

Foreign Minister Selimi hosted the Prince of Wales, Charles, at an interfaith conference in Prizren

Prizren, 19 March 2016 – Today, as part of the Royal Tour of the Western Balkans, The Prince of Wales, Charles, attended a conference organized by the Interfaith Kosovo Initiative, in the historic city of Prizren, Kosovo.



His Royal Highness arrived at the conference after a tour of the city during which he visited sites of particular religious and cultural interest.

At the conference, His Royal Highness heard an expert panel discussing the regenerative role of restoring heritage in regional cities following conflict or neglect. Leading representatives of Kosovo's faiths also presented their experiences of the role of interfaith dialogue in healing the wounds of the past. Present at the discussion were representatives from Kosovo's Islamic, Serbian Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Jewish, Protestant and Tarikat communities.

The Prince, who has a lifelong interest in regeneration, restoration & reconstruction was moved to remark:

"I have spent a lot of my time trying to find ways of bringing back to life those things which are being destroyed or abandoned and I have discovered personally, through experience, that heritage-led regeneration is enormously effective. It can resuscitate economic activity. It can help to revive aspiration in areas where there is enormous deprivation and lack of hope."

The Prince concluded his speech: "So I pray that as a result of meetings like this and all the marvellous work that's being done by so many courageous people, Kosovo will have a really special future. I'm so proud my country, the United Kingdom, has been able to play a small part in the renewal of Kosovo."

Opening the Conference, Acting Foreign Minister, and recipient of Doha Interfaith Award for Interfaith Dialogue, Petrit Selimi said:

"Kosovo comprises a multi ethnic and multi-confessional country that has a long history of religious tolerance. This fine and sometimes fragile balance of communities is one that we have to work very hard to maintain with the help of our international supporters. Kosovo has made a highly successful contribution to interfaith dialogue and our continuing commitment has provided a unique voice in both the international interfaith arena & in countering violent extremism. It is this commitment that we wish to secure, strengthen and continue."

Selimi thanked HRH Prince Charles as well as UK Government for their continuing attention to Kosovo and the agenda of tolerance and dialogue.

The Prince attended a panel discussion on, "Restoration of Religious and Cultural Heritage as a means of economic and societal regeneration."

Reverend Donald Reeves (UK), an Anglican priest who has been working in the Balkans since 2000, described the rebuilding of the Ferhadija Mosque in Banja Luka - one of sixteen destroyed during the Bosnia War and due for inauguration on May 7 2016 - the 23rd anniversary of its destruction.

Tina Wik (Architect Tina Wik Associates, Sweden) spoke about her long experience in post-disaster architectural conservation in Bosnia Herzegovina as project leader for Cultural Heritage without Borders (CHwB). She is currently designing a sustainable wooden structure for an Islamic Centre and mosque in Borlänge, Sweden.

Sneška Quaedvlieg-Mihailović - Author & Secretary General of Europa Nostra, gave examples of Europa Nostra's work building European solidarity when heritage is in danger, "Heritage is part of our identity, our DNA," she said.

After the panel discussion, the Prince continued his conversations with representatives of Kosovo's Islamic, Catholic and Serbian Orthodox faiths, cultural organisations and interfaith activists before leaving Prizren for the UK.

The Prince of Wales visited Prizren as part of Their Royal Highnesses visit to Kosovo on 18th-19th March 2016.

For more information on the Prince of Wales' activities regarding interfaith dialogue see: <http://www.princeofwales.gov.uk/the-prince-of-wales/promoting-and-protecting/faith>

The conference was organized by [Interfaith Kosovo](#), generously supported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kosovo, Royal Norwegian Embassy in Kosovo, Embassy of the United Kingdom in Kosovo, British Council.

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Below we bring you the full speech by His Royal Highness Prince Charles Philip Arthur George, Prince of Wales, at the interfaith conference in Prizren, organized by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kosovo

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted to have this chance of joining you, albeit very briefly at the end of visit here to

Prizren and indeed to Kosovo. So often I spend my life arriving at conferences like this, trying very hard to find out where on earth you've been during the time I haven't been in attendance. So you must forgive me for not knowing exactly what you've covered during your meeting today. But I was so pleased to find the Head of Europa Nostra here because we met a few weeks ago in England when to my amazement, I was given this very grand award by Europa Nostra.

One of my great passions for so long has been heritage-led regeneration. When I first came to this country in 1999, it was at the height of all the appalling difficulties and horrors that this poor country had to endure. I seem also to have found myself visiting so many different parts of the world which have suffered untold destruction, violence and unnecessary cruelty. Let alone the deliberate destruction of each communities treasures. Their most sacred and historic relics. All the things that actually help to define entire communities, to give them that sense of belonging and meaning, which as human beings, we all need so deeply. Without roots and without that sense of meaning and belonging, we are lost. We don't know where to begin, we don't know how to interpret the world around us without our history. At the same time, as I said the other day in Belgrade, we cannot allow ourselves to become prisoners of that history. We have to make sure we own it and we are not overwhelmed by it.

I have spent a lot of my time trying to find ways of bringing back to life those things which are being destroyed or abandoned and I have discovered personally, through experience, that heritage-led regeneration is enormously effective. It can resuscitate economic activity. It can help to revive aspiration in areas where there is enormous deprivation and lack of hope. For instance, in a former coal mining area in South West Scotland, where I've been doing an awful lot of this. Gradually we see a difference in an area where people are three generations unemployed. Bit by bit you can start to rebuild skills, self-confidence and self-esteem. We forget often that it's self-esteem and self-confidence, which is the thing which disappears so easily and rapidly. To rebuild that is actually a crucial foundation.

I was so glad to have this opportunity today to around and visit the mosque, the Orthodox cathedral and the Roman Catholic Cathedral and to hear their stories. And again, what I've heard today, here and in Pristina in many ways has broken my heart.

I listened this morning to some of the families who has lost their loved ones -missing persons. I know there are so many still in this country. They asked me if I could help, I wish I could do more. It seems to me there is so much unnecessary death and destruction around the world. We see it all the time now in the Middle-East. It is utterly heart-breaking. It is utterly pointless. Yet now we have an ideal opportunity to rebuild bridges. We have to ensure that this time they remain in place. I said the other evening in Belgrade, I feel I can understand just a little bit what people have gone through in an area like this, just a little bit. I remembered the assassination of my great uncle Lord Mountbatten, over 40years ago. I remember at the time feeling intense anger as an immediate reaction but then I very quickly realised that revenge is not the thing. It is actually reconciliation and forgiveness. If there's one thing we might be able to learn from this horror, it is that it is only through reconciliation and forgiveness that a new beginning can be made. I understand the appalling agonies, the dreadful experiences, the pain, but in order for countries which have been through such utter horror to recover, that has to be part of the building the new foundation. I pray that those courageous people that cross the bridge to the other side win the day in the end.

I spend a lot of my time visiting different ethnic and religious communities in the United Kingdom. I went to visit one remarkable centre called the St John's Centre in a part of London

called Southall. They've established a remarkable interfaith group amongst Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs and Christians. The group built up those personal relationships over a period of years so when London was hit by a series of riots a few years ago, they told me that all the Sikh community came out and stood in front of mosques and temples and prevented any of the rioting affecting those sacred places. It was a wonderful example of interfaith activity, understanding and solidarity. So I pray that as a result of meetings like this and all the marvellous work that's being done by so many courageous people, Kosovo will have a really special future. I'm so proud my country, the United Kingdom, has been able to play a small part in the renewal of Kosovo. Thank you.