

Welcoming Speech - Condoleezza Rice Lecture

UCLA, February 27, 2013

Thank you, Kal, Rabbi Seidler-Feller, General Clark, our distinguished speaker, Dr. Condoleezza Rice. friends of the Daniel Pearl Foundation, colleagues, students, interns, volunteers, ladies and gentlemen.

We are delighted to have with us Danny's sister Tamara and her husband, Brett, who flew here from Vancouver, and Walid Al-Saqaf, our 2006 Daniel Pearl Journalism Fellow from Yemen. No, no, he did not fly here especially from Yemen; he is attending the TED Convention in Long Beach as a Senior TED Fellow.

Walid is one of 16 mid-career journalists from South Asia and the Middle East who came to the US on the Daniel Pearl Fellowship to learn about journalism in America, to tell us how America is viewed from abroad and, eventually, to tell readers in their countries what they need to know about America.

The Daniel Pearl Foundation works internationally to counter cultural and religious intolerance, to cultivate responsible and balanced journalism, and to inspire unity and friendship through music.

We at the Daniel Pearl Foundation have our own measures of how America is viewed from abroad; one of them is counting the number of concerts that participate in the Daniel Pearl World Music Days in October of each year. This past October saw 1,908 concerts in 77 countries, including Afghanistan, Yemen and Saudi Arabia, all ringing the earth for sanity and humanity.

February is a difficult month for us, the Pearl Family. On February 21st, eleven years ago, the world was stunned to learn of Daniel's murder and joined us in asking the haunting question: How can anyone harm a gentle soul like Danny, a journalist, a musician, a super-humanist and a champion of truth, humor and friendship?

But reality proved capable of betraying all logic.

Two or three years later, around 2004, Ruth and I received a phone call from the then-Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, who informed us ahead of the news that Khalid Sheik Mohammed, who was then in US custody, is believed to be the killer of Danny. She then added a sentence that sunk deep into our consciousness. "I can assure you," she said, "that justice will be served."

Now, we heard the word "justice" and used it many times before, but on that day, coming directly from the Secretary of State, and referring to the actual killer of our son, a killer who was a father himself and who himself claims to be fighting for some sort of justice -- those words assumed a cosmic dimension.

We realized then that Danny's tragedy has had a profound, though rarely articulated, impact on the psyche of 20th-century society:

--- The resurrection of the ancient idea of
absolute right and wrong, good and evil ---

Right and wrong that does not bend with political correctness, but remains as absolute and immutable as a magnetic compass, the axioms of arithmetics, or elementary particles in physics.

We realized then that moral relativism died in Karachi on February 1st, 2002, and will never be resurrected again. And that one of the reasons America is respected around the world is that it takes seriously such Biblical, almost archaic values as absolute right and wrong, to be the governing norms of civilized society.

Thank you, Dr. Rice, for kindling this faith in our heart in that phone call, and thank you for honoring Danny's memory with your lecture tonight.

We are deeply grateful to everyone who worked very hard to make this event so special and to the thousands of people who are standing with us in our quest for a better world.

United, we can make a difference!

