**MARYAM BIB Honorary Doctorate Speech - Friday 15th July 2011 University of York UK**

**Opening Remarks**

**I am highly honoured to be here today and receiving this award from this prestigious university and through it to be extending further the links between York and Pakistan. Anyone would be honoured to receive such an award but I remember who I am and where I come from, the Tribal Areas of Pakistan bordering Afghanistan where the literacy rate for women is only 3%, the traditions are most conservative and the position of women is more restricted since the military activity of the so-called war on terror. In such a situation this award gives a very clear message that women can make it, whatever the circumstances of their birth.**

**Importance of Education**

**For those of you graduating today, you have achieved a very good level of education already. In my life, I have learned that education is the single most powerful instrument that can be given to someone. If you use it for your own personal goals then it will help you to achieve those but if it is simultaneously used for empowering others, the results could be phenomenal as you can see today - me a tribal woman from Waziristan getting this award.**

**Using Education: in own communities**

**I firmly believe that me achieving this award is because I have chosen to use the power of education as a way of helping the disempowered communities that I come from directly through schools but also through becoming more effective at influencing the networks of powerful people who even now are resisting attempts to improve the position of women and children. Education has helped me to think more strategically about how to achieve what I know in my heart to be important, to learn how to talk to people at all levels not just those poor women in the villages.**

**Using for influencing policy framework in most advanced countries**

**The skills that education gave me help me to challenge even the most advanced western societies to understand better how they can help my people. I tell them about the importance of building mutual trust with local people; I tell them that such work is slow and cannot be achieved overnight and that there will be many setbacks. I tell them that compassion needs to be there but that goes beyond sympathy.**

**Lessons learned**

1. **Patience and non violence**

**If you are trying to achieve improvements for women and children then you meet opposition from men and, in my case, from groups such as the radicalised Taliban. It is important not to react defensively and not to attack them as that will achieve nothing. You need to take such people with you, to help them to see what they can gain for themselves and their families through allowing their women and daughters to come more forward.**

**For example: We have set up schools and trained local village-based midwives in some villages and then radical Taliban have come and we have had to leave. But the villagers with whom we have developed understanding and tryst themselves feel that what we have done helps them and slowly and gradually, we would be able to talk to the Taliban, we can discuss with them and explain that what we are doing is not against Islam. And then they invite us back to start our work again even if it takes a long time.**

**You need to be clear about your values, you need to always act with integrity even if you feel tempted to take shortcuts and you need to understand the importance of building relationships. In that way, you will keep going no matter what the obstacles and hurdles are. Slowly, slowly things change. One very small example from my own life: when I was trying to get a scholarship to come to York to study, I was told at first that I was too old but I did not give up – at the third time I was selected and now here I am.**

1. **Looking at the whole picture**

**When people talk of Pakistan or of empowering women and children there, then they think of problems. Do not think only of problems but also of successes and solutions – understand the problem and be part of the solution. Wherever you are working and living – including like me in the conflict, difficult parts of Pakistan - it is not *all* bad; we have many successes in our work and that keeps us going.**

**For example: We have been working on Inheritance rights for females and rights to consent in marriage. After some time, a local religious leader agreed to support what we were saying by making a sermon in the mosque. But the weeks went by and nothing happened. Then, he made the sermon. He told us afterwards that he had delayed because he realised that he had not given inheritance and consent in marriage rights to his own daughters and nieces. So he made those changes in his own family first before he could tell others to do it.**

**But looking at the whole picture also means striking a balance between paying attention to those with power and those without. Once one achieves recognition and starts interacting at a higher level, there is the danger that you lose sight of what is happening in the marginalised and poor communities. So it is important for me as the head of my organisation to talk regularly with my staff at all levels and take notice of what they tell me – and that I keep visiting people in the villages as well as talking to high level international people such as when I visit the UN and when I meet with people at the House of Commons next week.**

**For example: We have had some terrible things happen in Pakistan in the last few years and they affect women and children the worst. We have had the earthquake, floods and military activity such as drone attacks all leading to people being displaced in huge numbers. Because of traditional, conservative views, women cannot come out of their houses or tents when there are men around who are not from their families. But the international rescue workers do not understand such cultural complexities and send teams with men. In the earthquake, some women died rather than come out of their houses because of this. And when the aid teams distributed food to the flood victims and threw it from the backs of the lorries or dropped it from helicopters, it was not only undignified to do that but the women cannot get it. We at Khwendo Kor are one of very few women’s organisations working in these areas and we have local people on our staff so we advise the international agencies and government how to reach the women and children. And we are able to provide spaces within the refugee camps for women to come together to share their trauma but also to learn skills, literacy and better health practices with our help.**

1. **Building Relationships**

**So this award today is acknowledgement of the successes achieved as a result of paying attention to building trust and relationships and achieving improvements in the most remote and difficult areas - but the same message is true for you in your work, even in the most advanced countries like the UK. Without putting relationships at the core of our work, we will not succeed.**

**Ending Remarks**

**Finally, remember that we should never lose heart in whatever we do but keep on looking for spaces to come together, connect with each other and find opportunities to make things better.**

**African proverb:**

**‘If you want to go fast, go alone**

**If you want to go far, take along others’**