

TEMPLETON PRIZE



CONTACT: Donald Lehr – The Nolan/Lehr Group
+1 (212) 967-8200 / mob +1 (917) 304-4058
dblehr@cs.com / www.templetonprize.org

FOR RELEASE:
Wednesday, June 27, 2018
6:00 AM EDT / 10:00 hours GMT

KING ABDULLAH II OF JORDAN AWARDED 2018 TEMPLETON PRIZE

WEST CONSHOHOCKEN, PA. – King Abdullah II of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, who has done more to seek religious harmony within Islam and between Islam and other religions than any other living political leader, was announced today as the 2018 Templeton Prize Laureate.

Known for his grace and humility, the King's long quest to promote peace-affirming Islam gained momentum in 2004 in the wake of the Iraq war when the fragile unity of Sunni and Shi'a Muslims in the region was at substantial risk. During that period, increasingly vocal rhetoric from marginal Islamic groups threatened to create deeper schisms within the Islamic community. In the face of these challenges, the King launched the breakthrough [Amman Message](#) that articulated a clear understanding of the central elements of Islam, and affirmed that terrorism and violence have no place in the religion.

The following year, he assembled 200 scholars from 50 countries representing all schools of jurisprudence in Islam who, under his guidance, issued a declaration now known as the "[Three Points of the Amman Message](#)." The first point recognized the validity of all eight legal schools of Islam. The second forbade declarations of apostasy (known as *takfir*) between Muslims, while the third established conditions for issuing fatwas, Islamic legal rulings. The Three Points have come to represent an unprecedented and almost unanimous religious and political consensus by Muslims around the globe. Since then, more than 450 Islamic scholars and institutes from more than 50 countries have endorsed it.

In 2006, King Abdullah II supported and funded the initiative known as "[A Common Word Between Us and You](#)," which led to a 2007 open letter from Islamic religious leaders to Christian religious leaders. *A Common Word* contains a call for peace and harmony between Muslims and Christians based on the twin commandments shared by both faiths, namely "love of God" and "love of the neighbor." Originally signed by 138 Muslim leaders and scholars from 52 countries, it now has more than 400 signatories including nearly 300 endorsements from a wide range of Christian leaders, and is considered by many to be the most important Muslim theological initiative towards Christians.

In 2010, he proposed the annual [UN World Interfaith Harmony Week](#) with a General Assembly resolution expanding the twin “love” commandments by adding “love of God or love of the good” to “love of one’s neighbor,” thus including all people of goodwill, with or without faith. Adopted unanimously by the General Assembly, the [resolution](#) established the first week of February as UN World Interfaith Harmony Week to stress the moral imperative of promoting and understanding the values of peace inherent in all religions. It is generally acknowledged as the first and only time that the United Nations approved a resolution explicitly citing belief in God.

Through these groundbreaking initiatives and many others, King Abdullah II has led a reclamation of Islam’s moderate theological narrative from the distortions of radicalism. But these efforts have come with great personal cost including condemnation and death threats from radical terrorist groups. As a result of Jordan’s key geographical location, his efforts have required extraordinary courage to advance cooperation within Islam and between Islam and other religions.

The Templeton Prize, valued at 1.1 million British pounds, is one of the world’s largest annual individual awards and honors a person who has made an exceptional contribution to affirming life’s spiritual dimension, whether through insight, discovery, or practical works. The announcement was made online at www.templetonprize.org today by the John Templeton Foundation, based in West Conshohocken, Pennsylvania.

Established in 1972 by the late global investor and philanthropist Sir John Templeton, the Prize is a cornerstone of the Foundation’s international efforts to serve as a philanthropic catalyst for discoveries relating to the deepest and most profound questions facing humankind. The Foundation supports research on subjects ranging from complexity, evolution, and emergence to creativity, forgiveness, and free will.

In a videotaped message on www.templetonprize.org, Heather Templeton Dill, president of the John Templeton Foundation and granddaughter of Sir John Templeton, said: “His Majesty King Abdullah’s work is indeed inspiring. He has underscored the importance of Islam’s diversity rather than seeking to invent or enforce uniformity where none exists. He has built upon the power of principled pluralism to extend religious harmony among the 1.8 billion followers of Islam, the world’s second largest religion, so that each can recognize one another as Muslims.”

She added: “Sir John Templeton often used the phrase ‘spiritual entrepreneur’ to describe Templeton Prize Laureates. King Abdullah offers the world the true definition of a spiritual entrepreneur, a person shaped by temporal and political responsibilities, yet who holds both the belief and free expression of religion as among humankind’s most important callings.”

Beyond his activities within Islam and between Islam and other faiths, the King has also tirelessly defended and supported refugees from across the Middle East, hosting and offering safe haven for millions fleeing conflict. Additionally, he has protected Jerusalem's Islamic and Christian holy sites at considerable personal and monetary expense.

His Majesty King Abdullah II, in his videotaped acceptance of the Prize on www.templetonprize.org, said: "Our world needs to confront challenges to our shared humanity and values. They are the very ground of the coexistence and harmony our future depends on. And this is why I feel it is so urgent to promote tolerance and mutual respect, support inclusion and hope, speak out against Islamophobia and other wrongs, and make our values a real force in the daily life of the modern world."

His Majesty continued: "The Templeton Prize has blazed a trail for all of us, by upholding the importance of spiritual discovery and spiritual values across religions. And I am pleased and humbled to share your path. It is my deep and sincere hope that this award will continue to promote love and harmony within and among religions, and that in doing so, will invite the blessings of God upon us all."

In his letter endorsing King Abdullah II's nomination for the Prize, the Very Reverend Professor Iain R. Torrance, Pro-Chancellor of the University of Aberdeen, wrote: "The immensely important work of King Abdullah II lies in his decisive leadership and convening authority in world-wide Islam to call a principled halt to sectarianism and to mutual denunciation." The King's work, Torrance added, epitomizes progress "in the sense that through scholarship, example, encouragement, and publication, King Abdullah has offered the inherently flexible structures of Islam space to re-set and look again at matters of justice, inter-faith relations and neighbourliness."

In her reference letter, Dr. Georgette F. Bennett, president and founder of the Tannenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding, a New York-based organization dedicated to fighting religious prejudice, stressed the King's efforts: "His leadership. His courage. His grace under fire. His unwavering commitment to expanding the boundaries of interreligious understanding."

Abdullah II ibn Al Hussein, 56, was born in Amman in 1962, the eldest son of King Hussein bin Talal and Princess Muna Al Hussein. A member of the Hashemites, the royal family of Jordan, he is a 41st generation direct descendant of the Prophet Mohammad, peace and blessings be upon him. Jordan's monarchy is the world's second oldest royal house, after the Imperial House of Japan. Following education in Great Britain and the United States, and a military career in Great Britain and Jordan, he assumed the throne in February 1999 after the death of his father, who had reigned since 1952.

In awarding the Templeton Prize to King Abdullah II, the Foundation emphasized his unwavering commitment to protect religious sites in Jerusalem, which he maintains is crucial to the hope for peace in the Holy Land. The Hashemites have been Custodians of the sites since 1924, and in 2013 a formal treaty between President Mahmoud Abbas of the State of Palestine and King Abdullah II officially reaffirmed King Abdullah II as the Custodian of Al-Aqsa Mosque/Al Haram Al Sharif, one of Islam's three holiest sites, and of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the presumed site of the crucifixion and tomb of Jesus. In 2016 he provided personal funds to restore the tomb, completing a restoration which had been abandoned since 1947.

In recent years King Abdullah pushed for legislation to restore and develop Al-Maghtas, also known as Bethany beyond the Jordan, on the Jordan River's east bank, which most Christians consider the site of Christ's baptism. UNESCO unanimously approved it as a World Heritage Site in 2015. He has ensured that various denominations received blocks of land to build churches there, and a conference center opened in 2012. King Abdullah's protection of holy sites stands in stark contrast to the destruction of countless historical treasures by ISIS (Daesh) in territories it previously controlled.

King Abdullah's leadership also has guaranteed safe haven for Jordan's ethnic and religious groups, including several denominations of Christians who are free to worship according to their own traditions. Moreover, Jordan has hosted waves of millions of refugees since its independence in 1946 – Palestinians, Iraqis, Libyans, Yemenis and, most recently, Syrians fleeing the Syrian Civil War – representing the embodiment of the Islamic requirement to care for strangers and affirm the dignity of life.

Other milestones of the King's reign include cultivating interfaith harmony through new organizations and programs such as the [World Islamic Sciences and Education University](#) in Amman, a fellowship for the study of love in religion at Regent's Park College, Oxford, and the establishment of critical centers of thought, such as the [Royal Aal-al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought](#) in Amman.

Through speeches, writings and other forms of commentary in the media and at key international forums, the King continues to draw attention to what unites humanity, and to call for collective global action to address crises around the world and build a bright, peaceful future for all.

His Majesty King Abdullah II joins a group of 47 Prize recipients including Mother Teresa, who received the inaugural award in 1973, the Dalai Lama (2012), and Archbishop Desmond Tutu (2013). The 2017 Laureate was the American philosopher Alvin Plantinga, whose half century of rigorous scholarship made theism – the belief in a divine reality or god – a serious option within academia. Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, the former Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth, was recognized for his work in 2016 after spending decades bringing spiritual insight to the public conversation. Canadian philosopher and theologian Jean Vanier, the founder of L'Arche, an international network of communities where people with and without intellectual disabilities live and work together as peers, received the Prize in 2015.

His Majesty King Abdullah II will be formally awarded the Templeton Prize in a public ceremony in Washington, D.C. on November 13.

#

Notes to Editors

- Further biographical information on King Abdullah II of Jordan, a video of King Abdullah II accepting the 2018 Templeton Prize, a video of Heather Templeton Dill announcing the Prize, still pictures, and information on the 47 previous Templeton Prize Laureates are available at www.templetonprize.org.
- Follow the Templeton Prize on Twitter using @TempletonPrize and hashtag #TempletonPrize2018.
- Everyone is a potential nominator for the Templeton Prize. For nomination details, go to: <http://www.templetonprize.org/nomination.html>.