Recognizing The Symbols Of The Culture Is A Very, Very Important Element In Our Quest For Peace

by
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Harvey [Golub, former Hadrian recipient], thank you very much for those generous words. Let me thank Bonnie Burnham and Marilyn Perry for having taken the initiative and setting the idea that I would receive this award. I'm deeply touched by both your response and I thank you enormously for being here to support the World Monuments Fund, and also to acknowledge the work that I've done and that my colleagues in the World Bank have done. I'm happy to have three of them with me today, Jeff Goldstein, Eduardo Doryan, and Ko-Yung Tung, and it is to them, as well as to me, that I think this award properly should go.

But let me make a couple of personal comments first and say how honored I am that Brooke Astor is here, because if it had not been for Brooke, as she knows, we would never have saved Carnegie Hall. When we came to the issue of saving Carnegie Hall we discovered that there were no plans for Carnegie Hall. And Schuyler Chapin said, “I know someone who will help us”, and he made a phone call to Brooke who immediately wrote a check for $1,000,000. No proposal, no approval, she just wrote it and so I am deeply honored that Brooke got me started on activities here in New York, and it's a privilege that she is here with us.

And then there is my friend Jacob Rothschild to whom as you see I have been linked for a very long time, when my father, his cousin, recruited a regiment in the Middle East and fought in the Middle East. And I've had the privilege of participating in Jacob's own receipt of this award and I knew then that he was, is, a hard act to precede; now I know he is a hard act to follow. Because he has everything that there is in terms of a sense of culture, a sense of commitment and a sense of public responsibility, and it truly is an honor for me that Jacob is here and as you can see, a great personal privilege because we're such very close friends.

I do want to observe though that there are two friends who could not be here: Kay Graham, and most particularly — because he was on the agenda to speak — Isaac [Stern]. Having these two national treasures not part of the lunch is truly a sadness for us, and it's a very good moment that we can remember them both.

We must also remember, as one must at this time, the great monument of the World Trade Center, and the damaged Pentagon, and the people that
lost their lives, in a way representing a current monument to the society that we love and defend and cherish. It's impossible to have this lunch without thinking of that. We must no longer just think of the damage that was done by the Taliban to their historic monuments, but recognize that our culture, our monuments are, in fact—in a world that is as crazy as the world we live in—also open to challenge.

September the 11th was a moment that, I think for very many reasons, one needs to think about in terms of history, of culture, of an explanation. Why did all this happen? Why is it relevant to this lunch? Why is this relevant, why are we here celebrating the World Monuments Fund? And for me the connection is really very direct. I have the privilege of leading an organization that is concerned with 4.8 billion people in the world out of 6 who live in developing countries, who represents many, many cultures, and who are very, very different. Frankly, when I was in the investment banking business they were of interest, but they were out there—beyond the wall of New York, or Sidney, or other places that I lived. One was interested in the developing world because you should be, and it was a good thing to do. But somehow we were separate, we were different, we were different economically, we were different culturally, we were self-satisfied, as indeed I was, interested but self-satisfied.

On September the 11th, the difference between these two worlds evaporated. We came to recognize that there are not two worlds, that in every sense there's one world. That poverty anywhere is poverty here, that terror anywhere is terror here, that crime or violence somewhere is violence here. And you have to think what are the causes of this? It's possible to say some of the causes are inequity and inequality—indeed that's true. We have this challenge of poverty, we have this challenge of disaffection, a challenge of not understanding other peoples, other cultures. Indeed for many followers of Islam, there is the feeling, correctly so, that we, many of us, have not either appreciated it or understood that great culture. Centuries ago it was the culture that was teaching us—teaching us astronomy, mathematics, philosophy, it was and is a remarkable culture, but somehow, for many of us, Islam has been less recognized, less understood, and there is no sense in us thinking in terms of retribution against those extremists who do not represent Islam. We do have to think in terms of understanding the culture of Islam and the other cultures of the developing world, so we are not imposing our own culture. We are not doing that but we are evaluating, appreciating, and understanding that we all have to live, now, in a single world.

For me the work of the World Monuments Fund in terms of recognizing the symbols of the culture is a very, very important element in our quest for peace, in our quest for understanding. This is not a moment to stop our support of culture. This is not a moment to suggest that we no longer appreciate difference or that we don't understand within the context of local cultures, the people, their aspirations, and what they need to do. We are not a dominant culture. We are one of many cultures on the globe. The recognition by the World Monuments Fund that one needs to preserve, understand, appreciate and treasure cultures, is something I think we need to recommit ourselves to today.
I'm deeply appreciative that the Aga Khan sent me a note. What he is doing in Central Asia on his own efforts, in terms of Islam and its culture, is more important than any other single initiative that I know.

But it is a time for us to think globally, in this global city today. I am deeply honored to be here with all of you, representing an organization that is in fact acting globally in support of this philosophy and I accept this award and, with you, recommit to trying to bring peace, through better understanding, through recognition of differences, and through love.

Thank you very much.