

**Opening remarks by Ms. Meredith Preston McGhie, GCP Secretary General,
at the 2019 Global Pluralism Award Ceremony
Ottawa, Canada, 20 November 2019**

Your Highness,
Rt Honourable Adrienne Clarkson,
Rt Honourable Michaëlle Jean,
Rt Honourable Joe Clark,
Honourable Elizabeth Dowdeswell, Lieutenant
Governor of Ontario,
Excellencies, and
Friends of the Global Centre for Pluralism,



I am delighted to welcome you, on behalf of His Highness the Aga Khan and the Board of Directors at the Global Centre, to the second Global Pluralism Award. I would also like to take this opportunity to those viewers watching this live streamed online.

I would like to acknowledge that we are gathered here in Ottawa on the traditional territory of the Algonquin Peoples.

I am Meredith Preston McGhie and I am honoured to serve as the Global Centre for Pluralism's new Secretary General.

My wonderful predecessor, John McNee, is with us tonight and so I wanted to begin by thanking John. John, I owe you a huge debt of gratitude for your exceptional leadership in steering the Centre from its infancy to the global reputation it enjoys today.

As many of you know, the Centre is a public-private partnership between His Highness the Aga Khan and the Government of Canada.

Avec le soutien de nos fondateurs, le Centre est un rassembleur. Nous réunissons des décideurs politiques, des éducateurs, des activistes et des universitaires, pour échanger des connaissances et apprendre comment bâtir des sociétés plus pacifiques, prospères et fructueuses dans lesquelles la diversité est respectée.

Ce soir nous pouvons apprécier les efforts du Centre à réunir tant de défenseurs du pluralisme.

(With the support of our founders, the Centre brings people together. We bring policymakers, educators, activists and academics together to share knowledge and learn how to build more peaceful, prosperous and successful societies in which diversity is respected.

This evening we celebrate the work of the Centre in bringing together so many advocates of pluralism.)

Since joining the Centre last month, I have had the profound privilege of learning more about the ten exceptional recipients of the Global Pluralism Award.

Chosen by an independent jury from among over 500 submissions, their dedication and passion are deeply inspiring.

But most of all, their initiatives offer us creative and positive solutions. These are ten concrete examples of exceptional individuals and organisations who envision a world where differences

are valued and diverse societies prosper. I believe that all of us in this room share that vision. We must all be concerned, however, that this vision is not shared in many societies in which our recipients are working.

We at the Centre are immensely proud to be able to support these recipients to continue to make the compelling cases they are making for pluralism in these challenging contexts.

The ten recipients are doing such varied work that they are difficult to summarise. But a number of common threads weave them together and I wanted to share a few of these with you tonight.

Several of the organisations stand out for the innovative ways they are approaching peace building and reconciliation in volatile contexts.

In Myanmar, the **Centre for Social Integrity** is empowering ethnically-diverse youth from conflict-affected regions to be leaders for change. The conflict prevention and leadership training that they are providing to youth is unique in the country.

The **‘Learning History that is not yet History’** network in the Balkans has developed approaches to history education that help both teachers and students reconcile with the painful, controversial, traumatic history of the wars in their societies.

And in Bangladesh, despite challenges of discrimination and social unrest, **Rupantar** is mobilising vulnerable populations at the grassroots, especially women and youth, to advocate for their rights and fight for social change.

Empowering the next generation of leaders is another common theme throughout this group. And a theme that is particularly dear to our hearts.

Using virtual exchange, **Soliya** from the United States, is bringing together young people across cultures and continents in structured online dialogues to build empathy.

The **Afghanistan National Institute of Music** gives marginalised children and youth access to high quality music and academic education in a co-educational environment, supporting their full inclusion in Afghan society.

In France, **SINGA** supports a new generation of newcomers build lasting personal and professional relationships with their host communities through mutual interests.

Finally, **Deborah Ahenkorah**, from Ghana, is helping African youth see their own experiences, see themselves reflected in African children’s literature, contributing to their sense of belonging, wellbeing and pride.

A third theme is that of **bridging divides and bringing together** people who would not normally sit at the same table, something that is absolutely critical for our mission for pluralism.

onBoard Canada is a particularly compelling example – their board governance training and matching programmes are giving underrepresented individuals opportunities to sit at the table with not-for-profit and public sector boards for the first time.

In Lebanon, **Adyan Foundation**, is breaking down religious barriers, connecting people with different beliefs to share experiences and develop trust and understanding.

And the **Artemisszio Foundation** in Hungary is tackling the social exclusion of Hungary's most disadvantaged populations, by creating communities that welcome Roma, migrants and refugees.

Whether building peace, enabling youth or bridging divides, the Award recipients are all committed to pursuing pluralism every day. This work is challenging, sometimes dangerous, and too often goes unnoticed and unrewarded, but not tonight.

A compelling example of this however is that just this week, one of our recipients has been unable to travel to Ottawa to join us here tonight, as he and his network of pluralism champions in Lebanon are working to support dialogue in the midst of the evolving situation there. We are very pleased that one of his partner colleagues has been able to join to accept on their behalf.

But I would like to briefly quote from his views on the situation in Lebanon – a reminder to all of us about the positive and, solution oriented engagements of our recipients, and I quote: *"This dramatic situation also had its positive side, that it is bringing Lebanese from different communities and regions in solidarity with each other to claim a real change, facing corruption and populist and sectarian politics"* end quote.

This is why the Global Centre for Pluralism believes it is critical to continue supporting the work of the recipients' work beyond this ceremony.

Over the past year, the Centre helped give international profile to the accomplishments of the 2017 winners. With Afro-Colombian victims' rights activist, Leyner Palacios Asprilla, the Centre has co-sponsored the screenings in Colombia and Canada of a feature-length documentary about his work – it is a film that I believe should be required viewing for all peacemakers. This has helped increase visibility and support of his efforts to seek justice for victims of the Colombian conflict.

The Centre has also supported the production of a report on family reunification of refugees to Australia with 2017 winner Daniel Webb and will support a further launch in early 2020. Finally, 2017 winner, Alice Nderitu has developed and launched a manual for women community mediators in armed conflict in Africa and is currently training women in several African countries.

We look forward very much to working with the 2019 recipients over the next year and beyond to help broaden their reach, new partnerships and increase their impact of the incredible work they are doing.

Finally, I would just like to say that we owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to the Rt. Hon. Joe Clark for his leadership and to our distinguished jury represented also here by His Worship Mayor Naheed Nenshi, for the countless hours of thoughtful discussion and decision-making that have led us here, with these ten exceptional exceptional recipients.

On that note, I am now delighted to welcome another lifelong champion of pluralism to the podium.

His Highness the Aga Khan,

Votre Altesse, bienvenue.
(Your Highness, welcome.)

Read online: <https://www.akdn.org/speech/ms-meredith-preston-mcghie/2019-global-pluralism-award-ceremony>