

Universal Human Rights for Humanity by Lord Nazir Ahmed

By Robin Marsh

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Chaired by Lord King of West Bromwich and Margaret Ali (Director UPF – UK), the first speaker was Lord Nazir Ahmed of Rotherham who was speaking on the topic of *Universal Human Rights for Humanity*. After thanking Dr Song, Robin and Margaret and those involved in UPF and WFWP for organising the conference, Lord Ahmed went on to talk passionately about issues of human rights in countries across the globe, asking if, on this 63rd anniversary of Human Rights Day, we had really progressed. He had attended the earlier session considering 'Human Rights in Europe'. He wondered, for example, if in the case of the Minarets in Switzerland, you should allow media and press to demonise communities.

Lord Ahmed said, 'We have problems internationally today with genocide taking place, war crimes being committed, with security measures being used as a reason after nine eleven. Arab Spring has been the rising up of people against ruthless leaders who have taken away their human rights, political rights and their economic rights. In the United States and Europe human rights are working reasonably well but stop and search is used in a humiliating manner. I was once in a queue in Heathrow and I was the only non-white person with a beard etc. A security officer approached me and said this was a random security check and he wondered if we could go to one side to ask me some questions. I told him, 'Like Hell this is random. I am the only one with another colour and a beard.' We had a robust discussion at that time.'

He continued, 'If you consider Iraq Afghanistan etc we like to discuss their abuse of human rights but the larger developed nations such as the US or the nations of Europe talk about protecting universal human rights but they will not assert human rights when it affects their own national interest. The US and Europe have interests in India so if human rights in Kashmir are abused they will not say anything. If the human rights of the Palestinians are regularly abused by Israel, because of the strong lobbies in the US they will not say much. They will look for any excuse not to condemn outright what is happening in Gaza or the West Bank. Similarly when there are human rights issues in Russia but we need them on board to make something happen in the Security Council, the West goes quiet on those human rights issues. Those nations we don't like much, such as Iran or Syria we will speak out strongly. If there are human rights issues in those nations we should speak out but it should be done equally, across the board not in a selective, self-interested manner. We sent our armed forces to respond to Libyan human rights abuses, and rightly so, but we are not so interested to stand up for the Shia of Bahrain. I am not Shia but I will defend those people's rights to protest and for equality and justice for them.'

'Keith Best and I shared a platform last week in SOAS. The ICC is very selective. They have only prosecuted African leaders or those in the Balkans. They have not said anything about Israeli Generals accused of war crimes in Gaza or Western Politicians or Generals for their actions in Afghanistan or Iraq. If we are going to have human rights they must be applied equally. The basic human rights are given by God Almighty, not by any individual. It is not that politicians are giving human rights it is only people's basic rights that they are elected to stand up for. That is the right

to be free from fear of persecution or prosecution, to be free from the fear of being picked up in the middle of the night after a knock on the door because of your political views or religious views. Baroness Amos had been in North Korea where she told me there are 5 million people who are undernourished and short of food. Young children desperately need food. There is a basic right just to be fed. There are hundreds of thousands in prison.'



'We are very fortunate that we have rights to express ourselves and we should remember that on the 10th of December. We are very fortunate in this country that we have more rights than any other nation in the world and I challenge the US on this point. Even here stop and search based on perception of a black person as a potential drug dealer or knife carrier. If you have a hijab or a beard you might be a potential Islamic terrorist. Even though none of those involved in the heinous crime of nine eleven had a long beard like Imam Sajid here or a turban or a long dress, those who have these elements are considered possible terrorists. It is perception based to deliberately demonise a community. It is a good day to reaffirm our commitment to fight for the rights of each and every individual human being around the world. As a Muslim I believe that is my duty because Prophet Mohammed, peace be upon him, laid down these rights 1400 years ago. Regardless of creed, colour, background, regardless of whichever part of the world they live in, all must be treated equally.

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