

Address by

Chief Justice Ralph D. Gants

Supreme Judicial Court

Islamic Society of

Boston Cultural Center

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SUPREME JUDICIAL COURT CHIEF JUSTICE RALPH D. GANTS REMARKS AT THE
ISLAMIC SOCIETY OF BOSTON CULTURAL CENTER - DECEMBER 16, 2016

IT is a pleasure to be with you again with this year for your afternoon prayers. I was so moved by the friendship and fellowship I received in my visit last December that I was hoping to be invited again. I thank Shaykh Yasir Fahmy and Executive Director Yusufi Vali for that invitation.

There is a story told in the Cherokee nation about a grandfather who explains to his grandson that within every person are two wolves fighting -- one the wolf of anger, resentment, and fear, the other the wolf of compassion, hope, and love. The grandson asks, "Which wolf wins?" The grandfather answers, "The one you feed."

I want to tell you what can happen when a city feeds the wolf of compassion, hope, and love. On August 29, 2005, as most of you will remember, Hurricane Katrina devastated the City of New Orleans and its neighboring towns, creating probably the worst refugee crisis in this country since the Civil War. Approximately one million people were forced to flee their homes, and about 250,000 sought refuge in the nearby city of Houston. Most came with no money, no food, and little more than the clothes they were wearing. The mayor of Houston, Bill White, declared that his city would act on the beliefs they declare each week in their houses of worship - they would treat these refugees as they would wish to be treated if it were them who had lost their homes because of a natural disaster.

This golden rule, in various forms, is found in every religion. In the Torah, in the book of Leviticus, the Lord declares, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." In the New Testament, Jesus teaches, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." Among the words of the

Prophet Mohammed in Imam Al-Nawawi's Forty Hadiths is number 13, which can be translated as either "wish for your brother what you wish for yourself," or "love for your brother what you love for yourself."

More than 27,000 refugees had nowhere to go in Houston, and ended up living temporarily in the Astrodome, the Convention Center, and various sports arenas. All needed food, and shelter, and to be comforted for their loss. Before they could be relocated, they had been served 450,000 meals. On the fourth anniversary of 9/11, 2,000 Muslim volunteers helped to cook and serve meals to all those housed in the convention center. "We're not trying to prove anything other than what our faith requires us to do," said Mahdi Bray, executive director of the Muslim American Society. "What goes with our faith is to help others, to respond and show compassion when people need it."

That same golden rule that inspired the City of Houston to feed its wolf of compassion, hope, and love, is embodied in two fundamental principles of law: equal protection under the laws, and due process. Stripped to its core, equal protection means simply to treat each person under the law as you would want to be treated. And due process means to provide each person with a fair hearing -- a fair opportunity to be heard by an impartial decision-maker -- before anyone is deprived of life, liberty, or property. And they blend together in perfect harmony, because the process due to one is the process due to everyone, regardless of the color of their skin, their nation of origin, their religion, or their citizenship. These are the fundamental beliefs that bind morality and law.

Much has changed since I saw you last December, but what has not changed, not even a little, is the commitment of our judiciary in Massachusetts to practice what we preach, to provide

every person in this Commonwealth with equal protection of the law and with the process due to each of us. I told you last year and I tell you again this year: "You do not stand alone; you have a Constitution and laws to protect your right to practice your religion, to protect you from discrimination and the denial of your equal rights, and to protect you from acts of violence that might be committed because of your religion or your nation of origin."

What has changed since last year is that we in our courts have focused with greater intensity on how we can better provide equal justice for all. As a court system, we are looking within ourselves to understand and thereby diminish the implicit bias that may infect our decisions. We are taking steps to ensure that defendants in our criminal courts are not being punished simply because they are poor and unable to pay fees, fines, and restitution. We are training our judges and our clerks to better understand and appreciate the cultural differences among our various litigants, so that we can be more culturally competent and, as a result, more effective and fair in the justice we provide.

But it means little to have rights, and courts committed to enforce them, if those whose rights are violated do not step forward and insist that their rights be honored. Legal rights can wither from silence, inaction, and fear. If the victims of hate crimes and of unlawful discrimination do not seek justice, there will be no justice. Here, too, you will not stand alone; the Attorney General of this Commonwealth, our district attorneys, and our police departments are committed to enforce those laws, and the bar of Massachusetts will help you find attorneys who will offer their time to help, even if you cannot afford to pay them.

I know that there are those in our society who are feeding the wolf of anger, resentment, and fear, and that this wolf will attack some of us and seek to do us harm. But when it does, there

are those in law enforcement, in our bar, and in our courts, if we call upon them, who stand willing and able to protect our rights. I believe, in the words often uttered by the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., that "the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice." The wolf of anger, resentment, and fear will have its day, but the wolf of compassion, hope, and love will prevail.