

A very special honour for a very exceptional man

New Ambassadorship for Ardeshir Zahedi

"No man was ever honoured for what he received.

Honour has been the reward of what he gave."

It all started on October 16th. 2018 and on the very day of the 90th. birthday of Ardeshir Zahedi, when the Council of Montreux, Vaud in Switzerland unanimously decided on a special distinction and new title for him. It was in recognition of his life-long devotion to humanitarian causes and services to world peace and reconciliation of nations as well a historical and familial attachment to Switzerland, The canton of Vaud and City of Montreux.

Laurent Wehrli, the Mayor of Montreux and Member of the National Assembly called it "a special honour for a very exceptional man". He had the mission to officially designate him as the special "Ambassador of Montreux" to continue his combat for peace and humanitarian values. Zahedi, in the words of the Mayor "is a part of history, is history, almost a legend."



The council also decided on the date of 25th. of January for the official ceremony to confer the title to make it more memorable as it coincided with the celebration of the Independence of Vaud in 1798 with the motto of "Liberté, Patrie", liberty and love of the motherland, the values so dear to the recipient of the

honour.





The ceremony was held at the prestigious Rotary Hall in Montreux Palace in presence of some 200 personalities, family and friends that had come from different parts of Europe: Switzerland, France, Belgium, Germany, Italy and also Dubai.



Amongst the distinguished guests were Mr Adolf OGI, former President of the Confederation of Switzerland, Madame DE QUATTRO, State Councillor, Mr Pierre SALVI Honorary Mayor of Montreux, Mr François CARRARD President of the Council of the Foundation of Montreux Jazz

Festival, His Excellency Mr Lahcen AZOULAY, Ambassador of Morocco, His Excellency Count and Countess Anne et Franz BLANKART de PALEZIEU, Her Royal Highness Princess Gabriella of SAVOY, Madame Christine CHEVALLEY Deputy and Member of Council and Madame MILLIOUD'HENIQUES.

Mr. Laurent Wehrli, Mayor of Montreux, Member of Parliament and Deputy at the Council of Vaud opened the ceremony. A polyglot and graduate of Lausanne University he spoke on behalf of the people of Montreux, the Council and the government to welcome the guests and explain why such a distinction was to be bestowed on Ardeshir Zahedi.:



"In the name of the authorities of the Municipality of Montreux and the Parliament, we are particularly honoured and happy to have and to welcome you all and His Excellency Ardeshir Zahedi on this special occasion for honouring a very exceptional man.

Aredshir Zahedi is so full of history, he has become a history. He has achieved so much in the past, is doing

so much today and we are confident he will continue for a long time in future.

The world we know used to be a much better place but today we see in so many corners of the world the situation is not as it was. For us here in Switzerland peace is the most important word. Without peace we cannot live, we cannot have hopes for future and future of our children. Here in Montreux we are particularly attached to the importance of peace and coexistence.

I do not want to name all the places where peace is no more a reality and people live in misery and fear. We all know what our honourable guest, Ardeshir Zahedi has done for world peace, making it his life-long ambition and putting it above all other goals. Thank you, Excellency, for what you have done, what you stand for and what you have achieved throughout the days, weeks, months, years and decencies of the past and we are sure you will continue for the people of your country, for your ideas, political convictions and for peace throughout the world.

You know that recently Ardeshir Zahedi published several books on YEMEN and the tragic conditions of that country. This is just one example and if I want to name all he has done this Friday evening will not be enough unless you agree to stay here till Monday! But you all

know him well and I do not need to go into details. I only want to insist on the word "PEACE", to Ardeshir Zahedi's engagements and his contributions to this great cause.

I also want to thank him for having set an example, an example for all of us present, for the people throughout the world who could not be physically present tonight and are with us with their thoughts and emotions. You are, Ardeshir Zahedi, also an example for our city of Montreux. Montreux, through its history, culture and international events has succeeded in bringing the people of the world, from different backgrounds and races together giving them a chance to live in peace and harmony. And we are sure that this combination of culture, diplomacy and human understanding can contribute to a solid and lasting peace. We need peace to enjoy our life and have hope for our children.

Excellency, here again you have set an example. It is always wonderful to be with you, to know you and to share so many memories and great moments together. But we are not here only to speak about the past; we want to express our aspirations for the future and a very long future that we all wish for Ardeshir Zahedi. We are also here to give him a new title, a title that is not only honorary but official with important missions.

As everyone knows, Ardeshir Zahedi has been ambassador to the United States, to England and has worked in many other countries for peace and friendship between nations and people. Here I should mention the name of a close friend, a colleague and associate of Ardeshir Zahedi who is, alas, no more amongst us but who had the same values and ambitions, the late Kofi

Annan. I want to mention him in this wonderful occasion because Kofi Annan and Ardeshir Zahedi were both excellent ambassadors of peace.



We give him the title of Ambassador of Montreux because we know how much he has done for his community of Veytaux, our city of Montreux and the region of Vaud, for the people of the Riviera, the important people who come to this part of the world, to our country and to our region. It is not enough to thank him for all his services with simple words, so the authorities of the region decided to bestow upon him this title of recognition, a testimony of what he has achieved throughout the years with quality and devotion.

Your Excellency, this is not only an additional title. You already have so many but this one has a very particular touch. Let me now, in the name of the authorities and the persons present to salute you sincerely for your engagement and wish you to continue for a very long time and serve as Ambassador of Montreux, Ambassador of Peace. Thank you for accepting this new mission."



Having officially presented Aredshir Zahedi with the new credentials and the special gifts and tokens of recognition from the Municipal Council, at the invitation of the

Mayor, Mr Zahedi Ambassador of Peace, Ambassador of Montreux addressed the audience:

*“My dear beloved friend,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen, Your Highness:*

These two days, yesterday and today, are now the happiest days in my life and you made it even more special. You all may know

that on the 24th. of January 1798 the beautiful Canton of Vaud declared its independence with the motto of “Liberté, Patrie”, a great event for this region and its lovely people.



My attachment to Vaud, Montreux and Veytaux has a historical root. From my mother's side, three Qajar kings Nasseradlin Shah, Mozafaraldin Shah and then Ahmad Shah visited and stayed here. It was here that Mozafaraldin Shah became familiar with the notion of democracy and returned to Iran to reform our institutions. Ahmad Shah was the last king of the dynasty who went to England from here. There, the British wanted to impose an oil treaty on him, and he boldly refused and said he would not sign it without the consent of the Parliament. He had to cut his visit short and came back to Montreux before going to France where he was well received. Then there was the coup d'état and the ascent of the Pahlavi Dynasty and a new chapter in our history.

During the Second World War when I was still very young boy, my dear father was arrested by the British and held prisoner in Palestine. When finally released, I was studying and had very little time to be with him. Then when summer holidays came, he suggested to take me with him on a tour of the whole Europe by car. We came to Switzerland and to Montreux and he fell in love with the country, its people and its institutions particularly the military organisations and democratic achievements. He then wished he could spend the rest of his life here, but we loved our native land and returned to Iran. It had now become his dream one day to see Iran like Switzerland and he did all he could in this direction. Later in life when he resigned from premiership he returned to Geneva as special ambassador and then retired and came to live the last years in Montreux, Villa les Roses, where I have been living for the past forty years.

My mother studied in Geneva and lived here with her children, grandchildren and a good number of close relatives who are still here.

My beloved king and father-in-law studied here and returned to Switzerland almost every year for winter holidays but mainly to stay with us, see my father, his daughter and me. It

was his Swiss education that served him most in all the ambitious projects he had. So, we are all grateful to the people of Switzerland, to their hospitality, generosity and above all to the examples this nation has set for democracy, an open and civilised society. But here I cannot resist mentioning two personalities that are not Swiss but share that nobility and these two are President Anwar Sadat of Egypt and King Hassan II of Morocco who hosted and looked after the dying king when all former friends had turned their back. I admire such qualities and am grateful to them.

As for "votre serviteur", when I lost my country forty years ago you warmly received me and gave me the privilege to live here and I am most grateful for your warmth and hospitality, your support and the opportunities I had. I have now lived half of my life here in Montreux and consider it as my second home.

What happened to me forty years ago, all that I lost, all that was taken from me, I have forgotten and forgiven with no bitterness. I have learned that in all great religions, be it Judaism, Christianity or Islam, giving, and forgiving are amongst the most fundamental human values. Today, what matters to me is what is happening to the people of my country. They are my love, my blood and my hopes for the future. If at the start there was a spirit of revenge and violence – as in almost all revolutions- today the country is following the path of reconciliation and peace.

Forty years ago, my country had a population of 36 million or so, today it is about 82 million and 60 million of them are young and highly educated. Some forty million have university education and two thirds are women which is the highest rate in the world. They are my sisters and brothers. These young and bright people are the architects of the future, the future belongs to them. I love them and am truly proud of them. When I look at Iran's foreign policy and the qualifications of the people in the executive branch, I cannot but admire my compatriots. When I left Iran, we had 17 universities, today there are 233 universities and medical schools. Most of the members of the government are now graduates of the best western universities.

*Talking about Switzerland, I remember my visits to Westminster College where I gave the inaugural address in 1977. This was the school in which Truman and Churchill were previously invited to speak. I remember when Winston Churchill finished his address on DEMOCRACY AND FREEDOM, a Swiss professor of the school asked him 'Mr Prime Minister, you spoke about freedom and democracy, in your view which is the country that we can truly call free and democratic?' Without hesitation he said '**Of course, Switzerland.**' and then with his colonial tone added 'But England is not Switzerland.'*

Here we all live in tranquillity and peace while in so many parts of the world, as our noble friend mentioned, people are suffering from dictatorial regimes, are going through hardship, war, insecurity. Greed for money has become the dominant occupation and even the countries that used to be defenders of human rights and values put profit making as their ultimate goal above all moral and human values or rights.

The President of United States speaks of seven trillion dollars recently spent on Afghanistan and Iraq wars. They give billions of dollars' worth of arms of destruction to Saudi Arabia that

massacres women and children in Yemen and devastates this poor country, while in our world today hundreds of millions live without medicine, food, water, electricity and shelter. Our honourable Mayor mentioned one outstanding example the case of Yemen that keeps me so preoccupied.

There are many nationalities that live here and a large community of Iranians that I happen to know. They are sheltered, protected and given the opportunity to work and live in peace; they are treated like Swiss citizens and are happy to be here and grateful to you as I am.

You have been kind to us, generous and so wonderful, so humane, so concerned and so conscious about the sufferings of others. While the ones that were at the origin of wars were refusing refugees. When I had an accident and could not walk without assistance, the people of this town took my arms, invited me to their shops to rest or have a cup of coffee. How can I forget these?

Let me conclude by referring to the wise words of a great Iranian poet, Sa'di of the 13th. Century whom I admire. The following words from him are inscribed on the building of the United Nations in New York, at the very entrance

بنی آدم اعضای یک پیکرند
که در آفرینش ز یک گوهرند
چو عضوی به درد آورد روزگار
دگر عضوها را نماند قرار
تو کز محنت دیگران بی غمی
نشاید که نامت نهند آدمی

*The sons of Adam are limbs of each other,
Having been created of one essence.
When the calamity of time affects one limb
The other limbs cannot remain at rest.
If you have no sympathy for the troubles of others,
You are unworthy to be called by the name of a Human.*

And you are truly worthy of the name.

*When feelings could not be translated into words and Shakespeare found them poor to express his emotions, he just said: **Thank you, Thank you, Thank you and again Thank you.***

I do not want to conclude with the words of others. I want to talk about what I have in my heart, love, true love. Many people abuse the word love. I talk about true love, a love that comes from very depth of the heart to tell you with a loud and clear voice:

I, I LOVE YOU, I LOVE YOU ALL and I am grateful.



The participants in the ceremony were then invited to attend a reception organised by the

municipality in the Hall of Festivities of Montreux Palace. It was a particularly warm atmosphere with many delicate and oriental touches. This reception was originally planned to end at 9 PM but by the time the personalities and the guests of Mayor started to leave it was already close to midnight.

The end of the ceremony was the beginning of a new life and a new mission for Ambassador Zahedi to continue his battle for peace, coexistence and defense of human rights and values. After all, as the Mayor said, he has a great mission and long future ahead.