

Thursday 20 April 2017, Palais des Nations Library

Your Excellencies, Mr High Commissioner, Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is the greatest imaginable honour to stand here today, as together we pay tribute to a very great man. And how appropriate it is for this tribute to be taking place in the building that Prince Sadruddin saw under construction when he was a little boy of three, who was present a year later at its inauguration by his father, the Aga Khan, President of the League of Nations in 1937, and who later worked within its walls for years almost without number.

It has also been a great honour for me to portray the professional life and the personality of a man of such tremendous distinction. You may well wonder how, as a junior staff member of UNHCR, I came to know Prince Sadruddin, and how this book has come about 50 years later. We have just had the benefit of hearing from the High Commissioner how Prince Sadruddin was a dynamic and inspiring leader – as he already was as Deputy High Commissioner, when in the 1965 General Assembly the chief delegate of Tanzania, Mr. Mwaluko, said this:

Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan, the diplomat, the leader of men, the accomplished artist and the humanitarian, combines all these qualities with the same humility that characterises his community.

That day, the General Assembly by acclamation elected the 32-year-old prince UN High Commissioner.

Eighteen months earlier, the prince had visited the small group of his colleagues at the first UNHCR regional office in Africa, immediately after one of the team had been killed in the Congo. I can never forget how one day Prince Sadruddin came unexpectedly into my little back office, sat on the edge of my desk and talked with the friendliness one can normally expect only from a close friend or a brother. Although I came to be away from UNHCR for some years after that, the prince kept in touch with me and later showed me, as he did to so many others, the utmost kindness, concern and friendship.

The year after the prince left us, a visitor from London suggested I write his biography, but I did not entertain the idea for a moment. Of course, there had to be a biography: a man so outstanding, so valuable to the world, so much loved and admired in his lifetime, should not be allowed to sink into oblivion. The moving 2003 tribute of the Chancellor of State of Geneva, Maître Robert Hensler, showed how deeply the prince had been appreciated by the Geneva hosts of the United Nations, as by countless people all over the world.

I wrote to several eminent publishers on both sides of the Atlantic, urging them to consider the idea of a biography. While several agreed that there was indeed a case for one, not one of them offered to take it on. You will hear the rest from my friend Nicola Spafford-Furey. Prince Sadruddin had said to me on the last occasion that we met, in February 1994, that he hoped that by the time he was seventy, there might be a start on one. And at the age of 70 he died...

I received invaluable encouragement and help from some former colleagues. For example, Guy Goodwin-Gill, a senior law professor at Oxford, wrote the Foreword. Georges Koulisher, a retired senior director, contributed his extensive experience of Sadruddin's work to do with Latin America. And we know the rest.

Prince Sadruddin's father, the Aga Khan, imam of the Ismailis and father to Aly (at that time nearly twenty), proposed marriage to a young resident of Aix-les-Bains, Andrée Joséphine Carron, and they were married two years later. On 17th January 1933, Sadruddin was born in Neuilly-sur-Seine, a Paris suburb. In his early years, his father being at assemblies of the League of Nations in Geneva as head of the Indian delegation, the little boy spent most of his time with his mother, who took him into the mountains where they often stayed. He started school in Paris, but when he was seven, the little family became refugees when Nazi Germany overran France, and spent the war years in Gstaad, in the Bernese Oberland. Sadruddin was at school there until he was fourteen, when he went to the École Nouvelle, Lausanne, by which time he had acquired an incomparable understanding and love of nature. From there, he went to Harvard University, returning with two degrees, some most beautiful Islamic and Indian paintings dating from the 16th century - and ... a fiancée!

His father's death and his wedding to Nina Dyer occurred in the same year, milestones that preceded the start of Prince Sadruddin's remarkable international career, with UNESCO and UNHCR - in turn, following in his father's footsteps and believing passionately in the United Nations. He went on to serve in many other capacities over the 20 years that followed his 12 years as High Commissioner, for he accepted missions to the Middle East, Kuwait, Iraq and Afghanistan that required both his diplomatic genius and his operational gifts. But the Prince was in addition engaging in countless other activities, having created his own foundation and "think-tank", the Bellerive Foundation, recruiting exceptional staff and launching their international careers. Let me speak of one of them, Michael Keating, once serving in Afghanistan under the prince, as did other brilliant men such as Steffan de Mistura. Now Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Somalia, Michael emailed me the following lines from Mogadishu that testify to Sadruddin's many-sided, very rich personality :

Sadruddin introduced me to the world of international affairs in a way that no-one else possibly could. He hired me as his Special Assistant when I was in my mid-twenties, and installed me in a converted attic in his elegant offices near the Old Town in Geneva. He was unbelievably well connected at the highest levels on all continents, north and south, on an astounding range of issues, including conservation, animal rights and environmental protection, cultural heritage and fine arts, refugees and humanitarian law, food security and green economics, nuclear proliferation and terrorism, religious tolerance, racism and identity politics, multilateralism and UN reform - to name a few. His views on all these subjects were rarely conventional, always deeply held and, as it turned out, way ahead of their time. He had exacting standards, great attention to detail and high expectations of me - including the terrifying assumption that I was familiar, or would be able to make myself familiar, with all these issues so as to be useful to him. I survived because association with him opened doors and because of his willingness to share knowledge. I was very privileged to have such an

induction, and still bump into people all over the world who tell me how much they valued meeting him and were influenced by him.

Other former recruits have said that the best years of their careers were those spent with Prince Sadruddin. To what these people have said of their brilliant, statesmanlike leader, I wish to add the prince's qualities of loyalty, intuitiveness, gentleness, humility, warmth, generosity and humour. His sense of humour and phenomenal memory led him, I believe, to tell the funniest stories, while his gift for mimicry convulsed family and friends. But the man to whom we now bear tribute cared above all for the poor and the uprooted, and died grieving that all too little was being done for them.

Your Excellencies, Mr. High Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen:

I hope that in time, not only will there be others who will write about the late prince, but that there will be very many who will try to follow his outstanding example.