

Welcome address by
ZTFE President Malcolm M Deboo
at the Zoroastrian Service of Thanksgiving
to mark
150 years of the Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe
in the presence of
His Royal Highness
The Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, K.G., K.T.
at the Zartoshty Brothers Hall, Zoroastrian Centre
on Thursday 6th October 2011

Your Royal Highness The Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, Respected Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen.

Today we bear witness to two historical events! It was today, exactly 150 years ago, during their second meeting on 6th October 1861, that the Zoroastrians of the UK agreed to establish the national faith association, the fore-runner of the Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe of today, to ensure that Zoroastrians would never be a financial burden on the British Exchequer when alive or after their demise.

By coincidence, today is also the day of Fravardin as per the Shahenshai and Kadmi Zoroastrian religious calendars. On this day we invoke the Fravashis or Guardian Spirits of our departed ancestors, and since our Zoroastrian faith teaches us that the spiritual world and physical world are one, therefore I am sure that the Fravashi of our founder President Seth Muncherji Hormusji Cama is present with us today. And so are the

Fravashis of our other founding fathers of our Association, including that of second President Dr Dadabhai Naoroji, are also present with us today in the Zartoshty Brothers Hall and are delighted to witness the Zoroastrian Thanksgiving Service for that the Association they established in 1861 which is still around 150 years later.

I as the 26th elected President salute these Fravashis for their vision and foresight to establish this Association when there were less than 50 Zoroastrians in this country. It is because of their good deed performed 150 years ago to establish this Association that we Zoroastrians today can rightly claim, that the Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe is the oldest religious voluntary organisation in the United Kingdom of South Asian origin.

From humble beginnings the Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe has grown as an organisation. It was not until 1923 that we acquired our first Zoroastrian House; also we nearly went bankrupt as our finances were depleted by the funds it had helped raise for the war effort. But we are still here today, because we Zoroastrians believe in self help and by the grace of Ahura Mazda we will continue to sustain our national association as each one of us will continue to donate according to their means for religious and charitable purposes. I pray to Ahura Mazda that 150 years from today the Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe will continue to be in existence serving the Zoroastrian community and the nation.

The second historical event we bear witness to today is that we have been graced for the first time by the eminent presence of His Royal Highness The Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, K.G., K.T. Your Royal Highness,

welcome to our Zoroastrian Centre, the only recognised Zoroastrian place of worship in the United Kingdom and perhaps the whole of Europe.

Sir, we are humbled by your presence with us today, because it is the first time in the history of the 150 year old Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe, that the consort of the reigning Monarch of the United Kingdom has made an official visit to a Zoroastrian place of worship. This in itself is history in the making. It is for this reason we have visitors from outside the United Kingdom with us today including the Presidents of the Federation of Parsi Zoroastrian Associations of India and the Federation of the Zoroastrian Associations of North America, as within these three English speaking regions reside over 75 % of the world Zoroastrian population. And this is not a coincidence.

Sir, most Zoroastrians world wide are royalist, they have a particular affection for the Monarch of the United Kingdom and the Royal Family since the reign of Her Majesty Queen Victoria. Zoroastrians have a high regard for the Monarch, the Government and Judiciary of the United Kingdom, because historically they have allowed Zoroastrians to practice their religion freely. It is for this reason many Zoroastrians preferred to live under the protection of the British Crown because where the Union Jack was hoisted it ensured freedom of worship for the Zoroastrians as its sway also assisted our persecuted Zoroastrian coreligionists in Iran in the 19th and early 20th century. It is for this reason that in the Second World the Zoroastrian community of UK and India gave in excess of seven million pounds and volunteered to serve under the Union Jack, including our High Priest the late Dastur Dr Sohrab H Kutar who joined the Royal Army Medical Corps, serving for over five years with the Eight Army in North Africa.

Of course freedom of religious worship in this country is granted to practitioners of all world faiths in the UK, but for us Zoroastrians it is pertinent because not all countries allow us these freedoms, including the land that gave birth to our prophet Zarathushtra. It is because this country has allowed us to practice our religion freely and more so during the reign of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, which has witnessed nearly 60 years of unparalleled peace, we have grown from 50 in 1861 to around 5000 in 2011 and become prosperous. In turn it has enabled us to return the wealth by implementing philanthropic projects and serve the nation. Sir, part of the credit for this peace and prosperity goes to you, as you were the first person to swear allegiance to Her Majesty and your presence is always visible. Hence the Zoroastrians in the United Kingdom are deeply honoured by your acceptance to be with us today for the Zoroastrian Service of Thanksgiving to mark 150 years of the Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe and the Zoroastrian community in Britain.

Sir may the wise counsel provided by you and others, including the Lord Archbishop of Canterbury, allow Her Majesty to continue to be the defender of the Faith, because by extension this cherish freedom of worship in the United Kingdom benefits a numerical tiny minority as the Zoroastrians. This helps our prosperity, in turn allows us to continue to serve Her Majesty and the United Kingdom in accordance with the motto of our faith; good thoughts, good words and goods deeds as noted above this stage. With the Grace of God, Long may this continue and Long live The Queen!