

WELCOMING ADDRESS

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Hello and thanks to everyone for being here this morning to celebrate the life and achievements of a remarkable man. It's safe to say that Abdus Salam was a one off in many ways, so this promises to be a fascinating and inspiring day. I'm especially delighted that we have with us members of the Salam family — it's an honour to welcome them to Imperial. It's a happy coincidence that Imperial marks its Centenary in the same year that it also marks the 50th anniversary of the arrival of one of its leading scientists.

Abdus Salam is someone who still has a great deal to teach us, and not just about physics. He was certainly a great scientist, a Nobel Laureate in a very complex field that I'm not even going to try to explain in front of a roomful of physicists. He came to Imperial in 1957, having previously studied and worked in both Lahore and Cambridge. I'm pleased to say that he stayed here for the rest of his career, and retained his connections with the College until his death in 1996.

He obviously showed great promise right from the start of his academic career, gaining the highest marks ever recorded in the Matriculation Examination at the University of the Punjab. He went on to set up the theoretical physics group here at Imperial, while at the same time keeping his links with his homeland strong. He had a keen interest in the scientific development of Pakistan and was a member of the Pakistan Atomic Energy Commission, a member of the Scientific Commission of Pakistan and acted as Chief Scientific Advisor to the President. When he was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1979, he had the distinction of becoming the first Muslim and the first Pakistani Nobel Laureate.

Abdus was known and admired for far more than his scientific discoveries. He firmly believed that “scientific thought is the common heritage of mankind”, and did much to advance that conviction. In 1964 he founded the International Centre for Theoretical Physics in Trieste, Italy, where he set up associateships for gifted researchers from developing countries. He went on to found the Third World Academy of Sciences, seeing investment in the science base of developing countries as a key way to reduce the gap between rich and poor. In this way, he believed, science could play a vital role in promoting world peace.

I said earlier that Abdus was the first Muslim Nobel Laureate, and he remained committed to his faith throughout his life. We probably all know that religion and science haven't always been happy bed-fellows, but he saw no contradiction between the two. He quoted the Quran during his Nobel speech and wrote of his work as a physicist: "That our generation has been privileged to glimpse a part of God's design is a bounty and a grace for which I render thanks with a humble heart."

This is just a short introduction to a many-faceted man. I hope it has given a taste of why Abdus Salam is remembered with such respect and fondness by all who knew him. We have a programme of distinguished speakers here today who I'm sure will be able to give us a new insight into his work and wider interests. Thanks are due to Mike Duff and the other organisers for putting together this varied and stimulating programme. I hope that by coming together in this way we can do justice to the memory of a truly great man.