

## **To hope is to live**

AHMED ZAOUÏ

Peace Sunday Address

Maclaurin Chapel, University of Auckland, 4 August 2005

It is an honour and a privilege to speak to you on Peace Day and I thank you for your invitation. As a Muslim and a scholar, I am particularly happy to be speaking in Maclaurin chapel, a place of faith located within an institution of learning. I am also a refugee. In the past twelve years, the course of my life and that of my family has been shaped by the threat of persecution and the search for sanctuary. Some day, I hope to return to Algeria, my native country, to contribute to the processes of peace and reconciliation. In the meantime, however, I enjoy the peace and quiet of this beautiful country.

But despite the tranquil nature of life in New Zealand, it is impossible for any of us to shut our eyes to what is happening in the rest of the world. The recent bombings in London have been another reminder that we live in very troubled times. My thoughts and prayers go towards the victims. The effects of the attacks have been felt by all. Even here in New Zealand, thousands of miles away, mosques in Auckland were vandalised. There are many things to pray for. I pray for peace through dialogue, and understanding of difference. I pray that the London bombings will come to be seen as they truly are: an affront to every religion and profoundly un-Islamic. I have given several lectures and seminars in New Zealand over the past few months, and my theme has been unvarying that Islam is a religion of peace. Like all the great faiths, Islam forbids aggression. Muslims are required to show respect to other religions. At its source, Islam is as peace-loving as Christianity, as Judaism, as Buddhism. There are specific Koranic verses in which believers are required to protect places of worship and freedom of religion.

In these times, while we can be excused for being downhearted, we cannot allow ourselves to lose hope. Hope is the energy that moves us towards peace. Hope makes you feel young, makes you think, encourages you to share life with others, and to make a difference. Hope delivers one from death, for I believe that to hope is to live. Without hope, there is no life. There is a saying in Arabic that without hope, the scholars do not write. Why? Because ultimately, the purpose of all scholarship is to change the world by increasing the store of human knowledge and understanding. Without hope, scholars would have no purpose.

To be useful in moving us towards peace, hope must be grounded in reality. If not, this false hope can damage us by disappointing expectations. We

sometimes see this with young people, who have immense energy for change but who may not have seen enough to get a good sense of what is possible. On the other hand, those who have seen much may sometimes retain little hope because change has been very slow. Yet, for human life to improve, hope must be the message that each generation passes to the other. So, I would encourage the young people and older people to always keep in dialogue, so that the younger may benefit from the older's experience, and the older from the younger's energy.

Hope is created by belief but sustained by action. As a Muslim, I would urge the Muslim community to form a plan to prevent young Muslims from falling into the scourge of extremism. The young must be educated about the true nature of Islam. The responsibility lies first with families to provide their children with a stable home life and a balanced education, and then with communities to never depart from the discourse of peace and tolerance. Moreover, by exposing the young to different viewpoints and beliefs, we encourage tolerance and understanding. Just as I am privileged today to visit this Chapel, I would like to see young Muslims, indeed the young of any faith, visiting churches, temples and synagogues. It is through small steps such as this that hope can be sustained, and we can move closer, inch by inch, towards what we all seek, lasting peace.

Thank you. Salaam Alaikum, peace be upon you.