference is very important. Islamic phobia is poisonous and dangerous threat for the relations between the Islam and the Western countries. Just like anti-Semitism, Islamic Phobia also is a type of racism and crime against humanity. Bible mentions about human love. In Quaran which Muslims believe as a sacred scripture also mentions about the same love.

One of the verses in Quaran states that “Say, [O Muhammad], "I do not ask you for this message any payment [but] only good will through kinship." And whoever commits a good deed - We will increase for him good therein. Indeed, Allah is Forgiving and Appreciative.” Islam also place importance in being a neighbor. If you have a neighbor who is hungry is not mine says the Quaran.

One of the wise men called Mevlana said that “Come whatever reason you have come”. There is no discrimination among people and there is tolerance among them.

In summary, as a Turkish and Muslim, I love anyone regardless of their religion and races. I accept the same respect and love from you. Thank you for listening.