

## **Dr Rangin Dadfar Spanta Speech**

September 24, 2018

Professor Michael Barry,  
Mr. Zaryab,  
Dear scholars,  
Media community,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

The idea of awarding Avicenna Peace Prize to one of the figures who had endeavored in dialogue, coexistence, and convergence of cultures was raised when Mohammad Khatami, the Former President of Iran presented this issue as an international discourse. Since then, a lot of roll-backs related to collaboration and coexistence of cultures has happened. But the desire to have a constructive dialogue among divergent cultures should be on our agenda more than ever. At the top of the current crisis of coexistence and collaboration among cultures, we see the democracy-phobia and enmity with universalized contemporary civilization, especially with regard to human rights, gender equality and acceptance of cultural diversity on the one side, and the rise of Islamophobia on the other.

In such a situation, honoring the admirable works of those who attempted in introducing diverse cultures has special significance.

Today, the Afghanistan Institute of Strategic Studies stepped forward through a symbolic but a meaningful attempt by awarding Abu Ali Sina-e Balkhi Peace Prize titled “Intercultural Cooperation for Peace” to honor Professor Michael Barry who has put a lot of endeavors in this area.

Professor Michael Barry, I congratulate you both from my side and AISS, and I thank my dear friend Dr. Davood Moradian, Director of AISS and his colleagues for this excellent choice.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

My friendship with Professor Barry goes back to the era when both of us were engaged in different ways with Afghanistan’s people combat against the invasion of former USSR as two young men.

Michael Barry was one of the organizers of the Bertrand Russell Tribunal in December 1982 for condemning aggressive policies of USSR in Afghanistan. This Civil Society Advocacy Forum was held at La Sorbonne University, Paris.

Russell Tribunal, a symbolic gesture by scholars, lawyers, and independent anti-war figures, was conducted two times: once to condemn a super-power during the Vietnam War, and the other time to condemn another super-power in Afghanistan War.

On this tribunal, Professor Michael Barry helped those Afghanistan nationals who witnessed the crimes of Red Army and its aligned regime in Afghanistan to testify on Soviet war crimes before prosecutors of this civil society advocacy forum in the presence of international media. I, along with mass Afghanistan refugees, was present in the tribunal.

Many years later, during my tenure as National Security Advisor, I was introduced to Professor Michael Barry and his researches on artworks of “Herat School of Miniature” during the Timurids and afterward. On the other occasion, I had the honor to attend his lecture on Herat School of Art at the American University of Afghanistan.

I, like many of my countrymen, had heard about the Miniature Art, its culmination in Herat, its spread from this historic city to the other parts of our civilizational sphere, and finally the exhibition of these artifacts at museums of the world in my young and old age.

However, I have to acknowledge that it was through Michael Barry’s works that I became familiar with the process of crystallization and more than that, the hidden mysteries within this art.

Professor Michael Barry’s research on Miniature art in ancient Herat and our civilization sphere help us to shake our sleeping civilizational memory and understand that such a huge amount of treasury of arts and culture have either remained unknown or were plundered in this land.

Professor Michael Barry,

The day I met you in a theater at La Sorbonne University, both of us were passionate youth full of desires and goals. Maybe most of those desires have changed in the light of social experiences and human efforts, but I can observe one sustained thing in your valuable works: discovery of cultural and civilizational values of our land and through this, supporting solidarity and connectivity of human beings with diverse cultural and civilizational background.

From another point of view, with these efforts, the people around the globe have understood the fact that our culture and civilization is not a culture of slaughter, suicide, prejudice, Otherization, enmity with beauty, subordination to stagnation and the repetition of iterations.

Your valuable works help us better to return to ourselves and to challenge the anti-novelty and anti-artistic behaviors within our own society through delightful creations and lots of taboo breakings in the art, literature and finally in the entire culture of this land.

It is by the discovery of the secrets and depth of the cultural sphere of this land that we would be able to understand the secrets of the emergence of mega-cities and cultural and economic metropolises, the caravans' hub and finally the civilization in ancient Khorasan. It will also encourage us to explore the reasons behind the current decline and pest, and the rise of dogmatism in a different historical context in the current globalized world.

My point in this speech on your thoughts related to "Herat School of Miniature Art" is a hint to a piece of our country's great civilization. In other words, you have considered the artworks of our civilizational hubs, that have received influence from Herat School of Art, "as a whole". Cities like Herat, Samarqand, Merv and Nishapur, Tabriz, and Delhi have been considered as the component of a great culture, which first raised in Herat.

The civilization which was not ethno-centric but Persian as a shared civilizational language had determinant role in its efflorescence.

In this era, the residents of these cities with different ethnic backgrounds created civilizational values beside each other. Mir Emad Herawi, Jami Herawi, Behzad Herawi, Baysunghar Mirza, and hundreds of other painters, poets, and writers created and owned a shared civilization in the context of socially and economically rich society and a shared culture.

The civilization created by the people coming from different ethnic groups during the Timurids was a product of economic growth, migration, and interaction of people in the stable cities, even when the stability of these cities was unsteady as a result of continuous invasion by nomads, not the class conflict.

To use the sociological term, this "interculturality" was a result of the interaction between cultures in the pre-modern metropolises and the geography, many parts of which belong to Afghanistan in the present day.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As we honor and celebrate a scholar and a researcher of culture today, it is worth mentioning, what I mean by culture.

My understanding of culture, in this talk, is high culture: culture as aesthetics, fine arts and reproduction of beauty through words, colors, pictures, or buildings. The contemporary discourses on culture in German universities, define culture as a great system of intellectual products, social institutions, intellectual and material values that people create through

knowledge and human creativity by bringing significant changes in their social environment. This great system includes the approaches, behaviors, habits, ways of thinking and inter-human action.

And we know that cultures are always manufactured from the interconnection of values and their mutual interaction, and different achievements of human beings in a historical process which always get transformed.

In the words of Alexander Duttmann, culture is nothing more than a process of inter-culture and inter-civilization relation, or cultural pluralism. And culture at the time of Timurids in our land, despite the limitation of social interactions during that era, was a product of a process of diverse causes with diverse characteristics. The cultures were diverse in the past, but today it has become more diverse. In other words, cultures accommodate masses in historical, geographical and cultural fabrics, but such understanding even in sociological researches is an understanding from a short period of history and human's social evolution; because cultures and civilizations are in rapid changes, and decline.

It is a reality of our era that cultures transcend the self-centered or ethnic and national boundaries with more acceleration than before. If in the pre-globalization era, most of these changes were happening in limited geographies, in the globalization era the acceleration and scope of changes are more drastic. The cultures are going beyond native, local and national spaces.

Despite the cultural assimilation in the contemporary era, we always observe something different which testify diversity and change. It is the change, and 'diversity within solidarity and similarity' which shape our multi-cultural world despite resistance from conservatives and revivalists.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is only with great beliefs and desires that great cultures can be created. Falling into the narrow and exclusionary beliefs on blood, ethnicity and land, and attempts for purification, homogenization, the racialization of cultures cannot upgrade us as the owners of a high civilization in this globalized world.

All great human civilizations, especially what makes the content of the current globalized civilization, is a product of the interaction between diverse cultures and civilizations. The current civilization is the product of rationalism, enlightenment and modernity, which was founded on the classical traditions and modern intellectual thoughts of the world, and is

influenced by modern knowledge. This synthesis reflected in the democracy, human rights, and citizens' rights has resulted in the tolerance and respect for "others."

By discovering and understanding of the realities of our civilization, perhaps we would be able to claim the solidarity and "integrity in diversity" as a historical fact and as an inevitable need for organizing our current world and country. And it might be easy to show that whenever lands and geographies had stable and sustainable peace, the possibility of the emergence of civilizations had become easier.

I thank you all.