

Madam President of Liberal International,
Madam Secretary-General,
President of the National Assembly
Distinguished Ministers,
Your Excellencies,
CEOs,
Political Party Leaders,
Representatives of Civil Society
Dear Liberal Friends, Dear Guests,

Let me first of all express my pleasure for being able to participate in today's meeting of my Liberal family after an absence of several years, due, as you know, to my numerous other activities at home and abroad, which left me no choice. My party, however, has continued to be involved in your activities.

It will soon be 25 years since I became a member of Liberal International, after having been an observer of its activities for one or two years.

I am firmly convinced that liberty is one of man's attributes and that all political and economic development must be built on this principle. Therefore, I quickly turned away from national and international organisations that gave supremacy to the masses over the individual, or to the State over economic groups.

Political liberty and market economy together constitute the basis of an ideology, or a doctrine to say the least. It is a set of values that results in guidelines adopted as the basic premise of the relationship between man and the universe and between man and his own kind. Individualism is the foundation of political liberalism that advocates a society whose pillars represent a number of different liberties: freedom of conscience; of expression; of movement; of opinion, and property rights. Therefore, the liberal society stands apart from all those systems that deny freedom or that are willing to compromise these liberties. History has proven that man best fulfils his talents and most develops his creativity in open societies that do not stifle the human being.

The affirmation of the pre-eminence of the individual is at the basis of free enterprise, the foundation of the liberal economy as opposed to communism and state socialism. History has proven the pertinence of the liberal option, since a society based on market economy has demonstrated its superiority in satisfying freely expressed needs. The 21st century is unquestionably the century of the triumph of liberalism, because, on a political level, its model of pluralist democracy has become a universal model in spite of the difficulties of adaptation and resistance. And, on the economic level, the market economy has spread to all four corners of the globe. Communism has all but disappeared, whereas democratic socialism only survives by borrowing from the liberal model.

Of course, as not all people have the same intellectual aptitude or the same advantages depending on their social origin, absolute liberalism can become a danger leading to anarchy and even to the complete opposite of liberalism.

The limits of liberalism have therefore become a concern for the members of Liberal International at a time when everyone professes to be a liberal. It is a question of establishing limits with regard to uncontrolled liberalism, the dynamics of which always lead to extremes such as de facto domination, imperialism or monopoly, all of which are contrary to the very spirit of liberalism.

The Perception of Islam in the West

Since the fall of the Berlin Wall, which buried communism at the same time, the world has lived under the banner of three principal ideologies: democratic socialism—a remote survival of Marxism even if it denies it—liberalism, and conservatism. Then come the two extremes, left and right.

However, we have seen that the humane and democratic liberalism of Liberal International is not the right-wing liberalism that positions itself to the left of the conservative right.

The point in bringing up these factors is to show that the West, in spite of its diversity, is founded on a common basis of freedom, which brings us straight to our subject and to the question of its compatibility with Islam, such as it is understood by the majority of Westerners. Let us face these questions frankly. For the West:

1°) Islam is perceived as an intolerant religion capable of leading its followers into a Jihad in order to impose itself if needed by the sword, through terrorism linked to integrism¹ and fundamentalism.

2°) The Islamic society is against the principle of individual liberty. The Islamic law is harsh, with immutable sanctions for certain crimes and behaviour, such as the stoning of adulterous women and amputating the hands of thieves, etc.

3°) The Islamic society is not a society of justice.

We could discuss the notions of "just society" and "society of justice" for a long time.

The notion of a just society is already a judgement relative to an ideology, a doctrine, or a moral; this is why this notion is purely subjective. On the other hand, a society of justice could be a society that applies laws and rules familiar to all its members in an impartial way. In this sense, let us remember that Islam refers to social justice as an imperative for judges, since justice is the act that is "closest to piety".

The Koran also reminds judges of the existence of a Supreme Judge who is above earthly judges.

It would not be prudent to answer these three considerations lightly and oppose them with a simple denial.

The difficulties for Muslims to practice their religion in countries of immigration is due to intolerance and ostracism by western society even if, as often happens, only a minority are involved. The debates that have taken place for

¹ Integrism is defined as the indivisibility of faith and law. The integrist society is one that is "corporatist in arrangement", a society that is placed "under the strict control of a despotic clergy who apply law and authority together. The name of this type of political organization is totalitarianism."

some time due to the abuse of Islam, especially by certain extreme branches or Muslim groups that claim to be representative of fundamentalism, quite rightly lead westerners to question the profound nature of Islam and its compatibility with democracy.

A View of Islam at the Beginning of the 21st Century

By asking me to deal with this question you know that I am neither an Ouléma nor a theologian, but quite simply a politician of Muslim faith. I am the leader of a country that is 95% Muslim, but that is also a secular republic. Because a politician makes decisions—whether he wants to or not, even if he is ignorant of many things—his opinion is never negligible. It is because the fate of the community, whose destiny is in his hands, depends on his decisions.

For my part, if I am Muslim, it is because my parents were and because they raised me in this religion. But, if I am a faithful practising Muslim, I believe I owe it to a personal commitment that led me to believe that I have espoused the most beautiful religion in the world.

You may tell me that the Christian, the Buddhist and the Jew do the same. But I know that each of them regards their religion as the best. This is the reason why I am tolerant. This is why, in fact, I am not completely ignorant.

Returning to Islam, specialists will excuse me for having to make incursions into their reserved fields, but I would like to explain my view of the religion that I have espoused. As in all religions, Individuals in power or in search of power have often abused Islam. These individuals make use of personal interpretations and sources that often contravene with **other** sources.

I will try therefore to respond to the fundamental question: confrontation or convergence? I will do this by successively examining a few questions whose answers will greatly help us.

- The rapid advance of Islam from the end of the 19th century to this day worries the West, where many residents adopt the Islamic faith. Why?
- What is the value of the theological practices of those that we Islamic republicans consider as extremists?
- Does the observation of the current situation in countries referred to as Muslim corroborate a fundamentalist or rather a "liberal" evolution? Does this evolution predict total incompatibility that could lead to confrontation or, on the contrary, to a convergence of values with western society?

This evolution of the world appears to be splitting the human community in two. The rapidly developing North is satisfying, not to say over satisfying, the needs of its population. And the increasingly poor of the South are ruthlessly turned back when they feel the need to try their luck in the North. The injustice is all the more felt as the North pursues a systematic exploitation of the South by means of economic domination, resulting in an unequal trade balance and a structural and technological disparity between North and South. This long-term evolution is transforming our world into a world of exclusion: 80% of the riches are detained by 20% of the world's population. The South is finding itself increasingly excluded from scientific knowledge transmitted by information networks that are lacking in the South.

This observation led me to recently propose the concept of numerical solidarity at the Visionaries Round Table Talks in Geneva. The Talks brought together some 3,000 participants from all five continents to prepare the World Summit on the Information Society, which was to be held in the same city in December. I am pleased to tell you that it was wholeheartedly accepted.

It has already resulted in the establishment of a *Solidarity Foundation* and of a *World Solidarity Fund* with its headquarters in Geneva. This Fund will be sustained by painless voluntary contributions—for example, 1 cent for every telephone call or \$1 for every computer purchased. Moreover, it will have the special feature of being totally transparent, as banking secrecy will not apply, and consultation will be possible at any time (See details in *Le Monde*, 07/03/2003).

1. The advance of Islam

1.1 Conversions

The advance of Islam is the result of increased conversions. It would take too much time here to try and analyse the causes of these conversions of Westerners to Islam. But it is a fact, and it has already softened the severe judgement of Islam. This is because these converts have obviously come in search of spiritual peace rather than to engage in subversive activities.

1.2 It appears evident that the advance of Islamic parties is due to the spread of poverty that leaves the population open to any message that promises a decent life in this world. They take refuge in the idea of a just society that Islam claims it alone can build. They make this claim by waving the Holy Book and by referring to a paradise for the most humble people, who are thereby politically manipulated.

But let us not simplify things too much as they are far more complex. There are four sources of Islam: the Koran and the Sunna (the practices of the Prophet) that together complete the interpretation of the Koran. There is also the Ijtihad or personal reflection, that can lead to reasoning by analogy. The fourth source is consensus.

The notion of consensus has enabled many dogmatic interpretations to be rejected.

2. Confrontation or convergence?

This brings us to the second question: Does the evolution of countries known as Muslim indicate a direction towards confrontation or towards a convergence of values?

I will attempt to respond to the question by first examining other questions and considerations that will lead us towards the answer:

- What is the nature of the regimes in countries with a Muslim majority and their compatibility with present-day ideas of liberty, democracy and free trade?
- What is the true nature of extremists and the problem of their legitimacy with respect to religion?
- How do the regimes that claim to follow Islam evolve?

- Are their common values between the western world and countries with a Muslim majority?

Today, there are about two billion Muslims in the world, spread out in many countries that are relatively simple to classify:

- Countries where the only source of law is Islam and where the Shari'a applies.
- Countries where the only source of law is Islam, but which are non-fundamentalist and where the Shari'a does not apply.
- Countries with a Muslim majority having several sources of law, there is primarily the Constitution, followed by the law, jurisprudence, analogy, etc. These are the countries that have adopted a republican form of government with a secular constitution.

One can see that the question of compatibility should only be raised for the countries in the first category, and it should be recognised that there are only a few. A distinction must be made between interior policy (Shari'a) and foreign policy (rather liberal), which does not seem to be influenced by religious considerations.

As far as I am concerned, I believe that the school of consensus was a factor in the evolution of Islam through the successive adoption of universal values. I am speaking of an evolution, which I think is a reality. From the point of view of democracy, liberties, and human rights, some regimes such as Morocco, Algeria, Egypt and Tunisia are not fundamentally any different from democratic African countries.

As an opposition leader, I often backed up my demands by referring to Morocco. For example, the access to State media, radio and television outside of electoral periods, which is a reality for the opposition in Morocco, was a continuing demand of the opposition in Senegal.

In many Muslim countries there is now democracy. In those countries we find elections and changes in the Heads of Government or State. Even the countries of the Gulf are in the process of evolving in this respect with the adoption of an elective assembly: Kuwait, Bahrein, and Syria.

A very clear evolution is now taking place. We even speak of the secularisation of Muslim countries, defining secularism according to its original meaning, as the separation of Church and State—not atheism.

To tackle the second point, the groups that refer to the Koran, it seems to me that I need to distinguish integrism from fundamentalism. On this distinction there is obviously a lot of confusion.

Fundamentalism could be a doctrine that refers to the foundations, in this case to the Koran and to the principles that it decrees. However, everyone knows that the Koran—although unchanging in its foundations—is the subject of different interpretations. It is not in its essence that it changes, but in its implications and in its relationship with Society. One could almost say as much about the interpretation of the Shari'a, which is the deposit of customs and jurisprudence.

When fundamentalists refer to the Koran, it is to underline the values that are in opposition with certain bad practices of the modern age. In a way, the fundamentalist contrasts religious moral with injustice, with all that is condemned by religions and by all moral philosophy. Sometimes this leads to integrism. Integrism appears to me as a rigorous interpretation of the texts, **even if** it means being in opposition with the form of jurisprudence that the Prophet (PSL) and his companions left us. For example, the practises of polygamy and stoning, though set forth in the Koran, are practically inapplicable, if one respects the conditions under which they are applicable. Besides, let us remember what Jesus said when he found himself faced with the case of the stoning of an adulterous wife condemned in the name of a principle prescribed in the Gospel of St. John: « If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her » (8:7). The poor woman was therefore spared.

1°) Islam is a religion of peace.

Islam is the only religion in which the first contact with another person takes place with a greeting wishing peace. «Assalamou Alaikoum», may peace be with you.

The Prophet (PSL) never pursued Jihad and he never went to war to impose Islam. He fought only to defend himself.

The Prophet had a cult of peace with his neighbours to the point of asking himself if they did not have a right to a part of his inheritance.

Islam is therefore a tolerant religion, even if intolerant individuals and extremists claim its absolute superiority and have taken it as a justification to attack the rights of others through Jihad. On this point there is not absolute agreement because if it is certain that the principle was expressed in the Koran, then the conditions for its practice are extremely harsh. Be that as it may, Jihad at the present time is out of the question. This is because an alternative also exists in the Koran: persuasion, which must never be aggressive and which only takes place when a non-Muslim solicits a Muslim.

2°) Islam is a religion tolerant by nature

The Prophet (PSL) instructed that the new converts of Mecca be treated with indulgence, and not verbally abused or mistreated. Is this not the affirmation of what we today describe as freedom of worship?

The Prophet (PSL) cultivated cordial relations with Jews and Christians, common descendants of the family of Abraham. The Koran itself cites numerous references to these religions. We should not forget that Jesus is also our prophet and is recognized by the Koran, even if he is not the last Messenger. This is why a Muslim recognises all the prophets whose names he pronounces with deference and respect.

When receiving in 631 a delegation from Najran, the Prophet (PSL) authorised them to celebrate Mass in the mosque of Medina, thus raising tolerance to a level never equalled.

3°) Islam advocates the equality of all races since it proclaims that, "An Arab is not superior to a non-Arab".

4°) The Prophet (PSL) engaged in inter-religious dialogue before it was invented. His entourage included Arabs from various tribes of the Hedjaz, Blacks, Persians, Jews, and Byzantines. Beginning in 617, he made contact with both the Blacks and the Christians of Abyssinia.

5°) The Position of Women

The Prophet (PSL) abolished the right of life and death over women. He abolished the pre-Islamic practice of murdering female babies at birth.

The Prophet (PSL) entrusted the management of the Medina Market to a woman, defying the convictions of his time, an era in which the woman was an inferior being.

Allow me a digression here to congratulate Liberal International for its role in providing a place for women. We have our first woman president of a Political International in the person of our friend Annemie Neyts-Uyttebroeck. At present we also have a female Secretary-General.

In Senegal, I had a female Prime Minister who possessed rare competence and rigour. Due to the change of government she vacated her position to a politician of my party. Today, I have 8 women out of 32 ministers in my Government, probably a record for Africa. I would add that, at the level of the African Union, an amendment by Senegal at the Summit last July resulted in absolute parity (5-5) in the Commission that runs the Union.

Let us return to our subject.

As religions **are not** under the control of political powers, I believe that Christians and Muslims should always search for the common values that bring them closer together and that enrich the international community in so far as they do not affect their own essence. This seems to me the duty of men of good faith who should devote themselves to fair and enlightened interpretations of the Koran and Bible.

In any case, I believe that integrism, whether Muslim or Christian, appears heretic. It is true that Muslim integrism seems to be more extreme at present. It constitutes a minority, but it is an active minority often manipulated by money and the prospect of power. Instead of conducting its extremist struggle on the basis of its own ideology, it finds it easier to erroneously consult religion.

The strategy of integrism consists therefore in fraudulent exploitation of religion and poverty in order to establish itself and spread, since it is relatively easy to speak to the underprivileged about the paradise that must be achieved on earth through violence, and about the duty to attack secular institutions.

What is occurring today in Islam has happened in all religions. Let's not forget the Christian Crusades of the Middle Ages under the sign of the Cross against the Crescent, the Inquisition, the women accused of sorcery burned at the stake, the Wheel of Torture, etc. But Christianity has had time to leave behind its "barbarities". Islam, as we have seen, is purifying itself. But the extremists are quite strong and well organised, fuelled by the great injustice that rules in this world, creating an island of abundance in an ocean of misery.

Islam in Senegal

You are probably going to ask me: Where in the world exists the tolerant, altruistic, peaceful and generous Islam I am describing?

My answer is, in a small country called Senegal that has had a Christian President for 20 years. It is a country where Christians and Muslims live so well together, sometimes even within the same family, that one can say the difference between them is unrecognisable until death comes and one is taken to the Church and the other to the Mosque. Cemeteries were only separated fairly recently. At the cemetery of Saint-Louis, the former capital, you can from time to time discover a cross on a tomb. In Ziguinchor (capital of southern Casamance), Christians and Muslims are buried in the same cemetery. In Senegal, neither stoning nor the amputation of thieves' hands is practised.

I will not go so far as to present Senegal as a model. Simply realise that this nation whose spirit of tolerance is often cited, was the work of men, particularly of its leaders, over time. For this is a country in which the Jihad was practised more than a century ago. If this was possible, it is because the population accommodated Islam through the brotherhoods (les fraternites) whose tolerance is well known and which plunges its roots in the Senegalese culture.

Today, as President of Senegal, I am striving to consolidate these achievements as well as the mutual respect among the citizens of Senegal of different faiths. This is why I have just introduced the facultative teaching of all religions in primary schools.

This brings us to the conclusion.

I belong to a Black African civilisation whose ruling class is abandoning, in all conscience, certain attitudes because they are incompatible with modern life and the humanist ideal. There is nothing to be ashamed of in recognising this since the people of Europe, to speak of only one region, also had barbarian practices they have abandoned. I have banned sexual mutilation and forced marriages. Even though the traditional inclusion of religious freedom was in the Constitution, I reinforced it with State protection for the rights of religious minorities.

In Senegal, we do not consider ourselves Christian or Muslim, but simply Senegalese. This means that the effect of evolution towards nationhood and citizenship is the decline of all integrisms to the advantage of a humanism that starts first of all within the national communities.

It has been said that it is ideas that lead the world. This is why certain theories are dangerous, as dangerous as they are superficial. The theory of the clash of civilisations is nothing other than anti-humanism concealed by an intellectual facade but which has as little justification as the instinctive reactions in the same direction. There is no clash of civilizations. There need not be a clash of civilisations if Muslim intellectuals prevent false believers and politicians disguised as preachers from imposing a distorted view of religion on us by circumventing us through the poorest fringes in our societies.

Nothing is unalterable in this world, not even the whole set of values of a civilisation that, at any time, can be enriched with contributions through an internal process of changing external contributions.

This is why, in fact, it is man that makes history. Now that a lengthy historical process is leading humanity towards a universal civilisation while enhancing the characteristics and contributions of different cultures, the world will be largely what we do with it now and in the future. The view of Islam and its contribution also depends on us, the Muslim intellectuals, who must defend our religion against a monopolising of power under the pretence of religion. We must advance towards the West with the positive values of our religion and our cultures, which must meet those of the West for mutual enrichment.

Until now I have spoken more to the Muslim intellectuals, adding my voice to others who have already come forth. We also know that the same approach exists among Christian intellectuals who are trying to distinguish our religion from present-day deviations. And they appeal, just as we do, to the ideal of a single humanity, with free men and women, different but enriched through their diversity. We hope that they too, within their societies, will carry on their efforts for mutual understanding, just as we are now doing inside Liberal International.

I would like to extend my deepest thanks to His Majesty, King Mohamed VI, whom young Senegalese adopted when they gave him the name, 'King of the Youth', for the friendly welcome that he has accorded to us, my small family and I, honouring Senegal and the Senegalese people. At the same time, I thank the people of Morocco and its Government for the warm welcome given to the delegation that is accompanying me.

Allow me to congratulate Liberal International for having had the courage to open a debate on such a burning and pressing issue. A heavy dose of tolerance and clarity is needed. By doing this, you open the way to the convergences that will save the world by reducing supposedly unconquerable antagonisms.

Liberal International in Senegal

Senegal is delighted to host the Liberal International Congress on the 23-25 of October. We are also delighted because the victory of the PDS at the presidential elections of 19 March 2000, over a Socialist Party that has run the country without a break for 50 years, was also your victory. During my 26 years in the opposition, your moral and political support has never failed me, especially during the numerous periods of my imprisonment. You have always supported me in spite of the serious accusations against me. Liberal International has always mobilised itself and has constantly mobilised our friends in Europe, Canada, and the United States for my release. And arbitrary power was reversed every time by the acquittals of the tribunals that nearly always sanctioned my arrest.

It will not surprise you that Annemie Neyts, our President, was always in the centre of the circle of my tireless friends. She understood the difficulties of a democratic party in an African context as in the de facto and de jure one party state of Senegal.

My demands for the right of assembly and freedom of speech were always legally based, but so numerous that the Ministry of Interior at the time said to me:

"Maître Wade, you want to pass from a lawless state to a legally constituted state in 48 hours! Give us time to catch our breath!"

By holding the Liberal International Congress in Senegal, you are simply and rightfully sharing a political arena that you have greatly helped to conquer by democratic means. It is appropriate that the occasion is also one to celebrate our common victory.

My dear Annemie, I willingly accept the Liberal International Prize for Freedom, although I am well aware of the part that you and the members of Liberal International have played in the work that I was able to do for the progress of democracy and freedom.

I would like to say one last word to the one who really deserves this prize, who must share it with me at least, my wife Viviane. She has courageously lived by my side during the long 26 years of opposition in the blind and intolerant African environment of the time, without ever complaining, always determined, and believing unperturbedly in my destiny. One day perhaps she will explain to me why.

Thank you for your attention.