

## **OPENING ADDRESS**

Ihsan Dogramaci, Chairman of the Board of Trustees and President of Bilkent University

Your Royal Highness,  
Excellencies,  
Distinguished members of the Club of Rome,  
Honorable guests,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great privilege for Bilkent University to host the 2002 annual conference of the Club of Rome on this campus. In this connection I want to extend my gratitude to His Royal Highness Prince El-Hassan Bin Talal, President of the Club of Rome, and His Excellency Ricardo Diez-Hochleitner, your Honorary President.

There is a special reason for my delight in hosting the Club of Rome here this year. 2002 marks the founding in Turkey of the International Cultures Foundation, established jointly by His Royal Highness as President of the Club of Rome and myself as President of a Turkish foundation. The purpose of this foundation is to create a Parliament of Cultures, the idea for which came to His Royal Highness while he was visiting the front lines in the Bosnian War in 1995. He later shared the idea with Lord Yehudi Menuhin, whose thoughts and presentations along similar lines enriched the Prince's conception. He subsequently voiced his thoughts during a visit to Bilkent, as I had visited Sarajevo in September 1992 and am well aware of the sources of hatred among people of different cultures and belief. In January of this year I visited Kabul to discuss the roots of the situation there and to establish training programs for Afghan teachers at different levels and also for health workers. That visit made even more evident to me the need for a body to advocate peaceful solutions to conflicts.

His Royal Highness then crystallized the idea in the form of a proposal which he put forward in several thought forums, and the Turkish authorities expressed their willingness to see such an institution created in Turkey. Turkey, a country where not only continents meet but also religions, cultures and civilizations, was a natural choice for such an endeavor. In this part of the world, the dialogue between cultures is architectural, musical and literary; in its cities, mountains and valleys have resounded and still resound various languages: Turkish, of course, and among others Greek, Arabic and Persian, Judeo-Spanish, Georgian and Circassian ... sounds and symbols that have left deep marks on its identity.

The late Syrian poet Nizar Kabbani, whose love verses have been sung by the greatest voices of the Arab world, wrote that the key of his house in Damascus opened all the doors of Cordoba. He was referring to the blessed age of tolerance in Muslim Spain. I believe that the Parliament of Cultures can be the founding stone of a new Andalusia and that wherever you come from, the keys of your house will open the gates to other cultures. Let me express this with the words of the great mystical poet Mevlana Celaleddin Rumi, who hailed from the heart of Anatolia:

Come, come, whoever you are come,  
Come even if you are an unbeliever, a fire-worshipper or a heathen,  
Our abode is not an abode of despair.

The Parliament of Cultures, our abode of hope, was officially established in August, with the express purpose of promoting understanding among cultures of the world, and enhancing dialogue among their thinkers and intellectuals. The Parliament of Cultures will strive to strengthen international and intercultural understanding by means of peaceful dialogue.

With this relationship between the Club of Rome and the Parliament of Cultures, we are assured that our contacts with you will not be limited to this year's annual conference. We look forward to close collaboration and joint activities to carry out the aims of this undertaking.

I take this opportunity to wish you every success in your deliberations. We would have hoped that your stay could be extended a little in order to show you some of the sights of our country. I trust that in our future contacts there will be occasions for you to enjoy some visits outside Ankara.