



An Eid message from the Vice-President

## BEING SEEN LIVING THE LIFE

*I begin in the name of God, the Compassionate, the Most Kind, and praise Him. He sustains and He provides, and He sent us His messengers who all spoke the truth. May God bless and grant His peace to Muhammad, God's last messenger, and to those before him.*



It seems only yesterday that we welcomed the month of Ramadan back into our lives. As we bid it farewell with a sadness of its passing, we welcome the great day of Eid. One month ago, people would quickly turn conversations with me round to the Pope's lecture...fast forward a month and it hardly gets a mention. We develop good habits in Ramadan through our extra prayers, devotion and charity, but this time round we found ourselves in the near daily habit of walking towards the newspaper stands, with a sinking feeling as those headlines came into view. The public spotlight on the Muslim faith had been particularly intense. Not on the timeless faith of the prophets of old, but on the Muslim 'problem' I mean. Even a cabby's moans made it to the front page in dramatic fashion. And the greatest attention continues to be on the subject of the veil, and by extension, on women. Do we laugh or do we cry? How about neither. How about action.

Eid is a wonderful occasion, a time of sharing. The morning Eid prayers represent action, an open show of confidence, humility and thankfulness for all we have – and we have much indeed. The Prophet Muhammad, may God bless him and grant him peace, made doubly sure that any section of society was not left out from the occasion and he would issue reminders saying women had as much right as men. Sadly, the need for those reminders has actually risen. Women played a proper role in his day, in the mosques, in the great outdoors and indoors. There was no artificial concept of 'women's work' as such, just a 'getting on with it' attitude to work itself.

**If you were to walk the streets with the great man, you would see ordinary people mixing ordinarily, not journeying in separate streams.**

Muhammad, may God bless him and grant him peace, built or oversaw some two dozens mosques and they all had one common prayer room for everyone with no veils or partitions. And when he learned some men would muscle their way through the door at busy times, he ordered a second opening be placed right beside it for improved access. Strange then that designs to empower and include women were replaced in time by instruments that achieve the opposite.

It was the English philosopher Edmund Burke who said, rightly, 'All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing'. I believe that is also true of a woman's position in her society. If women do nothing, the unfair discrimination against women will inevitably take root. That is true of any society and Muslim societies are in no way immune, despite what we understand about our faith. Islamic teachings will lie open to abuse and absurd interpretations, be that by jurists or tradition, or by political and media forces. A heavy price for inaction.

If we fail to take seriously the visible roles women have played, individually and as part of the collective, in the rise of many a just civilisation, and including the great Islamic civilisation during and after the Prophet Muhammad's time, we will fail to understand the opportunities that lie in the palms of our hands today. Muslim women must be seen living the life, the life of a practicing Muslim: the ordinary, grateful and positive life of a person committed to God, committed to right and good, committed to our neighbours and our country.

This Eid, as we think about what we gained for ourselves over Ramadan, let us also think about what we have lost over time.

I pray you have a joyous Eid.

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