



Sheikh Rached Ghannouchi

Recipient

International Award 2016 for Promoting Gandhian Values outside India

Dear Chairman of Jamnalal Bajaj Foundation; Mr. Rahul Bajaj,

Dear Chairman of the council of the foundation; Dr. Justice Dharmadhikari,

Honourable Minister of Finance & Corporate Affairs; Mr. Jaitley

Dear Awardees, Trustees, Members of the Council, Selection Committee and the Bajaj Family Members,

Good Evening,

I would like to thank Jamnalal Bajaj Foundation for choosing me as the recipient of the Jamnalal Bajaj International Award for 2016 for promoting Gandhi's values outside India. It is an honour that I, gratefully and humbly, accept.

Not long ago Tunisia was ruled by the brutal and corrupt regime of Ben Ali. The Tunisian people were forced to live in a country where human rights and basic freedoms were curtailed, political and media pluralism was banned and corruption was commonplace.

You know the story – Mohamed Bouazizi, a street merchant who had enough of corruption and exclusion, lit a flame of hope that travelled throughout the entire region – Libya, Egypt, Yemen and others joined the wave of hope for change. Years of suffering and resentment turned into joy and hope for change.

Since 2011, Tunisia has had three free and fair, democratic elections. It has the most progressive Constitution in the Arab world, adopted by a democratically elected body. It has the highest proportion of women in parliament, and the highest levels of human rights and media freedoms in the region.

What has guided Tunisia and kept it on the path to democracy and freedom, are three key values:

The first is inclusiveness. Building the foundations of a democracy requires a strong commitment to pluralism. Politics is about winning electoral majorities – but a society cannot be governed with the mentality of majority vs. minority. I have always argued that domination by those in power has been the root cause of many conflicts in our region and that we cannot govern society and build a sustainable and just system with a monopolistic or majoritarian attitude.

Democracy is a common roof under which all are equal, and all groups in society benefit from rights and liberties. Tunisia is on the way to building this common roof, and is today ranked the first country in the Arab world in terms of respect for human rights.

The second key principle is dialogue. This would not have been possible without dialogue. Tunisia's journey has had its ups and downs – and we have come close to the edge of the abyss many times. But each time, it is our capacity to resolve differences through dialogue that has saved us. Dialogue allowed

us to achieve a Constitution adopted with an astounding 94.4% of the parliament. This Constitution guarantees democracy, human rights, equality between men and women, freedom of conscience and belief, and freedom of the press. Most importantly, it belongs to the Tunisian people and reflects each and every one of them, because it was drafted and adopted through dialogue, discussion and cooperation.

When we speak about dialogue, we mean a process that is inclusive and representative of all of society. I believe that a country cannot be free when half of its population is not allowed to participate in decisionmaking. Which is why, I am proud that Tunisian women have played a leading role in our country's transition, serving in government, in parliament and in civil society. I am proud to see today, the youngest member of the ministerial cabinet is a young leader from my party, Saida Ounissi, aged 29.

The third key principle is compromise. In any relationship, we have to compromise. As a married man for over 40 years, I know that from personal experience. Without compromise, societies cannot find solutions and cannot live with diversity and respect, difference and coexistence.

Ennahdha, the Tunisian Muslim Democrat party I co-founded and of which I am the leader, presented many compromises throughout this transition.

When we won the first ever free and fair elections in 2011, we called for a national-unity government with the participation of other parties, and created a pioneering model of cooperation between Islamic and secular parties.

In 2013, we voluntarily handed power to a neutral interim government in order to ensure free and fair parliamentary and presidential elections. Time and again, we placed Tunisia's interest above our own as a party. We believed that while we may lose power, we guarantee Tunisia's future.

Tunisia's model of inclusiveness, dialogue and compromise sends an important message – it sends a message to Tunisian society that despite our differences, we can always overcome divisions. It also sends a message to some of our neighbours that coexistence is always possible, if we have the will and commitment to make it happen.

Tunisia still has a long way to go today. We urgently need to create opportunity and hope for our young people, through providing jobs and ensuring a decent quality of life. We need to build infrastructure and provide services that overcome decades of regional inequalities in previously neglected regions. We need to counter corruption and strengthen our democratic institutions to ensure they are effective. Citizens, and particularly youth, in poorer areas must be able to see that democracy has brought tangible improvements to their lives.

I am happy to say that, since the revolution, India has played a big role in supporting Tunisia's capacity building programs – especially in voter registration, freedom of expression and information, civic and political engagement of women, media training and human rights. We thank you for that support and hope we can continue to count on it. The youth in our region must see that democracy can indeed be the solution to their problems and can succeed in their part of the world – that democracy, not dictatorship or extremism, are the long-term solutions to building a better future. The Tunisian experiment must succeed, for the sake of our region and the world.

