

The Consul General of Azerbaijan Nasimi Aghayev lecture at Utah Valley University



The Consul General of Azerbaijan in Los Angeles, Nasimi Aghayev spoke at Utah Valley University in Orem Utah. The points and value that the Consul promoted in his presentation was interreligious engagement and tolerance in his country Azerbaijan. According to the Consul General, Azerbaijan boasts of long history of tolerance even surpassing many advanced countries including the United States in issues of social change such as granting women and other groups equal voting rights. In a nation where 93% of population is Muslim, with 70% being Shiites and 30% Sunnis, religious tolerance is evidenced by the fact that Christians and Jews who make up close to 5% of the population are able to worship, pray and celebrate freely. The Muslims and non-Muslims coexist successfully and interact mutually in civic life by being able to hold offices in government and religious celebrations such as honoring the dead. The Shiites and Sunnis of Azerbaijan do not exhibit major challenges. The Consul General cites that in one of the country's largest mosque, the Sunnis and Shiites worship and pray together, adding that they also intermarry. Pope Francis also paid a visit to the country and emphasized its respect for diversity and harmony to religious groups and its continued caretaker role for cathedrals and catacombs in Europe.

The position of the Consul General was that Azerbaijan's religious tolerance and acceptance is down to the country's long history of diverse religious groups living and interacting with each other, its staunch secularism, and its high level of education. I agreed

with the position of the Consul General behind Azerbaijan religious tolerance except on diverse religious groups living and interacting with each other for a long time. Without a political goodwill, diversity and interaction alone cannot work. For example, in the Israeli and Palestine war over Gaza, diversity is not embraced, the Arab Muslims view the Jews as their enemies and vice versa (Fisk, 2012). Their long history of coexisting together even before Zionism, which brought enmity, has been thrown out of the window. Staunch secularism promotes normal relations between diverse groups with different religious beliefs. In Syria for instance, one of the contributors of the war is down to many groups having their own agendas. These agendas are religious based, and they fuel the Sunni Muslim majority against the president's Shia Alawite sect (BBC, 2018). Additionally, high level of education enables people to appreciate and respect other peoples' beliefs, which leads to high tolerance between diverse groups of people interacting with each other. Azerbaijan's 99% of literacy rate has created an understanding between the country's diverse groups and has led to their cooperation on religious and non-religious issues.

The presentation by Consul General has taught me that with the correct model for harmony and coexistence in a region characterized by diverse groups of people, tolerance and acceptance can be promoted in the society. The three most important factors that can enhance tolerance and acceptance in the society are political goodwill to promote diversity of groups, encouragement of secularism where no religion is given more attention than the others and more importantly high education levels. Additionally, countries that have been able to promote tolerance and acceptance within their borders can engage with other countries to help them achieve the same success. Azerbaijan for instance is a committed member in the Organization of Islamic cooperation (OIC), that aims to promote prosperity in areas of conflict such as Muslim-Israeli relations.

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References

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