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Preface

This book has two main subjects. One is Dialogue among Civilizations; the other is Civil Society. By Dialogue among Civilizations, President Khatami highlights the significance of culture in international relations as a new paradigm. Such an approach delineates how civilizations can engage in fruitful Dialogue with one another, rather than negating or being absorbed by each other.

The other main topic is Civil Society. It has two aspects. One is the practical aspect, that is, how Iranian society can materialize the ideals of civil society in its political and social affairs by expanding citizenship rights and public participation. The other aspect is the theoretical one, examining how Islam is compatible with notions of freedom, rationality, development and human rights.

President Khatami underlines the importance of the relationship between these two subjects, especially with regard to Iranian society. His emphasis on Dialogue among Civilizations reflects on how Iran can interact effectively with the wider world. Iran is a country with an ancient civilization, which has benefited from Islamic civilization, and has subsequently engaged with Western civilization. It has therefore had a long history of interaction and dialogue. Drawing on this historical backdrop, President Khatami's reforms aim at building civil society in Iran, and at promoting dialogue among civilizations.

Articles and speeches in this volume include those written both before and after Muhammad Khatami's election in 1997 as President of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Dr Gholamali Khoshroo has played a significant role in the selection of the contents of the book.

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