

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a distinguished privilege for me to speak before you today on the occasion of this event of great significance. I would like to recognize all those men and women, whose efforts and dedication made it possible and extend my deepest thanks and appreciation to The Honorable Robert Garms, Mayor of Elkader, and Mrs. Kathy Garms, as well as to all officials and citizens of the city, for the warmth of their welcome and for the demonstration of their friendship and affection towards me.

We are gathered here today also to celebrate and pay homage to Emir Abdelkader, a man who is as dear to you here in Elkader as he is to us in Algeria, and whose name will forever be enshrined in the pantheon of the great figures of humanity.

A man who combined the epic heroism of a valiant freedom fighter with the genius of a great statesman, and a humanism which, one century before the Geneva Convention, made him a precursor to international humanitarian law. In 1843, Emir Abdelkader issued a national decree regulating conduct in times of war and ordering that war prisoners be treated in the most respectful and humane way possible.

Emir Abdelkader was also an unrivaled thinker and strong advocate of dialogue and tolerance. History will forever remember his providential intervention to save thousands of Christian lives in Damascus, which earned him the admiration and respect of all, including President Abraham Lincoln.

Today, in a world where misunderstandings flourish and thrive on ignorance, it is in the very values of justice, peace and tolerance, so cherished and held dear by the Emir, that the foundation on which rests our unity becomes stronger, in the fullness of our shared heritage and beyond the diversity of our paths.

Thus, we consider it as our ardent duty to honor this immense heritage, of which we are all custodians, by striving to dissipate mistrust and fears, promote dialogue, and foster the spirit of tolerance. The latter is not exclusive of deep convictions; it is, on the contrary, an auxiliary to them.

It is because schools are the epitome of places where values are inculcated and transmitted that your initiative is all the more laudable.

To make our children understand the scope of the principles extolled by the Emir and the exemplarity of his path in life, and to lead them to ponder them, is to succeed in making the seeds of tolerance germinate in their minds. It is also a way of preparing them to look at the world around them with confidence, at a time when abstract theses, eloquently contradicted by facts and which do not stand up to scrutiny, falsely allege the existence of antagonisms, whose roots are supposedly in the very nature of civilizations and religions.

With that in mind, I can but encourage your initiative, whose success is already reflected in the quality of the work achieved and the enthusiasm displayed by the candidates, and wish for it to set an example.

This seminal project takes on a meaning that is all the more particular that it saw the light of day in a city, whose founders, need I recall, named it after the Emir and which has since lived up to his memory by becoming a symbol of Algerian-American relations.

In this regard, I would like to pay a highly deserved tribute to the late Mayor of Elkader Ed Olson for the significant role he played in creating synergies and promoting rapprochement between our two peoples.

Moreover, Elkader is now ideally positioned to become a crossroad of cultures and a favorite point of meeting with the Muslim world. There is no doubt that this competition is another milestone towards achieving that aspiration.

You can be certain that the Algerian Government will not stop supporting your city, including in difficult circumstances, as was the case two years ago, and will continue to work towards reinforcing its remarkable role as a bridge between Algeria and the United States, prompted by its conviction that Elkader is the eloquent embodiment of the friendship between our two peoples.

An indissoluble friendship whose bonds have been forged throughout the centuries and which devoted men and women have continuously strengthened through their valuable contribution.

John Kiser is one of those. His book on Emir Abdelkader has been greatly instrumental in making known the reality of the figure in all his splendor and in shedding light on the exceptional depth and current validity of the lessons that each one of us should draw from his life and his work.

The testimonies and feedback in support of the book confirm our conviction that Emir Abdelkader will remain an inexhaustible source of inspiration for all those who believe in a common destiny for mankind.

Among them also are those who established the Algerian-American Foundation for Culture, Education, Science and Technology – an event recent enough to be highlighted – with the ambition of spanning as many bridges as possible between Algeria and the United States.

An ambition, evidently, shared by all of us and that is inseparable from the ideal to which we all aspire, the ideal of a world where friendship, peace, and justice prevail.

Thank you.