

THREE FAITHS FORUM



Speech for the Kuwait Embassy Dinner

Mark Ebert, Executive Director

Your Excellencies, My Lord, Ladies and Gentlemen, dear friends:

It is my duty to set the tone for this dinner. First, may I express my immense gratitude to the Ambassador of Kuwait for sponsoring this dinner tonight. May I also extend a special thanks to all of you for accepting his invitation and joining us. As an introduction, I would like to explain my background and the reasons why I joined the Three Faiths Forum:

1st - I have been in the financial industry all my life, a chartered accountant, an investment banker in top management positions, and finally the Chairman of an investment management business (the Fortune Group, an advisor on hedge fund strategies) and I am on the boards of numerous private equity funds.

2nd – In the wake of the terrorist attacks in the US, I was extremely concerned about the, in my opinion, wrong way the major powers were reacting to the crisis. I reasoned that there must be a better way of achieving and maintaining peace.

3rd – Then there were the riots in the banlieu of Paris. I was struck by the challenge of integrating faith and culture groups in Europe, and I believed that the French government was approaching the problem in the wrong way.

That's when I introduced myself to the Three Faiths Forum. I met Sir Sigmund and Stephen Sashoua, and our ideas were on the same wavelength. So, rather than start my own show, I joined up as part-time executive director to help them in the *challenging but essential search for reconciliation and fellowship between religious and ethnic groups in the UK, Europe and the Middle East.*

Many of the Three Faiths Forum's partners are educational authorities, religious organisations or other interfaith and peacemaking organisations, and there is a fair amount of political support and involvement. But what seemed missing to me was the involvement of the worlds of business and finance.

Like Sir Sigmund, I have a deep conviction that *it is in the total interest of each businessman or woman that the society in which he or she lives, trades, invests, raises a family, is a stable one, at peace with itself.*

Also, that it is a duty for the businessman or woman to make a maximum contribution to that society – to give to it, not merely to take from it.

Particularly in the capitalist United Kingdom, business opinion leaders often have a stronger voice and more enthusiastic following than political or religious leaders. I reasoned that if we could involve business leaders in what we were doing, get them to buy in and become enthusiastic, we could further our cause immeasurably, as they have great influence on employees, government and society at large. Good in theory, but now one year later, it seems a little daunting. I am not sure to what level we can actually engage the business world in the process of creating and maintaining peace.

I would like to engage business in this type of activity. To give you just a few examples of the tangible things we are doing to involve the business community:

1. We are launching a Managementors programme which creates small multi-faith teams of university students working on social action projects, mentored by business leaders. We may engage the US embassy in this project as a source of matching funds.
2. We are in preliminary discussions with Reuters about another multi-faith mentoring programme, Mediamentors.
3. Together with Cru Investments, we are planning to launch a conference in the first quarter of next year to focus on the demands of faith groups on the investment community.
4. We have a long and fruitful relationship with the World Economic Forum where Sir Sigmund established the religious leaders group.
5. Together with the Co-Exist Foundation and St Ethelburga's Centre for Peace and Reconciliation, we are establishing a group called the "National Forum", where we will bring together the UK's key business, religious, political, media and youth leaders to focus on issues involving peacemaking between religious and culture groups in the UK and Europe.

And so tonight, the topic is *"How can the business world engage in promoting peaceful co-existence of faith and culture groups in Europe and the Middle East"?*

The idea is to have a relaxed dinner discussion, each one of us freely expressing a point of view with an open flow and dialogue. To help the discussion flow, the following points might be worth addressing:

- Why should business want to be involved in promoting peaceful co-existence of faith and culture groups?
- What responsibility does business have in this regard?
- What are the special challenges Europe is experiencing in reaching peaceful co-existence?
- What specific actions can the European business community undertake to help meet those challenges?
- What can business do to promote Islam and West dialogue?
- Who should take the lead in engaging business in this?
- Where does government and politics fit in?

We have it all here tonight: excellent food for your body and challenging food for thought. I hope you enjoy the dinner.