

Speech of Mayor of the City of Ljubljana, Mr. Zoran Janković

Saturday, September 14, 2013

Please allow me on today's occasion to welcome you with your greeting: **Selam alejkum.**

For me, this day is quite special. Not because we in the City of Ljubljana have done everything within our power to enable this event, the laying of the foundation stone for a mosque in Ljubljana, but because I firmly believe that this is the right thing to do. There should be a place for a mosque in Ljubljana, the capital of the Republic of Slovenia, the historical point of intersection of different cultures and religions, where we do not merely talk about intercultural dialogue, but actively live such a dialogue instead.

A mosque is not only a friendly hand offered to the members of the Islamic Community; instead, it likewise represents their right guaranteed by the Constitution – and not merely a publicly attested equality. You are our friends and neighbours with your homes, families, and future in Slovenia.

In the past, Ljubljana has undergone many changes, but its spirit has remained young and open to the future. It is exactly this openness and kindness, this respect for differences and tolerance that reveal the answer why, for me, Ljubljana is the most beautiful city in the world. Also, why there are more and more of us who are convinced of this fact, and also work with conviction to achieve this goal. I am very glad that nowadays most of the inhabitants of our capital believe that.

Long years of deliberations and discussions about the mosque, years that can be traced as far back as the times of our common state, to the seventies, are a matter of the past. The first conceptual design appeared in the eighties, but the outline building permit was regrettably not issued. The studies made in the nineties addressed seven new sites, but due to extensive social and political changes taking place at that time, the interests of the Islamic Community in the Republic of Slovenia were eclipsed. At that time the policies of the City of Ljubljana were characterized by administrative and political quarrels concerning criteria and site for the mosque. It was only in 2003 that former

mayor Danica Simšič and the elected representatives succeeded in adopting a decree that would allow for construction on the site at Cesta 2 cesarjev.

Just as Mufti Dr. Grabus has pointed out several times, the critical shift in the attitude towards the construction of a mosque took place after 2006 with the onset of my term of office. I myself am particularly proud of the fact that this year, in the course of voting on the draft and the proposal for changes to be made in the municipal spatial plan for the mosque, the Municipal Council adopted the same by consensus – all the councillors voted in favour.

Presently, both individuals and society as a whole are subjected to heavy challenges, and the crisis we are undergoing in the economic, social, and moral domains no doubt represent such a challenge. Just as it is a sad fact that there are many people who are experiencing all this as a situation of extreme personal distress, one in which they found themselves or together with their families.

It is the city of Ljubljana and all of its inhabitants who can serve, with our openness and respect for all and everybody, as an example and an encouragement to all of Slovenia. The present moment is likewise one of the targets for whose achievement is worth every effort and self-denial. All the donors who actually made the construction possible naturally deserve to be sincerely thanked.

The foundation stone is the result of bravery and persistence, as well as a high degree of mutual trust in the relationship between the City of Ljubljana and the Islamic Community. I am convinced that this mutual trust that we have been building with such care over the past few years will be maintained with equal responsibility in the future.

On this day Mufti Dr. Nedžad Grabus is fully entitled to be happy and proud. On behalf of all of you who are attending this event, I am earnestly looking forward to the first ceremony in the new mosque. My sincere congratulations to the Mufti and to all Muslims in Slovenia.