Leader’s Address to the Participants in the 2nd Congress in Commemoration of Ibn Maytham Bahrani - 15 /Jan/ 2007

The following is the abridged text of a speech made by the Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran Ayatollah Sayyid Ali Khamenei in a meeting with the participants in the 2nd Congress in Commemoration of Ibn Maytham Bahrani and also a large number of Sunni and Shia ulema from various Islamic countries on January 15, 2007. In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful

I welcome all the dear guests who are attending this gathering, including both those that have come here from abroad and the Iranian guests who have come from different parts of the country. This is an auspicious gathering, and we always look forward to the concord and harmony that should be achieved through such gatherings.

I would like to make a brief comment about Allameh Ibn Maytham Bahrani. He was a prominent scientific personality of the seventh century A.H. He was both an Islamic jurisprudent and a dialectician, and he also had a good command of the noble concepts that are abundant in the Nahjulbalaghah of the Commander of the Faithful (greetings be upon him).

Some years ago - before the revolution - I taught the Nahjulbalaghah to youngsters and theology students and academics. I used to refer to the exegeses of this book. In those days, it was my view that, among all the exegeses of the Nahjulbalaghah, the one written by Ibn Maytham was the best in terms of its explanation and elucidation of the words and points of the Commander of the Faithful (greetings be upon him).

This great scientific personality really deserves to be commemorated by all Muslims, since the Nahjulbalaghah is a book that belongs to all Muslims. This is the reason why renowned figures from among Shia and Sunni ulema have provided exegeses of this book over many centuries. In the recent past also Sheikh Muhammad Abduh explicated this book, which was highly praised by him. The Nahjulbalaghah belongs to all Muslims.

The second point, namely the issue of concord and harmony among the Islamic Ummah at our time, is a more important point. Not only in the years after the revolution, but also many years before the revolution we were making efforts to bring about concord and harmony between the Shia and the Sunni and indicate the significance of Islamic unity to all Muslims.

During the years before the revolution when I had been exiled to the Baluchestan Province, I sent a message to the late Mowlavi Shahdad, a knowledgeable scholar and one of the renowned ulema of Baluchestan, suggesting that we

get together in order to lay the foundations of a practical, feasible and real unity between the Sunni and the Shia. He welcomed my suggestion. But later the issues of the revolution came up. At the first Friday Prayers Congress that we convened after the revolution, a number of Sunni ulema, including the late Mowlavi Shahdad, were also present. At that congress there were some discussions about the above issue.

The differences of opinion among followers of the two Islamic schools of thought are something natural. Even there have been differences of opinion among various Shia denominations and among various Sunni denominations themselves over the course of many years. Such differences at the level of the ordinary people lead to squabbles. But the case is different with regard to ulema and scholars, as they usually try to iron out their differences through discussions and arguments. The ulema and scholars and those who are characterized by good will and benevolence have always tried to prevent the ordinary people from engaging in squabbles and confrontations.

Besides, another factor that later entered this equation was colonialism. We are not trying to say that all the differences between the Shia and the Sunni have always been fomented by the colonial powers, as their own sentiments as well as certain cases of ignorance and prejudice and misconception have also contributed to their differences. However, the fact of the matter is that when the colonial powers emerged on the scene, they took the utmost advantage of these differences.

This is the reason why the prominent Islamic personalities who are renowned for their struggle against the colonial powers have all placed great emphasis on the unity of the Islamic Ummah. Sayyid Jamaluddin Asadabadi, his disciple Sheikh Muhammad Abduh and others, Shia ulema such as the late Sharafuddin Ameli and others made every effort to prevent the differences of opinion from turning into a weapon against the Islamic world in the hands of the colonial powers. The late magnanimous Imam Khomeini always stressed the need for the Islamic unity.

The colonial powers have capitalized on and taken the utmost advantage of the differences, and among them Britain is more skilled at doing so than others. The reason is that the British have been present in Iran, Turkey, the Arab countries and the Indian Subcontinent for many years, and they know how to set the Sunni against the Shia, and how to turn the Shia against the Sunni. They know very well how to do this, and they have done so.

Ever since the victory of the Islamic Revolution, the colonial powers have been stepping up their attempts at fomenting discord and schism between the Shia and the Sunni. We have been witnessing the signs of their attempts and giving the due warnings. However, over the past years, considering that the Islamic Republic of Iran has accomplished a noble objective and conquered a high summit, which is the awakening of the Islamic world, the arrogant powers now have a stronger motive for the creation of discord and division among Muslims, and they will do everything to attain this goal.

Today, they are seeking to turn the Shia and the Sunni against each other in Iraq; they are also trying to do the same thing in Pakistan and in Afghanistan. They will do the same thing in our country and anywhere else if they can. We

have been informed that their agents have even gone to Lebanon to set the Shia against the Sunni in that country. Therefore, they are making every effort to achieve their goal.

Those agents that are seeking to sow the seeds of discord are neither Shia nor Sunni Muslims; they are not interested either in the Shia or in the Sunni; they have no respect for the sanctities of either the Shia or the Sunni.

A few days ago the U.S. president referred in a speech to the explosion of the holy Askariya shrine in Iraq, attributing the act to the Salafi extremists who, he said, had intended to provoke the Shia and succeeded in doing so. The act was committed before the eyes of the U.S. troops. The holy Askariya shrine is in the same city whose security-related affairs have been entrusted to the U.S. troops, and they are patrolling the city. Is it possible to commit the act before their eyes without their knowledge and without their permission and go-ahead? It was they themselves that did this.

They talk about the al-Qaeda and Salafi terrorists in Iraq, while they themselves are the inciters. The U.S. and Israeli services are provoking the former Ba'thist elements in Iraq to cause explosions wherever they can. The most insecure Iraqi cities, including Baghdad, are the cities whose security-related responsibilities have been undertaken by the U.S. security officials. There is more security in many Iraqi regions in which there are fewer U.S. forces and more Iraqi forces. Insecurity is fomented by the U.S. forces. They have an ulterior motive for doing so.

Ever since the victory of the Islamic Revolution in Iran, the arrogant powers have been trying to portray our revolution as a Shia revolution. But the fact of the matter is that our revolution is an Islamic revolution relying on the Holy Qur'an, and it is proud of hoisting the flag of Islamic values and promoting divine precepts and spirituality. It has been a successful revolution, despite all the enmities.

The Islamic Revolution has imbued Muslims with a sense of Islamic dignity and taking pride in Islam. This is what they are opposed to. Otherwise, if our revolution had been a Shia revolution, we would have become separated from the Islamic world and had nothing to do with it. They would have had nothing to do with us either. They would have expressed no hostility to our revolution. But they have noticed that our revolution is an Islamic revolution.

Our Islamic Revolution has most seriously advocated the cause of Palestine. No country and no government and no nation have supported the Palestinian nation and their resistance and Intifada as earnestly as the Iranian nation and government and our Islamic system have done. We have extended both moral support and material assistance to the Palestinian nation. We have done whatever we could.

At the time when the military forces of the former Soviet Union entered Afghanistan, all the Islamic governments in the region kept silent due to various considerations. But the late Imam Khomeini sent an explicit message to the

officials of the former Soviet Union, telling them to pull their forces out of Afghanistan.

During those days I attended an international conference at which the officials from member states of the Non-Aligned Movement and many Islamic countries were also present. I noticed that none of them made any mention of the Soviet presence in Afghanistan, and it was only I that slammed the former Soviet Union for its entering Afghanistan. It was probably because of the presence of some officials of socialist and pro-Soviet governments at the conference that the officials of Islamic countries kept silent. But at that conference I slammed both the United States and the former Soviet Union in the same manner.

This is what they are angry about, since our revolution is an Islamic revolution. It supports the Palestinian people, regardless of whether they are Shia or Sunni. It supports the great movement of the Lebanese people. In general, our Islamic Revolution supports any Muslim community in any part of world that adheres to and works for Islam. This is what annoys them. Otherwise, if we had closed our borders and said that we had no relations with the Sunni countries and Sunni communities, the countries such as the United States and Israel and Britain would have shown no hostility to us.

They are opposed to the Islamic Republic, because the Islamic Republic is trying to promote the cause of Islam and the Muslim Ummah. Ever since the Islamic Republic has been established in Iran, the arrogant powers have intensified their attempts at fomenting discord and schism between the Shia and the Sunni.

We should remain vigilant. Both Shia and Sunni Muslims, especially the ulema, should remain vigilant. Today, the Islamic awakening is a reality on the ground, and the Islamic honor and dignity of the Muslim ummah is manifesting itself. On the other hand, the enemy is suffering defeat in various arenas. The global arrogance has suffered defeat in Palestine, Lebanon, Iraq and Afghanistan and has not been able to achieve its goals in any of these places.

The Islamic Republic of Iran is making steady progress. We have made great strides in the fields of science and technology and in terms of management efficiency over the past 27 years. The bonds between the Iranian people and the Islamic system have steadily grown stronger. This is what worries and exasperates the enemies and forces them to react.

Today, we should be very careful so that the enemy may not exploit this sensitive issue - or rather weak point- that exists in the Islamic world. Our friends made some proper comments. The issue is not that the Shia and the Sunni should accept each other's views and beliefs. Each has its own convictions. Each follows its own reasoning, and whatever belief it arrives at is worthy of respect.

However, the main issue is that the followers of various beliefs and convictions should not listen to the enemies'

divisive and malicious words. They should not turn hostile to one another and engage in confrontations. Our enemies teach each other whatever they know themselves: "...they impart to each other attractive but false words..." (The Holy Qur'an, 6: 112); the British teach the Americans; the Israelis teach them both.

We should imbue our people with awareness and vigilance and remain watchful ourselves. Those without understanding and conception of truth and piety who excommunicate a large number of Muslims, those ignorant excommunicatory groups - indeed the most appropriate feature qualifying them is ignorance, although they are also characterized by wickedness - should be guided as far as possible.

We should warn the people against the enemies' malicious and divisive words, since some are attracted by these words due to the weakness of their faith and others due to their lack of knowledge. "And that the hearts of those who do not believe in the hereafter may incline to it, and that they may delight in it, and that they may ultimately do any evil deed that they desire to do." (The Holy Qur'an, 6: 113)

We should remain watchful. The duty of the ulema is a heavy responsibility. Today, the unity of the Islamic world is a noble objective. If this goal is accomplished, the Islamic world will indeed be able to attain perfect honor and dignity. Both the Muslim nations and Islamic governments should contribute to the accomplishment of this noble objective.

The Islamic governments, in particular, should do their utmost to bring about unity and concord and solidarity among Muslim nations. If the Muslim Ummah attains its due status, it will become a strong supporter of the Islamic governments. Then, the Islamic governments will no longer be forced to seek help from Britain and the United States owing to their fear and weakness.

I pray to Almighty Allah to bestow His assistance and guidance on us all, so that we may be able to carry out our momentous responsibilities at the present age in the most appropriate manner.

Greetings be upon you and Allah's mercy and blessings