

APPEAL OF CONSCIENCE FOUNDATION

119 WEST 57th STREET
NEW YORK, N. Y. 10019

PRESS RELEASE

Address by Rabbi Arthur Schneier, President of the Appeal of Conscience Foundation, in honor of Her Imperial Majesty Farah Pahlavi, Shahbanou of Iran, Hotel Pierre, New York, New York, July 7, 1977.

We are gathered to honor Her Majesty Farah Pahlavi, Shahbanou of Iran, for raising the stature of women in her country and championing the cause of women's rights and equality.

Eighteen years ago when the woman we honor today was about to marry the Shah of Iran, she had a serious talk with her mother, Farideh Diba. If I may quote the Empress's own words:

"My mother told me, 'It's up to you. Are you simply going to be a face, a decoration, a clotheshorse, a picturebook Empress? Are you going to rest in history as just another wife of a Shah and mother of a prince? Or are you going to do something as a person yourself? Take on responsibilities, challenges that will make you discover what you are capable of and make an image of a new kind of woman in Iran?'"

Guided by her mother's wisdom and motivated--again in the Empress's own words, "to have something of her own in herself," Her Imperial Majesty, Farah Pahlavi, Shahbanou of Iran, "by her public and private example has set the standards of equality for women in the 20th Century."

In the past 11 years, the Appeal of Conscience Foundation has traveled to many lands with its vital message of religious freedom for all faiths of the world. Our ecumenical coalition of conscience has undertaken missions to the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, to Northern Ireland and to Spain--just to name a few--in our efforts to foster and strengthen communication and cooperation between religious communities and leaders of government.

We have encountered some difficult challenges and have achieved some surprising successes, but none as important to so many people of every faith as the cause we draw attention to today.

For in honoring our distinguished guest from Iran, we are doing more than paying tribute to a leader of a land where Moslems, Christians and Jews live in harmony side by side.

We are focusing attention on the cause of equality and first-class citizenship for women of all lands by honoring the woman who has done so much for the women in her land.

As the President of a foundation based upon the cooperation of religious leaders of all faiths, I must say today that organized religions throughout the world are better realizing the importance of women's global struggle for equality and justice. The fact that more and more women are taking active roles in every major religion is a sign of the increased influence women are achieving in every aspect of their lives.

Yet, I cannot stand here and say that religious leaders have done or are doing all they could to promote understanding and support of the difficult struggle for women's rights.

In our need to be more sensitive, less oppressive and more dedicated to the cause of women's equality, we can do no better than to look to the woman we honor today for an example of excellence.

The well known accomplishments of the Empress of Iran were achieved in a land where, for centuries, women were not counted as official people.

Today, largely because of the dedication and influence of the Empress, women in her country are able to take part in their nation's social, economic and political development.

If Her Imperial Majesty had chosen a different course, she could have been a fairy-tale Empress living in Shangri-La--locked in an ivory tower of indifference.

But instead she has become a modern-day renaissance woman living an involved and meaningful life--as wife, mother, diplomat and patron of the arts and culture.

She rises early each morning to spend a full working day directing a network of social and cultural projects.

She studied architecture in college, and has become a builder of hope and an expert planner in rehabilitation.

Because she chose to have her time on this earth make a difference, the Shahbanou of Iran provides an important lesson for everyone here today.

As leaders of business, government and religion, we have the same choice the Empress's mother gave her 18 years ago.

We can live in our own private Shangri-La, concerned only with immediate luxury and the protection of position.

Or we can take full advantage of our individual strength and potential and try to better the common destiny of mankind.

whether we live in Washington or Moscow, Belfast or Capetown, Westchester or the South Bronx--we are responsible for what happens to humans everywhere in the world.

There are those who help shape the destiny of the world and those who simply live in it. The Empress we honor today made her choice 18 years ago.

I would like to quote a passage from Proverbs, Chapter 31, which pays tribute to a woman much like the Shahbanou of Iran.

"A woman of valor, who can find her? For her price is far above rubies...

"Strength and dignity are her clothing...

"She stretcheth out her hand to the poor, yea, she reacheth forth her hands to the needy...

"She openeth her mouth with wisdom, and the law of kindness is on her tongue."

Inspired by this woman of valor, let leaders throughout the world increase their sensitivity to the struggle of women for their rightful place in society and work with a renewed dedication for the cause of equality for women.

For religion and society can only benefit.

We must hear the voices of women in their difficult quest as clearly as we hear the voices of all those who suffer social injustice and religious persecution throughout the world.

It is now my privilege to present the Foundation Award to Her Imperial Majesty.

"To Her Imperial Majesty, Farah Pahlavi, Shahbanou of Iran; the "working Empress," who has set an example to the women of her nation and the world of what a person who "has found something of her own in herself," can do for others.

"Because she is fighting to remove the veils of second-class citizenship from the women of her nation...

"Because she has led a full life of public service helping women and children; fighting ignorance, poverty, blindness and disease...

"Because she has guarded the cause of religious freedom in her country...

"Most of all, because she chose to make her life make a difference and has set an example which serves as an inspiration to women--and men--throughout the world."

The inscription on the award reads, "More things are wrought by prayer than man dreams of."

Your Majesty, our prayers and good wishes are with you, your family and the people of Iran.

I am honored to present the Appeal of Conscience Award to Her Imperial Majesty, Farah Pahlavi, Shahbanou of Iran.
