



*Inventing our Future*  
*Essays on Freedom, Democracy and*  
*Reform in the Arab World*

*Ismail Serageldin*

*Second Edition*

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## INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

The idea of publishing this series started a few years ago. It was in response to the pressing demands of many to have written copies of speeches that I have had the honor to deliver on various occasions, or to seek reprints of chapters that I had devoted to particular topics in publications that may not be available to that particular audience.

The speeches covered many topics, and therefore I felt it appropriate to group them by topic. Each of these booklets deserved its own introduction, explaining the circumstances of the speeches and articles provided there and why they were grouped in this particular fashion, to bring a semblance of coherence to words, which at their inception, were not intended to be read as a single continuous text. I believe that they are readable both individually and as a collection with little difficulty.

However, as we progressed in the publication of these booklets, another issue came to the fore. Some of the essays or speeches fit naturally in more than one grouping. Addressing “Women in Science” could, and should, be part of a collection on Science, as well as a collection on gender issues. I therefore decided to include it in both, on the assumption that readers of one may not be readers of the

other. In some cases, and “Women in Science” is such a case, this was complementary to the production of a stand-alone monograph, due to the demand for this particular piece.

All these essays, speeches, chapters, or monographs are available electronically, online on my personal website ([www.serageldin.com](http://www.serageldin.com)) as well as the website of the Bibliotheca Alexandrina ([www.bibalex.org](http://www.bibalex.org)). Many, however, prefer the convenience of the printed form of the book. I believe it is a wonderful companion, which will continue to co-exist harmoniously with its electronic counterpart for a long time into the future.

Ismail Serageldin  
Librarian of Alexandria  
Director of the Bibliotheca Alexandrina

April 2007  
Alexandria, Egypt



## INTRODUCTION TO THE SECOND EDITION

Having been asked by many to publish some of my speeches and interventions in the past few years, I have finally accepted to bring out a small selection of the countless speeches and presentations that I have been giving on these topics.

In the first edition of this publication, I included four of the five documents that are in this second edition. When time came for a second edition, I decided to add a more recent discussion of democracy from a lecture I gave in 2007, entitled “Is Democracy still possible in the Middle East?”, and I added the word “democracy” in the title, and removed the word “governance”, though governance is still very much part of the contents. The new document is inserted just before the Alexandria declaration, which as a reference document, is kept at the end of the book. Thus, the five documents in the book are now the following:

- The Tides of Change: Reflections on Reform in the Arab and Muslim Worlds (March 2005)
- The First Freedom (September 2004)
- Governance, Competitiveness and the Arab Future (January 2005)
- Is Democracy possible in the Middle East? (2007)

- The Alexandria Declaration (March 2004)

Each of these is a very different type of document, and was written for a very different audience. Each is a stand-alone document that can be read on its own. Together they constitute a well-rounded exposition of the values that I and many in the reform movement espouse and that the Bibliotheca Alexandrina is promoting. Clearly there is much more that could have been added from our ongoing work on educational reform to scientific excellence, from economic programs to environmental action, from cultural heritage to the digital revolution. Perhaps some of these other topics will also find their way into print. At present however, it is these five documents that are being presented to the public in this form. Perhaps a few words to contextualize each of them is pertinent.

The Tides of Change was an invited public lecture delivered at the University of Minnesota. While I gave three other talks on the campus (on agriculture and food security; on The Digital Divide; and on the Library of Alexandria: Past, present and future), this was the key event, with very large attendance. It was the first Freeman lecture, launching an annual program of distinguished public lectures, named to honor Orville Freeman, former Governor of the State and

former US Secretary for Agriculture during the Kennedy–Johnson years.

At the same time, a poison-pen campaign filled the op-ed pages with negative stereotypes of what was going on in Egypt, and the US was profoundly taken by its commitments in Iraq. A growing gulf of suspicion was separating the US from the Muslim world generally and the Arab world specifically. The organizers asked me to address my vision of the reform movements in the Arab world. The result was the speech before you, delivered to a full house. It was received with a standing ovation.

It is important to remember that the text before you was drafted to be heard. Thus many of the sentence constructions pursue a recurrent rhythm that impacts differently when heard in an auditorium than when read off the page. However, the message is clear: Reform must come, it must be home-grown and driven by forces from within the concerned societies. External support is welcome, but not a new form of tutelage. In that context, building bridges with the US is essential. The US can help that by better understanding the true forces in our countries, and by reclaiming the generous open spirit that they displayed at other critical moments of their history after the carnage of World War II. A generosity and openness that made the US the most admired country in the world.

I put that speech first as it sets the stage and paints a vast canvas for anyone interested in this topic.

The First Freedom, is a keynote address delivered at the second “Beacon for Freedom” conference, organized at the Bibliotheca Alexandrina, in September 2004. Speaking of freedom of speech, I chose to call it “the first freedom” because it is the freedom that can make all others happen. If freedom of speech is curtailed, there can be no civic or religious or cultural freedoms of any kind. No one will be able to denounce abuses against human rights and no one will be able to hold government accountable for its actions. Thus by almost any measure it becomes the first freedom. With it comes the free flow of information, the lifeblood of any democratic society or modern economy. Without it we cannot survive on this planet speaking hundreds of tongues, holding a wide range of political opinions and displaying a bewildering array of social attitudes and cultural attributes. Our creative diversity—if it is to survive the growing interaction between peoples—requires that tolerance become inbred, and further that it must be nurtured to go beyond acceptance of the principle of freedom of expression to the commitment to defend that right for all those with whom we disagree.

Indeed, to defend that right even for those whose views we find offensive. For it is precisely offensive speech and

obnoxious views that require protection in the name of freedom of expression. Surely conventional thoughts and mainstream speech do not require protection, precisely because they are so acceptable to the majority.

I will not belabor the point as to what constitutes free expression as that has benefited from several centuries of debate with generations of free spirits willing to put their well-being and even their very lives on the line to defend the crucial rights that we now have learned to take for granted. Today, it is expression in any medium, including and especially the Internet, and using any form of expression, be it language, music or the arts.

Are there boundaries to free expression? ... To avoid slander, libel and hate mongering, to avoid the humiliation of minorities and the promotion of exclusion, to avoid predators from attacking our children, to find ways to screen the very young from certain types of materials ... how do we manage that while continuing to ensure freedom of expression? How do we balance the rights of individuals vs. the rights of community? These are some of the timeless questions that Egypt and others are all struggling with. In that area, I argue for more guarantees for freedom of expression and more thought as to how we can fashion the wise constraints that make people free.

Governance, Competitiveness and the Arab Future, is an essay that I wrote at the request of the World Economic Forum for the Arab Competitiveness Report of 2005. In it I argued that development is meaningless without freedom, and that sustainability is all about giving future generations the same if not more opportunities than we have had ourselves. From that vantage point, with development as freedom, and sustainability as opportunity, the sustainable development path that we want our societies to pursue will require what we have come to call “good governance”. The ten commandments of good governance are defined as: transparency, accountability, pluralism, participation, the rule of law, free flow of information, democracy, human rights, gender equality, and finally a learning environment that nurtures innovation and respects youth.

The paper argues for what governments should do and what the civil society should do to promote good governance, and affirms that competitiveness will thrive (in terms of human resources development, better technology, and sounder management practices) only if the prerequisite of good governance is in place.

Less poetic than the “Tides of Change” speech, less abstract than the “First Freedom” speech, this paper gives some down-to-earth recommendations on what should be

done to advance good governance and competitiveness, without which there will be no Arab future, in a society that must generate some 80 million new jobs in the next 15 years or so.

Is Democracy possible in the Middle East? The fourth document is a lecture I gave to a combined group of scholars from Al Ahram and Brookings who came to the BA for the day. I was given the title, to reflect the pessimism that many were feeling in the face of the perceived slow pace of change in the region. The speech was clear and unambiguous. I emphasized the inevitability of the advance of the democratic idea, and explained what I called the “deep currents” of socio-cultural change that are far more important than the surface events that dominate the news and yet prove of little lasting value. I explained how the BA was active in promoting these deep currents of progress in Egypt and the Arab world, and why I was convinced that the ideas of openness, pluralism, rationality, dialogue, and understanding will prevail.

The Alexandria Declaration, is the final document in this collection. It is co-drafted with some 167 distinguished Arabs. It is included here because it would be inconceivable that a publication on reform in the Arab world would be issued without the Alexandria Declaration, which has become the most widely recognized reformist framework

articulated by Arabs for Arabs, without foreign pressure or domestic intimidation. It is an honest statement of what the aspirations of the Arab people are.

It is a civil society effort, which was blessed by President Mubarak, who delivered a speech in a separate meeting before the official start of the proceedings, to call for a partnership with the civil society for the cause of reform. No-one from the Government attended the discussions or the drafting sessions of the conference that produced the Alexandria Declaration...

The key actors were the Arab leaders of the civil society movement, eminent intellectuals and writers who participated in the enterprise. All were invited to participate from all political currents, but in general those who responded to the call shared a view of the changing world around us: That the world is driven by a true revolution in science and technology, and an inexorable march towards globalization, and that the new century promises increased competition, a knowledge-based economy and society and a world where human rights, democracy, and the meaning of citizenship are central themes as much as well-being, equity and fairness in human and economic development. Within this changing world, the Arab world must also change, and change profoundly. Past policies, whatever their merits at certain points in



time, must change. Broad-based comprehensive reform is absolutely necessary in the Arab world. We were, once, the promoters of science and learning throughout the world, and the practitioners of tolerance and pluralism at a time when the West was in the grip of intolerance and bigotry. It is time for the Arab world to link to these traditions of excellence and to reinterpret them in contemporary terms. We should be active participants in the creation of a better world for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and have our distinct contribution to make to this momentous international enterprise.

To organize for a conference where the participants would actually draft the document—not just approve a pre-prepared draft—the number of participants should be limited to no more than about 160 persons organized in four drafting groups which could each produce about four or five pages in a day of discussions. To ensure that it would be a truly pan-Arab conference, no more than a third would be from Egypt.

To start the process, a few of us drafted an issues paper, and organized an Egyptian civil society effort to which about 450 key people representing all the differing currents in Egypt were invited. About 275 came to a two-day event in February 2004 where the first issues paper was discussed. The participants amended the first issues paper and added a

special focus on youth employment. They also agreed that only about 50 Egyptians would participate in the official conference. The issues paper was next submitted to a pan-Arab organizing committee who added a special attention to the role of women. The revised background paper was then presented to the conference for their consideration.

The conference was held 12–14 March 2004, and was attended by 167 persons from 18 Arab countries, without a single minister or government official. Following the inauguration (by the BA and the co-sponsoring pan-Arab organizations), plenary discussions followed on the two special topics.

1. *Youth employment.* With a rapidly growing population, the Arab worlds must create millions of new jobs each year. The specter of tens of millions of half-educated unemployed youths in the cities of the Arab world is a disturbing one. Not just for the social and political dynamite that they represent, but far more importantly for the wasted talents and frustrated aspirations of so many wonderful young persons.
2. *The Role of Women.* No society can advance if it ignores the talents and contributions of half its population. Ample evidence exists that by educating girls and empowering women is central to any real socio-economic development.

The Arab world has its own specificities and Arab women are certainly increasingly playing important roles in our public life. However, much more needs to be done. No claim to cultural specificity should be given credence if it leads to the oppression of women or the mutilation of girls.

The result of these discussions was to permeate the special drafting session which lasted a whole day, each drafting group having about 40 persons. The four themes were:

- Political and Institutional Reform (with particular focus on democracy and the civil society);
- Economic Reform (with particular focus on youth employment and the open economy);
- Social Reform (with particular focus on gender equality and education); and
- Cultural Reform (with an emphasis on changing the public, media and religious discourse).

Each group was headed by a chair supported by two rapporteurs. They met in the evening with the representatives of the co-sponsoring organizations, and the pan-Arab organizing committee and myself as chairman, a total of 28 persons, and patched together the four thematic drafts and added an introduction and a conclusion. The ensuing draft

was read in plenary the following day and it was the first time that those who had attended the political discussion heard the social, economic and cultural sections, and vice versa. Only written suggestions were entertained. Sixty-three suggestions were submitted by the plenary. The conference then recessed for about an hour and the 28-person drafting committee met again to review all the suggestions and then everyone convened in open plenary—with the press present—and read out the historic document, not just approved by the conferees, but actually drafted by them. The Alexandria Declaration was born!

The process by which the Declaration came into being, and the subsequent program to follow up on it, was a model of openness and transparency. It was a clarion call for human rights and democracy. It also recognized that reform must be comprehensive, far reaching and suited to the dual task of allowing each Arab society to accelerate the pace of its own reforms while laying the foundations for a stronger regional cooperative framework that would make the Arab world internationally more than the sum of its constituent states.

The Declaration became a major rallying point for rational enlightened opinion among the Arabs. It was very well received internationally, regionally and nationally. It has

become one of the accepted frameworks for the articulation of reform proposals.

Beyond that, the BA has pursued an intensive program of meetings and conferences to light the fire of the civil society and involve youth in the pursuit of their visions of better futures. We fully recognize that mobilizing the civil society is a long process, but the Declaration was the launch of an ongoing Arab Civil Society effort, that will ensure that there will be significant follow-up leading to action on the ground in many of our countries, as the Civil Society engages with decision-makers and all collectively rise to the challenges of the new century.

One of the few queries about this remarkably open and effective process was the relative weakness of the representation of the Islamic current among the participants and signatories of the Alexandria Declaration, and the many subsequent meetings and conferences that devolved from the Declaration and its follow up. The short answer is that they were always invited, but only a few—the more liberal Islamic thinkers—did come and participate.

There are those who argue that the conservative Islamist forces should be allowed to form a religious party and participate in the democratic process. For my part, I specifically have two very clear statements that I believe that anyone who wants

to promote democracy and freedom of expression should find no difficulty accepting: First, all citizens, regardless of religion or sex are treated absolutely equally before the law, and that includes eligibility for the highest offices in the land. Second, that laws are drafted by the elected representatives of the people and not by some scholars interpreting certain texts. If an Islamic group publicly proclaims its willingness to adhere to these two statements, I would be the first to support their right to launch an Islamic Democratic Party. After all, there are many Christian Democratic parties in Europe.

On the whole, however, the Alexandria Declaration has been very well received. In the West, there are many who focus on the political or the economic aspects of the reform. Important as these are, I personally believe that the social and the cultural aspects of the Declaration are going to be the more challenging, and the ones where victories will be more significant. In the end, the social and the cultural reforms represent the “deep currents” of societal transformation that the BA is committed to act on.

The path we have chosen is more arduous but more lasting. Here the BA’s work on the “deep currents” is most relevant. It will be a long journey. The longest journey starts with but one step, and the Alexandria Declaration was a giant step in the right direction.

## **Inventing our Future**

We are in the process of inventing our future. Everything that now is, was once imagined. Everything that will be, has to be first imagined. We are inventing the future, right now, in the crucible of our minds. We are bounded only by our imaginations. We can imagine a better future for Egypt, for the Arabs and for the whole world. If asked to sketch an image, I will quote some words from Tagore's *Gitanjali*, introduced by Yeats and published in 1913, but that speaks far more eloquently than I could to describe what the future of reform could be:

Where the mind is without fear and the head is  
held high;  
Where knowledge is free;  
Where the world has not been broken into  
fragments by narrow domestic walls;  
Where words come from the depth of truth;  
Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards  
perfection;  
Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its  
way into the desert sand of dead habit;  
Where the mind is led by thee into ever-widening  
thought and action ...

Into that heaven of freedom, my father let my  
country awake.

It will be a long journey, a never-ending one. For both reform and the future it seeks are a journey, not a destination. On that journey, we are guided not by the limits of our present conditions, but by our evolving vision of what could be ... and in those immortal words: there are those who look at the world as it is and ask “why?” ... and then there are those, the reformers, who look at the world as it could be and ask “why not?”

Ismail Serageldin  
Librarian of Alexandria  
Director of the Bibliotheca Alexandrina

April 2007  
Alexandria, Egypt



# THE TIDES OF CHANGE

## Reflections on Arab Reform

The First “Freeman Lecture” delivered at  
the University of Minnesota on 24 March 2005

### INTRODUCTION

It is a great honor to address this audience on the occasion of the Freeman lecture at the University of Minnesota. Orville Freeman was an outstanding public servant, one of that unique group of Americans who mixed idealism with pragmatism, whose exemplary career in public service remains an inspiration to those devoted to the public good. He was one of “the best and the brightest” that President Kennedy brought to Washington.

Allow me to start with important words that President John F. Kennedy addressed to another university. Speaking of world peace, he said:

“... For, in the final analysis, our most basic common link is that we all inhabit this small planet. We all breathe the same air. We all cherish our children’s future, and we are all mortal.”

Those words are as pertinent today as they were over a generation ago. In the post 11 September world, it is important that the US and the Arab and Muslim worlds remember that common humanity, and build a new basis for common understanding and mutual respect. This will require greater sensitivity on the part of the US at a time of profound change in the Arab and Muslim worlds.

There are few topics that are as high on the global agenda today as the issue of reform in the Arab and Muslim worlds. Having been closely involved with these issues for a number of years, and most recently in terms of the efforts launched at the Bibliotheca Alexandrina, the New Library of Alexandria, that I have the honor of directing, I feel that my address brings the passion of the engaged more than the detachment of the scholar. Nevertheless, given the distinction that you have bestowed upon me by inviting me here, I will try to keep a balance between fervor and distance, engagement and detachment.

Allow me to cover the following points:

*First:* The changing world scene;

*Second:* A framework for Arab reform: The Alexandria Declaration;

*Third:* Key elements of the reform agenda, including the status of women;

*Fourth*: The tides of change that confront us all; and  
*Finally*, the challenge of tomorrow and the dream that could yet be a reality.

## 1. A CHANGING WORLD

### **The Emerging World**

Consider the paradox of our times. We live in a world of plenty, of dazzling scientific advances and technological breakthroughs. Adventures in cyberspace are at hand. The Cold War is over, and with that we were offered the hope of global stability. Yet, our times are marred by conflict, violence, debilitating economic uncertainties and tragic poverty. The US, seared by the agony of the monstrous disaster of 11 September 2001, is bent on deploying its enormous might and its considerable resources to root out the cause for such evil. The World, including the Arab and Muslim worlds, stand ready to participate in destroying this evil and to systematically attack the bases of terrorism, fanaticism and extremism.

Why then are there so many differences between the US and the Arab and Muslim worlds? While there is considerable overlap between the Arab and Muslim worlds, they are not the same. The Muslim world is some four to five

times larger in population than the Arab world and stretches from Morocco to Indonesia, and from central Asia to Sub-Saharan Africa, not counting the Diaspora of migrant and settled communities in the countries of the north. Today, I will focus my discussion on the Arab world, though much of what I say can also apply to the Muslim world. Let us start by looking at the World as it appears to many in the developing world, including the Arab world.

### **A View from the South**

Our world is in the throes of rapid transformation, with a future only dimly perceived. The post-war order is creaking and requires retooling from the Security Council to the Bretton Woods Institutions. Yet, the political will to forge the new multilateralism is lacking. Europe is busy constructing its wonderful new edifice, and the US seems intent on pursuing its own course. Yet the wisdom of the architects of the post-World War II system needs to be reflected as we enter into the new century. We recognize our common humanity, but shy away from the consequences of accepting such a view. For surely we cannot accept that half of humanity is ill-fed, ill-housed, wracked by disease and blighted by ignorance.

Our new world is emerging by the action and the inaction of the powerful. It is one that could make a difference for so many if the powerful choose to act in those areas where

they will empower the weak and marginalized to become the producers of their own bounty and welfare, not the recipients of charity or the beneficiaries of aid ... replacing despair with hope, anger with love, enmity with friendship, conflict with cooperation. Yet the world that is emerging is not like that. It is one where hate and suspicion have overtaken the urge to altruism and collaboration, where the clash of civilizations is advanced as a substitute for the Cold War, and where the misdeeds of a few are projected onto guilt by the many. Stereotypes abound:

A powerful, hegemonic west, that insists on seeing us through stereotypical eyes: The Arabs and Muslims are intolerant and prone to violence and terrorism, Sub-Saharan Africa is a problem case, riven with war and littered with the corpses of well-intentioned development efforts.

For us, the arrogance of power has blinded the West to its own record of misdeeds in our region, and today, the West, smug in its rich self assurance, insensitive to our predicament, perpetuates the very conditions that prevent us from rising to claim our rightful place among the nations of the world.

We must strive to challenge these prejudices and stereotypes, on both sides. I believe that we reformers in the Arab world will do our part and we stretch out our hands in friendship, confident that—as President Kennedy said—the creation of a new world order is in the interest of all. I hope that this lecture will be perceived in that light.

The Arab societies of today want to define themselves in terms of the present and the future, but still retaining their links to their heritage, without remaining captives of the past. In so doing, they are confronting the dominant, hegemonic constructs of hyper-mediated western societies, that are blithely setting the global agenda from world trade to consumer taste. The images of those western societies seem as pervasive as their discourse. Many in the Arab world, as in many developing countries, fear the spread of this “westernization”, and want to assert their separate cultural identity.

### **What is the Arab World?**

Many in the Western world think of the Arab world as one of oil, deserts and camels, authoritarian governments and militant fanatics. The Arab world is one of the most diversified regions in the world. From the war-torn deserts of Somalia to the chic cosmopolitan streets of Lebanon, from Egypt’s monuments that defy time to Dubai’s gleaming

structures that run ahead of tomorrow's dreams, the Arab world is a seething multi-faceted reality that transcends any short-hand, sound-byte description. It is a classic case of the "blind men and the elephant" where each description is partly right and essentially lacking or wrong. So what makes it one Arab world?

A shared heritage and history for one thing. Islam is an essential component of that, but not all Arabs are Muslims and not all Muslims are Arabs. In fact, the vast majority of Muslims are not Arabs. A shared language, Arabic, and a shared sensibility is certainly part of the equation. Recall also that inter-Arab labor mobility has been very significant in the years that succeeded the oil boom of the 1970s, and has marked the coming-of-age of the now-dominant generation. Above all, the empathy is real. For many Arabs, the issues of Palestine and of Iraq are not distant foreign policy issues, they are deeply felt "family" issues. People react as they would for the catastrophes that befall members of one extended family.

Are there other elements that unify them? Yes. The Arabs are proud people, and today, more than ever, they yearn for freedom, self-rule, democracy and the rule of law. Long postponed in the name of national and international imperatives, reform will no longer be denied. The forces of

change are challenging the forces of stasis on every Arab society. A younger generation is pushing open the gates to the labor force and to public life. Recall that over 50% of the Arab world is under 25 years of age. That, more than anything, has put the Arab Reform Agenda front and center in every Arab capital.

The US avowed and declared intent to promote regime change throughout the Arab world has certainly helped focus national and international attention on the issue, and has helped the simmering pots to boil. Yes, it has certainly removed the evil and tyrannical regime of Saddam Hussein and his cronies, opening the way for a new generation of Iraqis to take charge of their own destinies, and to breathe—for the first time in decades—the air of freedom. It would be disingenuous to ignore the very real problems that remain in Iraq, or to claim that the very considerable achievements, especially with the remarkable success of the 30 January 2005 election, have taken Iraq out of the woods. Much remains to be done. In every country, we need truly national champions of the reform to step up to the plate. Reform, credibly articulated from within, not perceived as the artifact of external forces and their puppets or the result of forced intrusions, is reform that will take root and succeed over the long haul.



## 2. IMPLEMENTING ARAB REFORM

### **A Vision for Arab Reform: Alexandria Declaration**

By early 2004, the ongoing drama of events in the Middle East fueled unprecedented anti-US feeling, and more generalized anger against the injustices of an unfair world, and the major powers in it. Against this background, the calls for Arab reform emanating from the US and the EU generated resentment and suspicion. Most voices in the Arab world rose to reject these proposals and assert that reform cannot be imposed from the outside. Experience has shown that reforms to be successful and lasting must be home-grown and driven by forces inside the societies concerned. It was against that backdrop that the idea of a civil society initiative, based in Alexandria, was born.

In March 2004, from 18 Arab countries, 167 distinguished Arabs gathered in the Library of Alexandria, in Egypt, to firmly and unambiguously state their positions on all the important issues of reform. Could they possibly agree on a coherent statement?

They did. The Alexandria Declaration of March 2004<sup>1</sup> is a remarkable document, for its clarity, its balance and

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<sup>1</sup> The Alexandria Declaration is posted in Arabic, English and French at [www.arabreformforum.org](http://www.arabreformforum.org).

its comprehensiveness. It sets a course and defines a framework, covering everything from Political reforms (democracy, human rights, freedom and the rule of law) to Economic reforms (removing trade barriers, youth employment, regional integration and integration with the world economy) to Social reforms (family, education and the removal of all forms of discrimination against women), to Cultural reforms (the religious discourse as much as the public and media discourse, promotion of rationality and the scientific outlook). It categorically condemns all forms of terrorism, and focuses on the internal situation in many Arab countries. It recognizes that the start positions of many Arab countries are very different. If it does make allowances for these differences, it nevertheless, calls for reforms to be implemented without delay or hesitation.

What is more, the 167 participants actually drafted the document collaboratively, and produced this forthright statement in less than 48 hours of deliberations. They even agreed on a whole program to actively pursue the mobilization of the Arab civil society around the themes of reform, and immediately started implementing this follow-up program, as can be seen from the *Arab Reform Forum*<sup>2</sup> established within 24 hours of the conference in March 2004. Every one of

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<sup>2</sup> See [www.arabreformforum.org](http://www.arabreformforum.org).

the promised actions did actually take place: conferences, lectures, Internet linkages, and discussion forums were all on schedule. A more direct and vibrant involvement of the civil society is beginning to take hold.

A second conference, held exactly one year after the Alexandria Declaration, allowed us to take stock of the situation. The results are quite encouraging. Attended by some 500 delegates from 16 Arab countries, presenting some 120 “success stories” of the actions of the civil society, the conference witnessed a marked change in the tone of the discourse and the tenor of the discussion.

Egyptian President Mubarak, who had encouraged the first meeting with a speech inviting the civil society to be a partner with government in promoting the reform process, again came ahead of the formal opening to the conference and gave a historic speech in which he praised the Alexandria Declaration, and stated that it provided the framework for much of the reform thinking. He saluted it as the authentic voice of the Arab Civil Society and listed some of the momentous developments that he sponsored.

### **The Struggle for Reform:**

#### **An Iron Triangle of Competing Forces**

Today, reformers, including myself, are locked in an enormous struggle with conservative, anti-reformist forces for the

hearts and minds of our people. We are one point of a three-way tug-of-war, an iron triangle of competing forces locked together in an inescapable showdown. The first point of this triangle, and still dominant in many Arab countries, is the remnants of the statist bureaucracies and old-line politicians, ideological heirs to the 1960s socialist centralized power of their secular regimes who battled the Muslim brotherhood, and who to this day fear openness and actively seek to intimidate differing voices and who would use any excuse to do so. The second point of this triangle is their nemesis, the radical right, the Islamist currents, ideological heirs to the Muslim Brotherhood, who would reject the openness to our rapidly changing world, and take us back to a form of theocratic government, where not only the rights of women and minorities are trampled afoot, but also all those who do not agree with the specific interpretation of Islam that is being advocated. These are not the extreme militant groups of fanatics who wage terror on all societies in the name of Islam. They are mainstream groups in society today, and tend to be the most powerful street presence in opposition to the statist forces. Finally, the small but rapidly growing liberal forces of democratization and change constitute the third part of that triangle. By the very nature of the movements that they represent, no two parties of this triangle can actually

form an alliance against the third. They are all locked into a real and profound ideological combat for the future of Egypt and the Arab world.

### **Egyptian Reform: Reviewing the Facts**

Let us take a closer look at Egypt's reform.

Why Egypt? Because in the final analysis, by sheer historical, cultural and demographic weight, Egypt counts in the Arab world.

Quietly, despite the recurring barrage of criticism in the US, and the impatience of some of us reformers who want a faster pace of change, much has been done in Egypt. More serious reform than in any other country in the Arab world!

Let us review some facts.

Much has been done to liberalize the climate of debate and discussion in Egypt, and much remains to be achieved. In Egypt, today, compared to two decades ago, radio and broadcasting channels have increased more than five-fold, public TV channels have increased by 16-fold, reaching 32 public channels—not counting six privately-owned channels, and newspaper numbers have increased almost 20-fold. Most dramatic of all, in the past 7 years, Internet subscribers have increased by more than 50-fold.

Of course, today, TV channels from all over the world are available on cable and satellite, and the number of choices that one has to access news and entertainment is enormous.

Internet subscribers rose from 75,000 in 1997, to 3.3 million in 2004. Freedom of expression on the Internet is absolute, with chat-rooms proliferating, and it is becoming an important alternative source of news in relation to broadcasting (radio and TV).

There is a wide margin of freedom of expression, and governmental legal censorship is light by any standard. Official censorship focuses mostly on extremist Islamist propaganda and hate literature. It tends to approve many films, videos, novels and plays that are considered “obscene” by large segments of society. A vigorous form of political and intellectual censorship, by self-appointed groups, is effectively curtailing the full use of the available freedoms. Different segments of society are struggling to set the boundaries of the permissible and the acceptable. This is a struggle that must be joined on the side of liberty and freedom of thought and expression by all caring individuals.

While the battles with our self-appointed censors continue, the 2004 Alexandria meeting and the new open door to the civil society that it heralded, topped a year of important changes that witnessed the abolition of the hated State Security Courts (but not the Emergency State Security Courts), the creation of a Human Rights Council headed by former UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, a

ban on imprisonment for any journalist on the basis of what they write; and a declaration that the President was ready to discuss even constitutional reform. The Emergency Law could be replaced by a new law on terrorism.

A new government headed by a 52-year old IT specialist and including a number of ministers around 40 years of age, took over in July 2004.

The economic team promptly set to the task of important reforms that were felt within the first six months: they slashed and simplified both taxes and custom tariffs, unified the multiple exchange rates, abolished the crazy-quilt of special exemptions to many industrial ventures, established the qualified industrial zones which had been held up in the limbo of committee discussions for six years. They liberalized the exchange rate transactions, facilitated one-stop-shop investment authority to attract Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), removed the shackles off the commercial banks to operate freely in foreign exchange transactions and revived the stalled privatization program.

In the meantime, the Library of Alexandria continues its program of intense public debates about reform issues: from education, to economics, to youth. We also invited foreign leaders to share their experiences with reform.

All this has provided many in Egypt high hopes that far-reaching reforms are in the air, and that further changes are likely.

Then came the bombshell: President Mubarak called for a constitutional amendment to allow for multi-candidate contested presidential elections to be decided by the popular vote for the first time in Egypt's history.

This enormous step did not receive adequate international attention perhaps because of the highly publicized arrest of an opposition figure.<sup>3</sup> Whatever the legal merits of the case against him, his arrest before trial was a most unfortunate decision. It was subsequently reversed by his release, but not without damage to the image of Egypt internationally. However, I believe that these are the manifestations of rear-guard actions of old statist forces who are disoriented and worried by the President's march towards greater freedom

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<sup>3</sup> The arrest of Mr. Ayman Nour, like that of Professor Saad Eddin Ibrahim two years earlier, received much international publicity and was very negative for the image of the Egyptian Government. It is important to note that the Egyptian Judiciary released Mr. Nour pending trial. In the earlier case against Professor Ibrahim, the Egyptian judiciary rejected the government arguments, reversed the "state security court's" conviction of seven years hard labor, and dismissed all charges against him. These state security courts were subsequently abolished. However, Prof. Ibrahim did end up spending time in jail until his conviction was reversed, and the episode continues to be a major source of international criticism of the Egyptian authorities.



of expression and greater public participation, and by the erosion of State control as market forces gradually take over large parts of economic decision-making.

### **A Civil Society Initiative**

What made the remarkable Alexandria experiment successful was the support of President Mubarak of Egypt to maintain that space of freedom that the Library of Alexandria provided. By design, the conference banned Ministers currently in office, as well as non-Arabs from participation. The intent was to produce a truly independent, home-grown Arab view of reform. President Mubarak not only gave his blessings to this civil society initiative, he also joined us in a special, separate meeting, hours before the scheduled start of the conference, to deliver a speech that invited the civil society to become partners in the long and arduous tasks of reform. He emphasized the need for reform and its urgency, and that the basis for reform must be respect for human rights and the removal of all forms of discrimination against women.

This was the first time that President Mubarak inaugurated a non-governmental affair, and he effectively opened the door to the civil society to play a real role in shaping Egypt's future. Initiative is not the monopoly of government. In his second address the following year, he lauded the efforts that had been exerted, explained his historic decision to ask for

the amendment of the Constitution to allow for contested presidential elections by secret ballot and popular vote, and he lauded the Alexandria Declaration as the framework for much thinking on reform and reaffirmed his belief in the role of the civil society.

It will be up to us—members of the civil society—to push the reform agenda, show imagination and come up with real proposals, promote public discussions and undertake effective actions at the community level as we assume a much bigger role in bringing the Egypt of the 21st century to life.

Today, in the Arab world, everything is still left to the governments to decide, and the public is there, like a spectator, to judge their performance with applause or cat-calls, but not really expecting to participate at all. It is time for the spectators to become engaged citizens, and to take charge of their destiny. That is what a civil society effort is all about, and we have only just begun.

### **3. KEY ELEMENTS OF ARAB REFORM**

Many have focused obsessively on the political dimensions of reform which I have no doubt will eventually emerge. It is the most obvious, and possibly the simplest of the various aspects of reform to achieve. The Alexandria Declaration had,

correctly, focused on the socio-cultural and the economic in addition to the political. Of these, the hardest and arguably the most important will be the socio-cultural dimensions of Arab reform.

### **Liberating the Arab Mind**

Today, I reaffirm that the key element of reform will be our ability to liberate the Arab mind, for it is in our minds that the new Arab renaissance will be created. It is the responsibility of the intellectuals, all of us who drafted the Alexandria Declaration and tens of thousands like us throughout the Arab world, to liberate the Arab mind from the fear of intolerant fanaticism or State despotism, from the shackles of political correctness or the insecurities of being disconnected from a rapidly evolving world. We must liberate the Arab mind so that Arabs can soar, take in from the new and make it their own.

That is the true revolution, creating a new order of things. There is nothing more difficult to take in hand, more perilous to conduct, or more uncertain of success than to take the lead in the introduction of a new order of things, because the innovator has for enemies, all those who have done well under the old conditions, and lukewarm defenders in those who may do well under the new.

It is our destiny to have been here at this time, and we must try; for it is better to try and fail, than to have failed to try. The first thing we must try to break is that sterile, tired and tiresome debate about Modernity and Tradition.

We need to respect tradition, and integrate it into the present, and apply it as a foundation for launching a better future. We need to fashion a critical approach that interprets tradition in contemporary terms, just as the great jurists of the past applied in their day.

Indeed we need to create a new discourse, and that new discourse, critical, open and tolerant of the contrarian view, will be the basis for the creation of a mode of cultural expression. A new language that permeates the arts, letters and the public realm, that incorporates the new but anchors it in the old.

A new language, where in the words of T.S. Eliot ...

*Every phrase and sentence is right  
When every word is at home  
Taking its place to support the others  
The word neither diffident nor ostentatious  
An easy commerce of the old and the new  
The common word exact without vulgarity  
The formal word precise but not pedantic  
The complete consort dancing together*

*Every phrase and every sentence  
is an end and a beginning.*

T.S. Eliot, *Four Quartets*

### **The Modernization of Values and the Values of Modernization**

The modern discourse has internalized what we could term the values of science. Science as a way of thinking, as a world outlook from cosmology to evolution, from quantification to logical deduction, has permeated our outlook and our way of thinking. This is still at odds with the shrill self-righteous discourse that permeates much of the Arab world today. The advocates of that discourse, try to claim a uniqueness to our societies that would justify this disconnect from the global contemporary discourse. They seek refuge in past achievements to avoid confronting future challenges.

Contrary to what some would have us believe, there is much in our Arab–Muslim tradition that has to do with the promotion of science. Today, as we confront the voices of extremism, we can find strength from the legacy of the golden age of our own civilization. Indeed, our culture has much to be proud of. It was very much the Arab–Muslim civilization that helped spawn the Renaissance, and that laid the foundation of the modern experimental method, accepting the authority

of observation and experiment rather than the authority of the ancients. Listen to the modern voice of Ibn Al-Haytham, known in the West as Al Hazen:

“He who searches for truth is not he who reviews the works of the ancients ... It is the duty of he who reads science books, if he wants to learn truths, that he should set himself up as an opponent to all he looks at ... [accepting only what is supported by evidence and argument].”

Ibn Al-Haytham,<sup>4</sup> *Al Shukuk fi Batlaymous*

Likewise, listen to the voice of Ibn Al-Nafis<sup>5</sup> on accepting the contrarian view, subject to the test of evidence and rational analysis.

“When hearing something unusual, do not preemptively reject it, for that would be folly.

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<sup>4</sup> A distinguished Arab mathematician, Ibn Al-Haytham (965–c.1040) was born in Persia, but made his career in Cairo. His *Optics*, which relied on experiment rather than on past authority, influenced Kepler and Descartes.

<sup>5</sup> Ibn Al-Nafis (1213–1288) reputed in medicine and jurisprudence, worked in Mansuriya Hospital in Cairo. His major original contribution of great significance was his discovery of the blood's circulatory system, which was re-discovered by modern science three centuries later. He embarked on writing a medical encyclopedia comprising 300 volumes, and although incomplete at the time of his death, *Al-Shamil fi al-Tibb*, remained a milestone of science and medicine in the medieval period.

Indeed, horrible things may be true, and familiar and praised things may prove to be lies. Truth is truth unto itself, not because [many] people say it is.” Ibn Al-Nafis, *Sharh' Ma'na Al Qanun*

How different these enlightened voices from the past sound compared to the frenetic ranting and condemnations of the new and the difference that we see and hear everywhere in the Arab and Muslim worlds today! Armed with our past legacy of scientific detachment, we can better address the challenges of opening up to the global discourse with its scientific component, and push for the modernization of our values so that they become the values of modernization.

### **The Values of Science**

We must see science as an integral part of our culture, that informs our worldview and affects our behavior. It promotes fundamental ethical values. Indeed, as Bronowski said “Those who think that science is ethically neutral confuse the findings of science, which are, with the activity of science which is not.”<sup>6</sup>

It brings imagination and vision to bear on concrete problems and theoretical speculation. After all, in Blake’s immortal phrase “What is now proved was once only

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<sup>6</sup> J. Bronowski, *Science and Human Values*, pp. 63–64.

imagined.” Imagination and vision are at the very heart of the scientific enterprise. Again, Bronowski put it beautifully when he said “...We are the visionaries of action; we are inspired with change ... We are the culture of living change.”<sup>7</sup>

In fact, the values promoted by that scientific outlook: honesty, honor, truth, and the use of reason, are profoundly Islamic values. These were the values when Islamic science was defined as the contributions that Muslims made to the collective scientific enterprise, rather than an effort to dissociate ourselves from the rigor of scientific debate by claiming a separateness to our scientific enterprise. So let us not allow the essence of these arguments to be sidelined by arguments about Islam and the West. Let us reclaim, as intellectuals, our right to reason, let us liberate the Arab mind.

Let us make use of these liberated minds to create a better future for all. In that framework, the status of women comes to the fore ...

### **The Status of Women**

No issue looms larger on the reform agenda than the status of women. It is the ultimate litmus test for whether the Arab societies have finally made a transition to the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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<sup>7</sup> J. Bronowski, *The Abacus and the Rose*, p.118.



Global experience highlights the emerging centrality of women. They are the true vectors of development. There is ample evidence that the key to development lies in the education of girls and the empowerment of women. These are the single most important actions that any developing society can undertake: the education of girls and the empowerment of women ... Speaking from this podium, as a Muslim Arab man, let me be clear: there is no cultural specificity argument that can be tolerated to justify depriving women of their human rights in the name of tradition, or to mutilate girls in the name of custom.

Indeed, women's rights are human rights. These must be protected by the rule of law, where all are equal before the law, and no-one is above the law.

There is more. Women are not just victims of oppression or vectors of change. They are the artisans of social capital, that lattice of values that is the glue that holds societies together. It is they who repair the torn social fabric of communities in the difficult post-conflict situations. They are the custodians of values, who nurture these values in the next generation.

New civil society movements have emerged. Mrs. Mubarak founded an international movement devoted to women and peace,<sup>8</sup> the first to emerge from the Arab world. I am proud

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<sup>8</sup> See [www.womenforepeaceinternational.org](http://www.womenforepeaceinternational.org).

to work with her and others in a peace movement that is all about empowering women. We must engage all men in this endeavor. Men must not just be made to understand, they must be mobilized. Women's issues are society's issues, and men must be involved. We need to breathe with two lungs!

Crimes against women, such as rape, trafficking and honor killing, reflect pathological behaviors by men. I am appalled by such behavior from members of my sex, and it is clearly an issue for both women and men.

Hand-in-hand, empowered women and enlightened men will build that better future we all dream of. We cannot continue to focus on building the women of tomorrow and not worry about transforming the men of yesterday!

### **A Credo**

The world will judge us by deeds not declarations, and we must "walk the talk" in our effort to promote a culture of peace and justice opposed to the culture of hate. Reform is a journey, not a destination. It is crafted by the serious debate of engaged citizens as they struggle with the challenges of their changing times. Beyond actions, declarations of principles are important. For the principles guide the actions. People need to know where we stand. So allow me here and now to declare what my colleagues and I believe:

The world is my home  
Humanity is my family  
Non-violence is my creed  
Peace, justice, equality and dignity for all is my  
purpose  
Engagement, rationality, tolerance, dialogue,  
learning and understanding are my means.  
With outstretched hands, we welcome all those  
who share these beliefs ...

I submit that a widespread adoption of this credo will make it possible to empower philosophers, writers, artists and critics to pour forth their myriad contributions that fashion culture, identity and the very fabric of society. They are all necessarily the artisans of this new Arab Renaissance. Thus, will they rise up to the tide of challenges that confronts us today ...

#### **4. THE TIDES OF CHANGE**

*There is a Tide ...*

For there is a tide out there ...

*There is a tide ...*

There is a tide of humanity,

a population growing and multiplying  
in the remotest corners of this vast Arab world,  
Millions of young people demanding a right to a decent life,  
a life without fear or despair, a chance to break free of the  
misery of poverty ...  
that tide, that unstoppable tide of human ambition will not  
be denied ...  
and if it is, then it will be a tide of anger, of hate, of violence,  
that will engulf all before it and consume us all in its fiery  
embrace of rejected present and foregone tomorrows.

*There is a tide ...*

A tide of suffering,  
Of children malnourished, stunted, deprived,  
They haunt our television screens and our dreams ...  
In Somalia, in Sudan, ... Our brothers and sisters, our  
children, fellow human beings ...  
Left to their fate ...  
While a new class of rich consumers discuss the prices of  
everything and the value of nothing ...

*There is a tide of ignorance and greed*

that ravages society and destroys our heritage ...  
A tide of intolerance and obscurantism,  
That wants to stop the march of time and freeze our minds

That teaches hatred and fear

But also ...

*There is a tide of new awareness ...*

There is a tide of understanding of our interdependence, not just among economies, but among all people and even all living things ...

A tide of awareness that the rights of all women and minorities and the weak and the poor are indivisible from our own ...

There is a tide of awareness that the past practices of governance and the new specter of intolerance and bigotry cannot be accepted, for they will surely bring misery and wretchedness on our selves and our children ...

There is a tide of awareness that we cannot let the world move into the dawn of a new tomorrow while we remain debating the glories of our yesterdays ...

There is a tide of new technologies, that can help us grapple with the complex realities of our lives ...

There is a tide of new possibilities ...

We have the knowledge, the science, the expertise, to be part of the scientific revolution that is accompanying the new millennium ...

Knowledge that can cure disease and double harvests, bring water to the deserts and create humane cities, where equity and justice can prevail.

There is a tide of possibilities that the genius of the Arab people can unleash ...

Genius can only be unlocked by freedom and thrives on liberty, unbounded inquiry and tolerance.

Yes, *there is a tide ...*

There is a vista of possibilities where the scope of our achievements is bounded only by our imagination and constrained only by our determination to succeed.

Yes ... *there is a tide in the affairs of Men*

*which taken at the flood leads on to fortune ...*

Fortune, not just in terms of more economic growth, although that, too, can be accommodated ...

Fortune, not in terms of accumulation of dollars in national or foreign bank accounts ...

but fortune in terms of true well being.

Fortune in terms of quality of life.

Fortune in terms of the satisfaction of doing what is good.

Fortune in terms of a better understanding of ourselves and our neighbors.

Fortune in terms of leaving a better world for our children, and our children's children,

Yes ...

*There is a tide that leads on to fortune.*

*Omitted, all the voyage of their lives*

*is bound in shallows and in miseries ...*

If we fail in bringing about this change in the way the Arab people think about themselves and the world ...

If we fail to persuade our colleagues in governments, the media, the universities, the streets of our cities and the fields of our countryside ...

If we fail to go beyond the exhortation to do good ...

Then the poor among our nations will indeed be denied, the world will indeed be poorer and future generations will indeed suffer.

Then our future will indeed be bound in shallows and in miseries ...

*On such a full sea are we now afloat,*

*and we must take the current when it serves  
or lose our ventures*

The sea is indeed full, it is full of threats, and full of promise.

We have the opportunity not just to navigate this sea, but in fact to show the way towards a more responsible relationship with each other and with the world, to show how reform can lead to new vistas and how development can be equitable and sustainable.

We will seize these opportunities; we will succeed in creating that better future, that Arab Renaissance ...

For ...

*There is a tide out there ...*

*There is a tide in the Affairs of Men ...*

*Which taken at the flood leads on to fortune.*

*Omitted, all the voyage of their lives*

*is bound in shallows and in miseries.*

*On such a full sea are we now afloat*

*and we must take the current when it serves*

*or lose our ventures.*<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, Act IV.



## **Better Tomorrows**

We will Not lose our ventures.

We will create the new world, guided by a vision ...

A vision of a caring society where (in keeping with Gandhi) there would be

**NO** Politics without principle

**NO** Wealth without work

**NO** Commerce without morality

**NO** Pleasure without conscience

**NO** Education without character

**NO** Science without humanity.

A vision where a people's greatness is measured by the quality of the lives of their poorest citizens not by the size of their armies or the scale of their buildings ...

A vision where the future is for all, as open-ended as knowledge, as random as play, as surprising as human imagination and ingenuity ...

This is the vision of a new future for the Arab world ...

A true Renaissance ...

A vision of a people, secure in their knowledge of themselves, and their openness to the "Other" in a free commerce of ideas and of knowledge ...

Yes! We must change the world ...

It can be done, it must be done, it will be done.

## ENVOI

It is often said that the longest journey starts with but one step. The Alexandria Declaration was a giant step on the right path. It was an exercise in empowerment, and of giving voice to the forces of reform. As we go forward, we are willing to engage with others around the world to learn from their experiences. It is clear however, that reform must be home-grown and driven by forces internal to the societies concerned.

Reform, and more generally development, is like a tree. You can nurture its growth only by feeding its roots, not by pulling on its branches.

Please do help us.

Help us establish links to the rest of the world in the age of the Internet.

Help us by supporting education.

Help us promote rationality, science and technology in our societies.

Help us with your books and your experience.

Help us with access and the free flow of information.

Help us learn to learn.

Help us discover the new and the unknown, in that great human journey of discovery of the self and the universe ...

Help us in myriad ways, but do not try to impose upon us a new form of tutelage.

Perhaps it is time to recall the wise words from a senior US military officer and statesman about how the people of the United States, despite a traumatic ordeal that shook the national psyche to its foundations, should deal with a part of the world torn by war, poverty, disease, and hunger. He said:

“... it is of vast importance that our people reach some general understanding of what the complications really are, rather than react from a passion or a prejudice or an emotion of the moment ... It is virtually impossible at this distance merely by reading, or listening, or even seeing photographs or motion pictures, to grasp at all the real significance of the situation. Yet the whole world of the future hangs on a proper judgment.”

The speaker was General George C. Marshall, outlining the Marshall Plan in an address at Harvard University on 5 June 1947. Surveying the wrecked economies of Europe, Marshall noted the “possibilities of disturbances arising as a result of the desperation of the people concerned.” He said that there could be “no political stability and no assured

peace” without economic security, and that US policy was “directed not against any country or doctrine but against hunger, poverty, desperation, and chaos.”

It is that generous spirit of America that needs to be revived, and in that you will find friends in the Arab and Muslim reformers who will welcome the helping hand of friendship, but not forced dictates of a powerful hegemon. I am optimistic that we will be able to build this understanding based on mutual respect. I am sanguine that you will recognize that the engaged citizen of the Arab world is keen to take charge of his own destiny, rejects tutelage and is unbowed by a history where the doors to freedom and self expression are being opened only now. I am confident that you will hear my voice, symbolic of many other reformers, as I say to you with Henley’s *Invictus*:<sup>10</sup>

*Out of the night that covers me,  
Black as the pit from pole to pole,  
I thank whatever gods may be  
For my unconquerable soul.  
In the fell clutch of circumstance  
I have not winced nor cried aloud.*

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<sup>10</sup> *Invictus* (meaning unconquerable in Latin) was published in 1875 by the poet William Ernest Henley (1849–1903).

*Under the bludgeonings of chance  
My head is bloody but unbowed.  
Beyond this place of wrath and tears  
Looms but the Horror of the shade,  
And yet the menace of the years  
Finds and shall find me unafraid.  
It matters not how straight the gate,  
How charged with punishments the scroll,  
I am the master of my fate:  
I am the captain of my soul.*

Thank you.



# THE FIRST FREEDOM

## Opening address to the International Conference on the Beacon for Freedom of Expression

Bibliotheca Alexandrina  
18 September 2004

### 1. WHY FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION?

Today, the Library of Alexandria lives again. By our gathering and our commitment, we represent the values that the Ancient Library stood for, by our presence and our actions we give content to the slogans and take firm steps on the path of asserting the principles we stand for.

Freedom of expression is today recognized as a universal gain. It was not always so. Even in the golden age of ancient Greece, Socrates was put to death, and Plato's republic was an Orwellian nightmare. The last few millennia have been one long struggle for acceptance of human rights, of expanding the scope for freedom of choice and of action...all of which would not have been possible without the freedom of expression, gained slowly and at great cost, and persistently defended again and again, at all times, in all places, against

the incursions that are constantly waged against it by the forces of societal repression.

We value freedom of expression above all other freedoms because it is the foundation of self-fulfillment. “The right to express one’s thoughts and to communicate freely with others affirms the dignity and worth of each and every member of society, and allows each individual to realize his or her full human potential. Thus, freedom of expression is an end in itself—and as such, deserves society’s greatest protection”.

*ACLU (American Civil Liberties Union)*

Without free speech, no search for truth is possible, no discovery of truth is useful, and no progress is possible. Without freedom of inquiry, and of expression, there can be no scientific advancement. Freedom, as much as imagination and boldness, is at the heart of the search for the truth and the attainment of knowledge. The history of science is replete with official repression, from Hypatia to Galileo. Even today, there are those who would restrict the teaching of evolution, or dismiss the findings of genetics.

It is necessary to any viable system of self-government. If people are to make decisions and elect their government, if they are to check its excesses and root out corruption, they must be well-informed and have access to different ideas and points of view. Mass ignorance is a breeding ground for



intolerance and bigotry, which in turn leads to oppression and tyranny. John Stuart Mill, contended that enlightened judgment is possible only if one considers all facts and ideas, from whatever source, and tests one's own conclusions against opposing views.

Freedom of expression is needed, because there is no telling when a minority view—often considered “bad” or socially harmful—will become a majority view ... So much of what we take for granted today such as independence for the colonies, abolition of slavery, universal suffrage, basic human rights and women's rights not to mention children's rights, all were once considered dangerously seditious. In the end, only ideas defeat ideas. Victor Hugo is quoted as saying that invading armies can be defeated, but you cannot defeat an idea whose time has come! Society benefits by having a market-place of ideas.

Finally, expression is not just in language in its spoken or written form. It is also in the language of art as much as of science. That is why Egyptian Law No.1 for 2001 concerning the Library of Alexandria has listed in Article 1, that ... [the BA should be concerned with]... “all products of the human mind, in all languages, from all cultures, ancient and recent.” It recognizes the language of music and painting and sculpture as much as the language of words and sentences.

The Bibliotheca Alexandrina (BA) is dedicated to all forms of expression.

## 2. EGYPT TODAY

The New Library of Alexandria was born in Egypt during interesting times. Much has been done to liberalize the climate of debate and discussion in Egypt, and much remains to be done. Compare the situation in Egypt today with what it was like in the 1980s. Just in terms of numbers:

- The licensed newspapers rose from 27 in 1982 to 504 today, not counting about 1100 journals (of which about 585 are scholarly);
- Radio and broadcasting channels rose from 106 in 1982 to 529 today;
- Public TV channels rose from 2 in 1982 to 32 today, in addition to 6 privately-owned channels.

Today, TV channels from all over the world are available on cable and satellite, and the number of choices that one has to access news and entertainment is enormous.

The real revolution is happening on the World Wide Web. From 1996/97 to 2004, the number of websites located in Egypt (ending in “.eg”) rose from 591 to 24,226; while the number of ISPs has risen from 40 to over 200, and subscribers

rose from 75,000 to 3.3 million. I will have more to say about these other forms of expression: broadcasting (radio and TV) and the Internet.

Just let me add that the number of books published during 2003 was 7,675; and during January to August 2004, over 5,000 books have been published.

There is a wide margin of freedom of expression, and governmental legal censorship is light by any standard. However, a vigorous form of political and intellectual censorship by self-appointed groups is effectively curtailing the full use of the available freedoms. Different segments of society are struggling to set the boundaries of the permissible and the acceptable. This is a struggle that must be joined on the side of liberty and freedom of thought and expression by all caring individuals. However, in its essence, it is no different than the ongoing struggles that all societies confront at all times.

### **3. SOCIETAL QUANDARIES**

If societies have increasingly come to accept that freedom of expression is beneficial and should be protected, they have also sought to limit it in various ways. This is true in varying degrees of all societies. It holds for France and the United States as much as for Egypt and other Arab countries. My

colleagues and I have prepared some thoughtful studies on issues of censorship in the Arab world and have documented some testimonials and case studies of interest.

Leaving the extreme cases, it makes sense to consider what form of boundaries, if any, should be placed on free speech. Most societies legislate to strike a balance between the interests of the community and the rights of the individual. That boundary is never absolute. Recall the words of American Justice Holmes “The most stringent protection of free speech would not protect a man in falsely shouting fire in a theater and causing a panic”. [Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. (1841–1935), Supreme Court opinion. *Schenk vs. the United States*, *Baer vs. the United States*, 249 US 52 (1919)]. However, most cases are seldom so clear-cut!

Since we are talking of books and art, let us focus on a few of the key cases that have been much in the press in Egypt in the past few years, and specifically the issues of the presence of books in libraries as opposed to distribution, and the right of the artist to have the State subsidize their work with taxpayer money.

Those concerned with this issue inevitably cite the cases of the storm over the book of *Haidar Haidar (A Banquet for Seaweed)*, the case of Maxime Rodinson’s book on Muhammad at the AUC and the three books that were being

published by the Ministry of Culture and were withdrawn under a barrage of objections. All of these cases are real, but are rather misinterpreted.

In every society, there is an ongoing debate about the boundaries of the socially acceptable, especially for schools and for taxpayer-supported activities. Thus the United States, considered by most journalists to be the paragon of free speech, saw a vociferous minority effectively block the teaching of Darwin in the State of Kansas. This is less than ten years ago, where for two years evolution was not taught in the schools of Kansas until the governmental decision was rescinded as a result of a direct campaign by American scientists. School districts in Florida and Texas have raised questions about the suitability of J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* and the appropriateness of the image of blacks in Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*. Efforts to ban these books from the schools and from the shelves of the public libraries continue to this day.

Regardless of the merits of the cases concerned, they all highlight the fact that society makes a distinction between what is the right of Twain or Salinger to write or say, and what is appropriate to be in a school curriculum. The question of Rodinson's biography of Muhammad falls into the same category. Whether the AUC, as a private institution should

be forced to abide by a majority view or even to take into account the views of irate parents or even of the Minister of Higher Education is another matter.

The objections of the majority, or even a vocal minority, to what they deem to be offensive in what others consider to be works of art is as old as art itself. The church fathers found Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel offensive, and even forced some additional painting to cover the genitalia of the nudes. That gesture is today viewed with derision, but in its day, it reflected a timeless conflict between conservative views and art. More recently, in the United States, the conflict over what constitutes art, and what is acceptable to view in public, has been tested all the way to the Supreme Court, leading to the famous statement by Justice Potter Stewart that while he could not define pornography legally, he could recognize it when he saw it. The inherently subjective boundaries of the acceptable are defined by different communities differently at different times and different places. This is a societal function, where the rights of the minority view to exist, does not mean that the majority has to condone it or support it. All societies try to protect children and the weak from "inappropriate material"... That is why we have ratings to guide parents taking children into films, but we do not forbid the production of the films.

Should the State (with taxpayer money) subsidize the production of works that are inherently offensive to the vast majority of these taxpayers?

That question was brought into vivid relief in the US by the cases of the Mapplethorpe exhibit and the Serrano sculpture. In the 1990s, Robert Mapplethorpe's portfolio of pictures, largely erotic and homosexual, was deemed pornographic, and the Corcoran Gallery cancelled the show under intense pressure, while Serrano's crucifix in urine resulted in a debate in Congress on the appropriateness of using taxpayer money to support activities that were deemed offensive by the vast majority of those paying the taxes. That is the same issue that underlies the question of the three books withdrawn by the Egyptian Ministry of Culture under intense public pressure.

Indeed it is relevant to highlight that [in *NEA vs. Finley et al.*, 1998] the Supreme Court of the US found that not being funded by the State for your artistic project does not constitute a first amendment breach against your freedom of expression. What about cases where the State effectively controls most of the forums of expression?

Finding a balance between the wishes of the majority and the rights of the minority is what it is all about. The same situation arises in other contexts and other countries as well.

The questions are difficult to answer, and every society has to define its own boundaries.

Yet, this is not a case of moral relativism, for no society should be allowed to define its own boundaries in ways that infringe upon the fundamental rights of the minority. Any local perception of boundaries must, at a minimum, respect what has been defined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The Universal Declaration represents that core set of rights that individuals possess by virtue of being human, without regard to the society to which they belong. Not all great democracies can pass that test either: the US still favors the death penalty and a number of European countries have refused to extradite persons to the US for that reason.

Back to the issues of censorship. In the case of the United States, the questioning of the use of public funds to finance artistic products that the majority of taxpayers find offensive is no different than the questioning of the Egyptian Ministry of Culture about its publication and distribution of three books that many Egyptians find offensive. The case of the pressures exercised on the Corcoran Gallery to cancel the Mapplethorpe exhibit are the same as the pressures exercised by segments of society in Egypt to withdraw from circulation the *Haidar* book. The pressures on the Kansas schools to forbid the teaching of evolution, and the public school



reading lists and public library shelves under assault from conservative forces in American society are no different than the Egyptian conservatives assault on the AUC curriculum and the public distribution of books they find offensive. In the case of the US, the sources of the conservative wing tend to be Christian, while in Egypt they tend to be Muslim. It is to be expected given the religious affiliations of the majority of the population in the two countries.

These clashes over boundaries are really clashes between the conservative and liberal wings of any society, and tend to be fought over time and again.

There can be no question as to my personal position on these issues. Our presence, all of us here today, attests to our collective commitment to freedom of expression.

One more societal quandary must be mentioned. The new media, from TV to the Internet are amazingly ubiquitous. They effectively can intrude into our living rooms, in our very homes. The chance of exposure of the very young to materials that we as parents may not consider them ready to see, or to have them preyed on by pedophiles, is real. It is a different matter than saying that if you do not like a book, you do not have to buy it; or that if you do not like a movie, do not go to see it. Yet, freedom of expression is as important in these new media as anywhere. We must defend it even

there. It is here that parental involvement and guidance maybe more important than direct government intervention. Definitely, some wise balances will have to be tracked. It is a societal quandary for the new century.

Let me address the more insidious form of censorship that forged in the crucible of religious or political intolerance, and societal indifference or acceptance.

#### **4. INDIRECT CENSORSHIP**

The public discourse in any country is dominated by the views of the majority, which in times of stress can be whipped up by an active minority to a high degree of intolerance. This has been seen in the US following the disastrous monstrosity of 11 September where the Patriot Act was passed and sweeping powers granted to the Government, raising questions of basic civil and political rights so cherished by Americans and enshrined in the American Constitution and its Bill of Rights. It is found in other societies as well.

In Egypt, today, the climate of concern, and the general feeling of anger and frustration with a world that seems, to many Arabs and Muslims, to be hostile to the aspirations of the entire Muslim and Arab peoples, leads many to seek a lost purity and a sense of security in a golden mythical past. This forces a discourse where deviations from appearances of

religiosity and adherence to the prevailing political views of the majority is severely sanctioned socially and in vehement political attacks, and even occasionally in physical threats, abuse and even assassination. It takes courage to stand up for the contrarian view. Frequently, people give in to this tide of obscurantism and xenophobia and undergo a self censorship that is as Draconian as any that is imposed by the State.

It is here that principle must triumph over pragmatism. It is here that ideas of tolerance, rationality and pluralism must be advanced and defended. It is here that the BA stands as a rallying point for those who support such values.

Libraries have a major role to play, and the BA has an especially relevant role to play here ... The availability of this material somewhere is not only needed for the collective memory of a society, or even for a balanced view of the world, it is very much what people expect of libraries. Libraries are the champions of freedom of expression, because it is their vocation to be custodians of the products of the human mind. Indeed, it is not surprising to note that the Boston Coalition for Freedom of Expression, which started offering awards in 1990; its first award went to the ACLU, and its second award to the American Library Association.

I recently answered a question by someone concerned about whether an offensive book could be found in the

Library, and why it should be there. My answer was, that there is a difference between the availability of material sitting passively in a library and the active distribution of material to the public. There is a difference between scholarly gatherings and mass events. Besides, if that concerned person wanted to write a rebuttal to that book he found so offensive, where would he go to find a copy, if not at a library?

Indeed reference libraries, such as the Vatican Library, held copies of all the banned books, even at times when people were being burned at the stake for reading these banned works!

**My friends,**

The real issues of censorship: from Taha Hussein to Nasr Hamid AbuZeid are not so much government actions or the legislative climate, even if that can certainly be improved ... The real issue is in the intolerance that permeates a society ... the unwillingness to recognize that the only legitimate way to defeat an idea is with another idea, not by harassment or banning of books...

The BA is committed to help create this space of freedom for dialogue between individuals, cultures and civilizations...

## 5. BANNED BOOKS

The Banned Books of the world represent a strange mixture of great classics and marginal and obscure works. Yet, they have succeeded at some level to challenge the conventions of their times and place and to force people to think ... even if to reject the offending material... Such books represent an important research resource for scholars from all over the world, and the affirmation of the importance of their presence somewhere is an affirmation of the importance that we attach to freedom of expression. In the end, it is offending speech that needs protection, not acceptable speech. Societies are well-served if they remember that and recall Voltaire's dictum: "I may differ with your views, but I am willing to lay down my life to protect your right to express these views I disagree with"...

Today, at the BA, with our distinguished visitors and many friends, we assert that right by housing a bibliographic listing of all those books.

Today, by our international conference we assert our commitment to freedom of expression.

Today, in a world riven by hate, suspicion and war, we affirm the vision of the BA as a place of openness, dialogue and understanding.

Today, we confirm that scientific research, as much as artistic expression, require freedom.

Today, we assert once more that freedom of expression and democracy are indivisible.

Today, remembering our annual display of the World Press Photo exhibition in our Main Reading Hall, we underline our link to the press of the world and to the mirror that they hold to our societies where we still spend 14 times more on military than on development.

Today, the BA stands proudly to house the Beacon for Freedom Project and the Arab Reform Forum, and we look forward to working with all like-minded persons to advance these goals...

## **6. THE DAWN OF A NEW ERA**

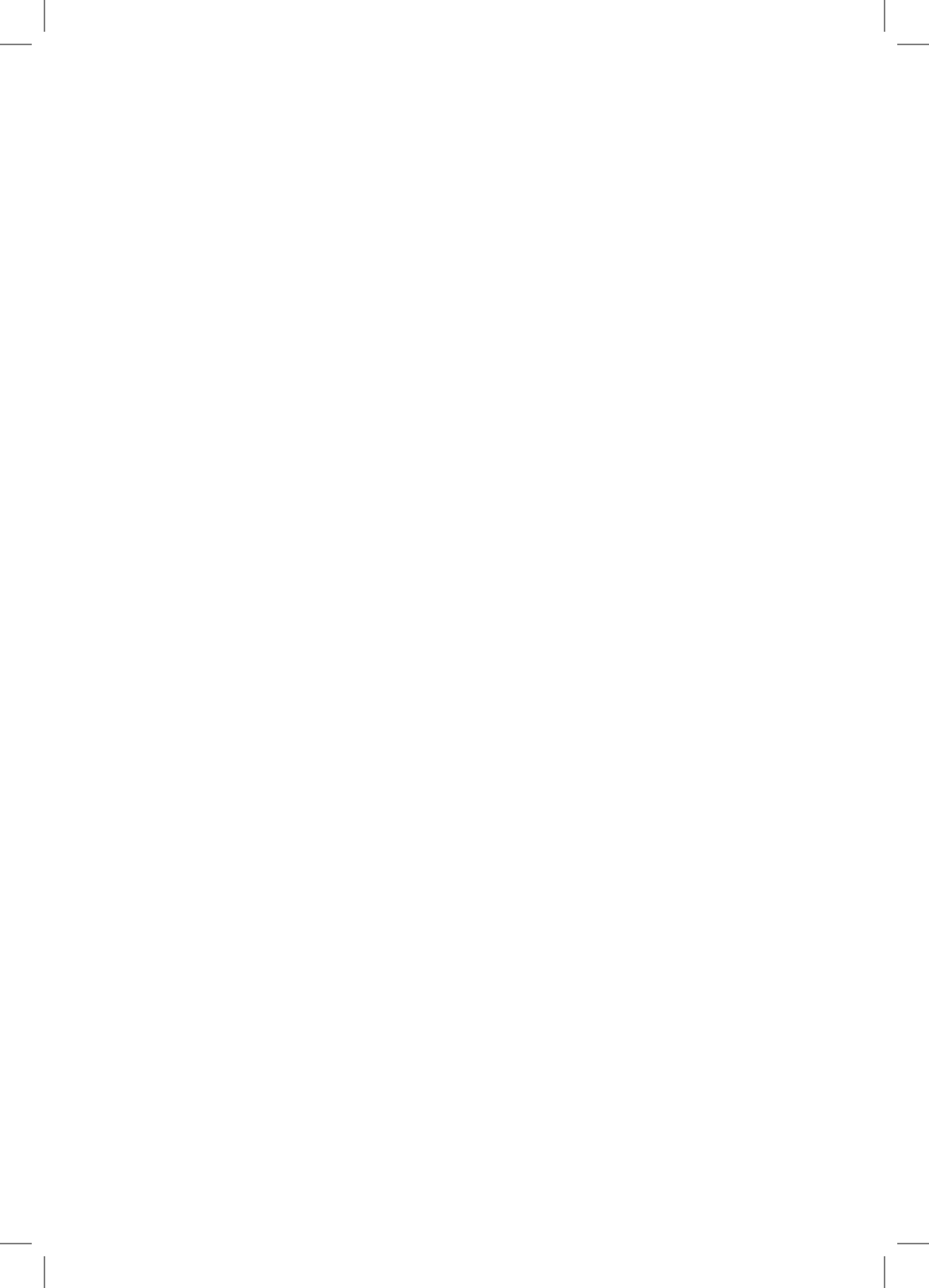
As we look into the past history of humanity: banned books and works of art have been part of the long struggle for emancipation. We have discussed the special role of libraries in this matrix of issues that each society struggles with ... Today, at the BA, we are also conscious that we need to open up the windows and in the words of Gandhi, engraved under his bust in the Library:

“I do not want my windows to be stuffed ... I want all the cultures of the world to blow about my house freely, but I refuse to be blown off my feet by any...”

We are at the dawn of a new age, where the digital future beckons, and calls to us into lands unknown ... where copyright and legal issues will be different, but where the greatest dreams become possible ... to have all material available at all times from anywhere to everywhere... The Internet will make this possible... The BA is proud to be the only existing back-up center for the Internet Archive outside California. The new revolution in ICT makes practices of the past moot, and confounds old legal definitions of what is published publicly and what is private... Whether this new world will be a libertarian jungle, with no rules other than the market remains to be seen... The market is a good servant but a bad master...

This is the task for the future ... to create some order out of chaos, to make the valuable more readily accessible, while seeking to protect the rights of all to freedom of expression...

To build this new digital world of connectivity and content, we must go forth and fashion the wise constraints that make people free...





# GOVERNANCE, COMPETITIVENESS AND THE ARAB FUTURE

*World Economic Forum for the Arab Competitiveness Report*

14 January 2005

## THE MEANING OF GOVERNANCE

About 20 years ago, a number of us at the World Bank were concerned about the long-term perspectives for Africa. Some of us felt strongly that there was something more to the equation than the likely price of primary commodities, or the availability of natural resources or the productivity level of African labor. It was summed up in the view: no matter what you analyze and prescribe, we all know that unless there is a radical change in the manner in which some of these governments are run, nothing will happen. There will be no development in Zaire as long as Mobutu is in charge, there will be no development in Central African Republic (or empire) as long as Bokassa is in charge. However, the World Bank strictly forbids taking political factors into consideration in assessing the viability of an operation, instructing the staff to look only into the economic justifications for the loan.

We thereupon hit upon the word governance. I went on in an influential internal memorandum to spell out that governance was not about whether the system was two-party or multi-party, parliamentary or presidential—which would have been overtly political—but rather good governance was about transparency, accountability, pluralism, participation, the rule of law and free flow of information. That these characteristics would also be those that would foster democracy and respect of human rights I had no doubt. However, the arguments for good governance could be framed in economic terms. In the absence of these characteristics, the economy would not attract investment, especially FDI, except for sharks using bribery, which would cost the country a lot.

From these early days, the implicit was made explicit. Democracy, the respect for human rights and gender equality became widely accepted as key components of the concept of good governance. To these nine characteristics, a tenth can now be added: a learning environment that nurtures innovation and respects youth. All these characteristics work in concert to define a state of good governance. Thus an excessive assertion of cultural specificity cannot be allowed if it contravenes one group's fundamental human rights or gender equality.

To operationalize the concept of good governance, a few words about each of these ten characteristics may be pertinent. First, I would like to introduce the concepts of development as freedom and sustainability as opportunity.

### **DEVELOPMENT AS FREEDOM**

Development as Freedom was brilliantly articulated by Amartya Sen in a series of lectures at the World Bank, later published in a book by the same title. Freedom of choice is fundamental to human well-being, and development is about maximizing the domain of choices for all people. A society of well-fed, well-educated slaves is not what anyone would aspire to. Implicit in this definition is also the reduction of poverty, since the poor are circumscribed by their poverty from exercising the range of choices that others in a society are capable of.

From an economic point of view, we value the availability of options and the ability of persons to exercise choice as consumers, for without it, there is no functioning market mechanism. Market failures, in terms of asymmetry in information, or monopolistic or oligopolistic practices are terrible, but so is the inability of large numbers of people to participate in the market by freely exercising choices. “Good Governance” as defined by the ten characteristics

mentioned above, would nurture greater participation and lead to reduction of poverty in the sense that Amartya Sen described. Good governance is not only compatible with “development as freedom”, it is essential for it.

### **SUSTAINABILITY AS OPPORTUNITY**

The words “sustainable development” have become part of our lexicon following the Brundtland Commission Report (*Our Common Future*, 1987) and the widespread acceptance of the environmental agenda after the 1992 Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit. Then the following definition was made famous “Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”

This is philosophically appealing, but the concept is not operational. Needs are obvious enough for starving people, but what does it mean for people who already own two cars and three TVs? It is the well-off in the world who consume about 85% of world output, not the starving poor. The concept of “needs” was not actually operational to guide development policy.

A number of us went on to redefine the concept into “Sustainability is giving future generations as many opportunities as, if not more than, we have had ourselves”...

This is very close to the Brundtland philosophy, but has the advantage of being operational. This means giving future generations as much or more capital per person than we have today. We went on to re-define the concept to include four kinds of capital: man-made, natural, human and social capital. These were partially substitutes and partially complements.

We quantified the concepts and made estimates of the real wealth of nations. We did two rounds of calculations, adding up to 300 country studies over two-time periods. The results were always the same: Human and social capital accounted for about 60% to more than two-thirds of the actual wealth of nations. Man-made capital (produced assets) accounted for 15%–20% and natural capital (including ecological services) for the rest.

Instead of economists continuously refining their measurement and understanding of man-made capital that seldom accounted for more than 20% of the total, they should focus on a better understanding of the remaining 80% and especially that all important human and social capital components.

Human and social capitals are not the same. Human capital is embedded in the human being, and moves with the person when he or she migrates. Social capital is the glue that holds society together. It builds trust, promotes shared

values and allows transactions to take place while nurturing solidarity.

Thus, Somalia and former Yugoslavia have wide differences on the level of human capital that they enjoyed; yet, both societies unraveled due to a lack of social capital that could hold sub-groups within the national framework and its presumed shared identity.

Social capital is essential for good governance. It is the shared values of society that enable social solidarity to exist, and it is these values that enable a society to enact laws transparently and abide by them. If the precepts of good governance were essential for the proper economic investment climate, they are even more important for the very concept of nurturing social capital. Good governance and social capital tend to interact in a mutually reinforcing fashion, each drawing strength and reinforcing the other.

Indeed this was a primary result of the pioneering work of Robert Putnam in Italy (*Making Democracy Work*, 1993), which showed that civic mindedness, and the density of voluntary horizontally-based associative institutions of the civil society resulted in responsive government, and high efficiency of public services as well as noticeably better economic performance and social services.

## **GOOD GOVERNANCE AND DEVELOPMENT**

So there we have it: Good governance is essential for development as an element of freedom, and it is essential for the promotion of social capital and to ensure sustainability of development. Beyond that, it is also the guarantor of human dignity. With corrupt and inefficient governments, not to mention despotic ones, we are all at risk of being humiliated and deprived of our fundamental human rights. It is also desirable, as an end in itself, not just as a means to other laudable goals. Good governance is the embodiment of our creative involvement as responsible citizens. It is the product of our actions as citizens, it is our creation, and we should be proud of it.

## **GLOBALIZATION AND THE LESSONS FROM THE PAST**

What about competition and globalization? Surely, the competitive globalizing world in which we live has no place except for the fast and the powerful. Compassion is for the weak. This is the dawn of a new age; let the weak complain, for they cannot stop the march of history, etc.

“... exploitation of the world market [has] given a cosmopolitan character to production

and consumption in every country ... All old-fashioned industries have been destroyed. They are dislodged by new industries, whose introduction becomes a life-and-death question for all civilized nations ... In place of old wants, we find new wants, requiring for their satisfaction the products of distant lands and climes. In place of the old local and national seclusion and self-sufficiency, we have intercourse in every direction, universal inter-dependence of nations.”

Contemporary as they sound, these words do not come from the present. They are from Karl Marx’s *The Communist Manifesto* of 1848. The pangs we are feeling today are remarkably similar to those felt during the industrial revolution two centuries ago. The question before us is whether we have learned from that experience to design a more humane way of dealing with the inevitable wrenching that accompanies such processes of technological change.

To avoid repeating the problems of the industrial revolution, from child labor to the robber barons, from widespread urban misery to massive inequities, we must harness the emerging universal values of our common humanity, and create a coalition of the caring to ensure that good governance



satisfies the basic needs of the destitute, respects the human rights of all and ensures well-being and prosperity.

We must recognize that the private sector will not take care of public goods, and that the public must remain engaged to deal with market failures and public goods.

We must change the calculus of our economics and finance, to internalize the full social and environmental cost of our decisions. Some headway is being made on this at the local level, but we have certainly not even begun to introduce the global costs of local actions at the level of national policy. We must rectify our national accounts that count a forest standing as zero and give it a positive value only if it is chopped down.

We should measure the growth in our capital stock not just the growth in the volume of our activities. We should be concerned with nurturing natural capital and building human and social capitals as much as we are about economic growth.

All of that is possible. It will not diminish the vibrancy of the entrepreneurial spirit, nor will it curb economic growth, a prerequisite for effective action against poverty, nationally and globally. It will help make new investments environmentally-friendly and socially responsible.

Such measures will not affect any of the positive aspects of globalization, which remains an important positive force

in today's world. Small countries of the developing world can escape the limits of small domestic markets by selling to the whole world. They can tap literally endless sources of funds if they have the ideas and the abilities. The premium on the knowledge-based societies of the future means that they will be less dependent on their specific natural resource endowments. All of that will favor the nimble and the educated.

Good governance, by its inclusionary aspects, its inherent social conscience and the practice of democracy that it inevitably brings about, is a good safeguard that competition is matched with compassion, and that we do not repeat the same mistakes that accompanied the industrial revolution.

## **FREE MARKETS AND COMPETITIVE MARKETS**

I would like to ban the word “free markets” from our lexicon, because it has been misinterpreted in so many quarters. What we really mean is “competitive markets”. If Wall Street represents the quintessential “free market” let me remind you that it is one of the most severely regulated. You have to file certain types of audited financial data. If a person acquires more than 5% of the equity of a company, it has to be publicly acknowledged. Insider trading is criminalized

and prosecuted. Anti-trust laws to prevent monopoly are in place, and are enforced.

All competitive markets require an effective state apparatus behind them: property rights, binding contracts and effective judiciary to name but a few. A totally “free market” is an invitation to predators, as we saw in the Pyramid scheme, that almost caused a civil war in Albania shortly after its independence.

Yet, the international capital markets are more similar to those of Albania at the time of the Pyramid schemes than they are to Wall Street today. The volatility is unbelievable and the inadequacy of the current level of oversight practiced by the international agencies, especially the IMF, is obvious. There is a real need to strengthen that oversight, and temper the volatility of the markets. This will require greater discipline from all countries, and a voluntary relinquishing of some of their sovereignty in the interest of all.

## **THE ARAB WORLD TODAY**

How does all this square with the experience and practice of development in the Arab world? There is no question that to be competitive the Arab world needs to improve its Governance. By that, I mean that Arab societies must ensure that they are global leaders—not reluctant followers—in

the promotion of transparency, accountability, pluralism, participation, the rule of law and free flow of information. Democracy, the respect for human rights and gender equality are essential. These are the qualities that promote both human and social capitals; they are not incompatible with our traditions or our cultural identity. Far from it, a proper reading of our heritage demands it.

No claim to cultural specificity can be given sanction if it deprives women of their basic human rights in the name of convention or mutilates girls in the name of custom.

Educating girls and empowering women is one aspect of the transformation that brings good governance and competitiveness together. A society cannot hobble half its population and expect to compete effectively with one that nurtures the talents of all its people. Likewise, we cannot stifle the young, and expect the imaginative designs of tomorrow to emerge from the old. We must create a learning environment that nurtures innovation and respects youth. All these characteristics work in concert to define a state of good governance. Will the Arabs actually do all this? I say, yes.

The Arabs, some cynics say, will never miss an opportunity to miss an opportunity. Untrue. If given half a chance, the Arabs, can do a lot. In March 2004, at the Library of

Alexandria, Egypt, 167 distinguished Arabs from 18 Arab countries met at a time, and in circumstances, where political volatility is legendary, squabbling is common, and real agreement seems to be always just beyond reach. Could they possibly agree on a coherent statement?

They did. The outcome was the remarkable document “The Alexandria Declaration” of March 2004. The Arab world today is moving, albeit not as fast as some of us would like, but it is moving faster than our critics would recognize. Everywhere female education enrolments are up, university education is expanding and there is growing attention to the quality of education, not just its quantity. Nevertheless, that record remains uneven, with enormous disparities between individual countries, and even between different aspects within a single country.

## **ENTER THE CIVIL SOCIETY**

Reform in the Arab world is on every agenda. There is so much talk that many questions that the verbiage is a smokescreen for inaction. I do not believe so. I believe that action on reform has started and will intensify. However, how you do reform is as important as what the reform is. Reform, true reform, is not by government edict alone. It involves the citizens and promotes participation. It depends on a

true partnership between government and the civil society. An informed and engaged citizenry is the best guarantor of lasting success and enduring change.

Mobilizing the civil society can become a very potent force for change. It creates the climate within which once unthinkable decisions become easy. It transforms the relationship between the government and the citizens. Mobilizing the civil society is by engaging the intellectuals and working at the grass-roots. It is to build coalitions of the caring on issue after issue. It is different from building a political party, which is expected to have a coherent platform on many issues. It is different from lobbying governments for a specific purpose.

Decisions achieved by behind-the-scenes lobbying in dark corridors are antithetical to the true spirit of openness that reform, true reform, should require.

I have personally had experience of working with eminent civil society leaders to build vast civil society efforts on an international scale. Whether it was the call to place water on the international developmental agenda, or making micro-finance acceptable to the international financial institutions, or directing the spotlight on the issues of youth employment, or other efforts to improve the design of environmental policies, all these efforts have convinced me that it is more

than just the adoption of formal resolutions by governments. Building a movement takes time, dedication and effort.

It is about building alliances and getting the largest possible number of people to actually become involved in a participatory fashion to achieve results on the ground. Of course, government legislation needs to be passed, and good governance needs to be ensured, but such matters are assisted and reinforced by the presence of an engaged civil society.

The Arab civil society is stirring. Some of its members met and crafted a statement that would express their own aspirations, free from external interference or coaching, whether from current governments or foreign powers. The Alexandria Declaration of March 2004 is a remarkably comprehensive document, that calls for far ranging reforms in the political, economic, social and cultural arenas.

They called for a civil society effort to implement reform from the bottom upwards, not just rely on the top-down formulas of the past. Civil society must work with governments. Reform is everyone's business. Recall the experience of Italy recorded in Putnam's pioneering work.

Mobilizing the civil society is driven by a different logic than that which governs inter-governmental conclaves from the United Nations to the Arab League. It is also very different from the widespread attitude of apathy and disengagement

that prevails in many parts of the Arab world where everything is left to the governments to decide, and the public is there—like a spectator—to judge their performance with applause or cat-calls, but not really expecting to participate at all. It is time for the spectators to become engaged citizens, and to take charge of their destiny. That is what a civil society effort is all about, and we have only just begun.

What about Arab Governments?

## GOVERNMENT ACTION AT COUNTRY LEVEL

To respond to global shocks and make effective use of new opportunities, Arab Governments must have effective action in some key areas.

**First, credible macro-management of the economy.** The preeminent role of government in setting and maintaining the proper macro-economic fundamentals is essential for any effective growth, as well for a well-functioning competitive economy. The costs of inflation and over regulation tend to be felt, above all, by the poor.

**Second, flexible institutions.** The one common denominator of the global knowledge driven economy of the new millennium is the pace of change itself. The successful, competitive economies of the future, those that will be crating the jobs and the prosperity for their people, will be the flexibility of their



institutions. Institutions capable to recognize and interact with the emerging market opportunities halfway around the globe, or the new technologies, such as the Internet, or satellite mapping and telecommunications, that make the obsolescence of what we invested in an ongoing fact of life.

**Third, facilitate the flow of knowledge and information.** The world is awash in more information than ever before, and governments that try to regulate that flow will be placing their enterprises at a distinct competitive disadvantage. The future will require more access to open communications and information at a speed that will defy our current thinking and that will exceed most of what we can imagine today.

**Fourth, investment in human and social capital.** With so much emphasis on the concerns of promoting economic growth and protecting the environment, we must reaffirm the essential role of human and social capitals. The future is going to be a knowledge-based society, and that will require enormous and continuously upgraded skills. This means that education, health and nutrition of persons are a primary competitive asset as well as being the best investment that societies can achieve.

It is essential for both equity and economy. Equally important, is to strive to build up the shared values, the legitimacy of the institutions of mediation in a society, for

that is the essential glue that holds societies together and allows them to function.

**Fifth**, *to enhance inter-Arab cooperation*: starting with trade, which is very low compared to other regions, and to learn from the European experience, and focus on the nitty-gritty unglamorous, but essential tasks of customs deregulation, harmonization of banking and investment regulations.

**Sixth**: *All governments should enact enabling legislations that allow the civil society to flourish.*

The civil societies, for their part, must be much more involved. From local to global, the civil society is the agent of change and the catalyst for transformation. Good governance and competitiveness go hand-in-hand. We can create a better future at home, while simultaneously competing and collaborating with the rest of the world. We can retain our identities and values in tandem while opening up to the rest of the world. We can realize our common vision for a better future.

## **A VISION OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

Beyond competitiveness and good governance, there is the vision of a better future.

A vision that sees Development like a tree: it can be nurtured in its growth by feeding its roots, not by pulling on its branches.

A vision where Freedom and well-being are the ends for which development is the means. Freedom of choice, to all individuals must respect the fundamental human rights of all others. Societies must fashion the wise constraints that make people free.

A vision where Progress, real progress, is to empower the weak and the marginalized, working in harmony with nature, to become the producers of their own bounty and welfare, not the recipients of charity or the beneficiaries of aid.

A vision of Sustainability as Opportunity, dedicated to leave future generations as many, if not more, opportunities than we have had ourselves.

This is the vision of sustainable development, a vision that is people-centered and gender-conscious, that seeks equity for all and recognizes the interdependence of all living things. An ethical vision, that will lead us to act fairly to each other, to nature and to future generations. It is a vision worthy of the Arab world at the start of the new millennium.



# IS DEMOCRACY POSSIBLE IN THE MIDDLE EAST?

*Address to*

**The Brookings–Ahrām Meeting**

Bibliotheca Alexandrina

8 March 2007

Welcome to the Bibliotheca Alexandrina (BA), the New Library of Alexandria, that seeks to be a worthy heir to the Ancient Library of Alexandria.

We are engaged in the pursuit of knowledge and in the promotion of dialogue and understanding, between cultures and within cultures. We confront the currents of obscurantism, fanaticism and xenophobia with a steely determination to uphold the values we hold dear, among which are the respect for human rights, rationality, the maintenance of a civil discourse and the promotion of personal freedoms, especially the freedom of expression.

Today, “Democracy” has been adopted as a slogan by almost any group everywhere. Few, however, are ready to practice it!

## THE MEANING OF DEMOCRACY

Democracy is a political system, based on a number of principles that have come to be widely, but not universally, accepted. My own list of what constitutes democracy is:

- The legitimacy of government comes from the consent of the governed: periodically reaffirmed through elections or referendums
- Majority rules, but guarantees for minorities from the tyranny of the majority
- A Bill of Rights that guarantees fundamental freedoms of the citizen from the power of government, including but not limited to Franklin D. Roosevelt's *Four Freedoms*: Freedom of thought and expression, freedom of religion, freedom from want, freedom from fear (negative rights and positive rights and their treatment)
- The Rule of Law, with all it requires in terms of a constitution as Supreme Law of the Land, and an independent judiciary
- Equality before the law and due process for all
- Checks-and-balances on the abuse of power, best achieved by the separation of powers, and a vigorous free press
- Institutional pluralism, be it in multiple political parties or civil society institutions

- Transparency, accountability, free flow of information
- Participation.

Doubtless we can all go on and on.

Democracy is a system of governance which not only guarantees individual rights and freedoms for all citizens, be they in the minority or in the majority, it is a system that ensures that the minority view is heard before decisions are made. It is a system whose lifeblood is participation by as many as possible, not just in terms of extending the franchise and legally giving universal suffrage, but participation in everyday affairs at the local level, with a vibrant civil society and a vigorous press.

Systems of governance are not born perfect. They are built by the exercise of political participation and the experience of defining the boundaries of the acceptable.

Democratic systems seldom come into being full blown. France, Germany, Italy, Spain, UK, USA, all had to go through many agonies before they achieved not only their current systems of democratic government with their distinctive characteristics, but also the broad based support of the people in the exercise of that democratic system. Perhaps some of the Baltic States went from being part of the former Soviet Union to a western democracy in one go, but most of the other countries went through the agonies of creating

their democratic institutions through a long, slow process of self wrought transformation and institutional consolidation. It would be too optimistic to hope that the Arabs would automatically achieve a modern democratic system, all in one go.

Like everywhere else, there are many obstacles to the advance of democratic practice, even after the principles of democracy have been accepted.... Powerful interests defending their privileged position, competing ideologies, uncertain loyalties, corruption ... all mean that every society moves towards its democratic ideal slowly ... two steps forward, one step backward...

Worse, there are those who believe that they have a God-given right to impose their narrow perspectives on all others by force, or by ruse. Sometimes they are incorruptible men, such as Oliver Cromwell or Maximilien Robespierre... Men who believe that they are entitled by the correctness of their cause to trample afoot the rights of others, who believe that the ends justify the means.

However, if they are incorruptible in their devotion to an ideal and their rejection of personal wealth, they are corrupted by power. They are the epitome of the famous statement by Lord Acton "Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely."



## **THE CURRENT STATE OF AFFAIRS**

Elsewhere, I have characterized the struggle for reform as an “iron triangle” of competing forces, with reformers at one point, old line statist, rejecting pluralism and maintaining the authority of the Central State through force and brutal tactics at the second point, and the Islamist currents at the third point. I called this an “iron triangle” because by the nature of the philosophies involved, no two points could form an alliance against the third. Each considers the other two anathemas. Within that reality, we, the reformers, are at present the weakest of the three. Yet, I have no doubt that in the enormous struggle with conservative, anti-reformist forces for the hearts and minds of our people, we shall ultimately prevail.

The tide of history is on our side. The forces of stasis, who would try to stop the march of liberty shall not succeed. They try, Canute-like, to force back the waves. The entire history of the world is about the increasing emancipation of humans, and respect for their inalienable human rights. The instrument of their fall may turn out to be the forces of the Islamic right. I doubt that. For even if they were to succeed in seizing power, these forces of the radical right, ideological heirs to the Muslim Brotherhood, carry the seeds of their own demise. Formidable as a force in opposition to the old

statist forces, they will fail when confronted with the need for a positive program of action. Their leaders reject openness to our rapidly changing world, and want to take us back to a form of theocratic government, where not only the rights of women and minorities are trampled afoot, but also all those who do not agree with their specific interpretation of Islam. Whereas the march of history is for rationality, openness to pluralism, the advance of science and the establishment of the values of scientific enterprise.

### **WHY THE ISLAMISTS AND STATISTS WILL LOSE...**

Islamist and statist ideologies carry within them fundamental weaknesses. Whether they advocate the power of the Central State or the power of an organized religious framework as the means of advancing society, they have nothing to offer for the future. The solutions for the problems of our societies do not lie in ideology but in the pragmatism that will adapt to rapidly changing circumstances. They do not lie in the promotion of dogma, but in the tolerance of encouraging diversity to unleash the genius of our own people.

Instead, the Islamist currents of today demonstrate

Obsession with women and their bodies,

Obsession with the past,

Obsession with ritual and religiosity.

Like the statist, whom they vehemently oppose, they are  
Afraid of pluralism and diversity,  
Afraid to lose control  
Afraid to tolerate the contrarian view  
Afraid to open up to the other...

These obsessions and fears will not beget policies that can respond to the challenges of tomorrow. The new century requires access to science, not just consumption or mastery of technology. It requires the space of freedom to create, to dream and to think of the new and the untested, not the constraints of dogma and tradition. It requires a forward looking vision of a better future to guide our actions in the present.

## **ALEXANDRIA DECLARATION**

The forward looking image of the Arab future is embodied in the Alexandria Declaration, a document issued in March 2004, by 167 distinguished Arab intellectuals and civil society activists. It spelled out principles: rejection of terrorism as well as foreign interventions, and promotion of respect for human rights. Key reforms in four main domains of public life were outlined. Political reform is clearly about, the promotion of a democratic system and upholding the Rule of Law. Economic reform would include concern

about inequalities, but also seek a vibrant economic system regionally integrated and connected with the world economy. Social reform would address the status of women and the transformation of our educational systems. Finally, cultural reforms would include changing the prevalent religious discourse, as well as the public and media discourse. This declaration was overwhelmingly well-received, and still stands as the single most comprehensive statement of the hopes and aspirations of Arab civil society for a better future.

## **TRANSITION, TRANSFORMATION AND TIMELESS QUESTIONS**

Having marked out our vision of the better future that we want in the Alexandria declaration, the question is whether we get there by reform or revolution. I argue for reform. Why reform? Because as a society, we have to avoid the violence and dislocations that come from attempted revolutions, which all too frequently go astray. Lasting change is that which grows organically from the soil of the societies where it is envisaged.

Development is like a tree, you help it grow by feeding its roots, not by pulling on its branches.

However, that does not mean we are not living in a time of profound change and transformation that deservedly will be called revolutionary in the view of future historians.

We are living in truly historic times. At the dawn of the new millennium, a scientific and technological revolution grips the world and is pushing us all, willy-nilly, into the information age. The knowledge-based society and the technology driven economy are spreading across the globe.

Elsewhere,<sup>11</sup> I have called this the third great global revolution, referring to the agricultural revolution and the industrial revolution as the first two. I sincerely believe that we are witnessing a transformation of similar magnitude. Such transformations will occur slowly, in different parts of the planet. At the same time, enormous advances in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) have spawned a massive transformation from news services, to banking, to personal communications, and have facilitated the spread of new global ideas that can no longer be denied even in the farthest reaches of the most desolate places on Earth. Human rights, gender equality, freedom of expression, political democracy, environmental stewardship are all ideas that have become common denominators for the new global discourse.

Today, in Egypt and in the Arab world, as in many other parts of the developing world, we are in a state of transition from awareness of these concepts to espousal of their

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<sup>11</sup> AUC Commencement address 18 June 2000.

application in our societies. This transition is critical, for immediately upon the espousal of the application of these concepts, we undertake the arduous task of transformation of our societies. Nothing less than transformation will do. For we are talking about changes comparable to moving from an agrarian society to an urban industrial one. Everything from the prevailing cultural norms, to the meaning of the family unit, to the relationship of a person, to the output of their work, to the significance of nationalism, will be profoundly affected. It is important that we keep these notions in mind to understand the difficulties for those embarked on the path of reform in the Arab world. For under the innocent sounding name of reform, which implies minor adjustments in an ongoing enterprise, we are asking for nothing less than the complete transformation of our societies.

So, why do we refer to these endeavors as “reform” initiatives? I believe that we do so for three reasons.

*First:* We do not want a political revolution with its concomitant violence. We have already seen too many freedoms sacrificed on the altar of revolutionary fervor, and we have seen too many times how the promise of a quick revolutionary transformation goes astray and leads to stasis and totalitarianism. No, we want reform, even if the cumulative effect of the reforms will be nothing short

of a revolutionary transformation of our societies. There is no substitute for the patient, systematic transformation of the structures of society and economy, institutionalizing the changes so that they emerge as a solid robust structure. The democracy of Westminster was so achieved, and the patient constitutional work of the American Founding Fathers stands as good contrast to the fits and start of the French Revolution for all its inspirational moments and flashes of brilliance. So does the remarkable achievement of building the new post-war Europe, as opposed to the instant and short lived total political union of Egypt and Syria (1958–1961).

*Second:* Overthrowing an existing order and replacing it with a new one as was in the two great global revolutions of the past, is not about regime change or change of personalities, it is about the profound in-depth transformation of the social, economic, political and cultural underpinnings of the old order. In many instances the process of change has been embraced and accelerated by the rulers themselves, who, by virtue of their political skill in mediating the inevitable differences in many parts of society, became important factors in accelerating the processes of change.

The Agricultural Revolution brought about human settlement and the emergence of civic culture and trade, replacing hunters-gatherers and pastoralist nomads.

The Industrial Revolution replaced a feudal land-based, agriculturally-driven world with a dynamic world of cities, factories, industrial labor, trade and capital. These transformations are driven by the new economic and technological order that helps create the appropriate political mechanisms as it interacts with the social and cultural realities of a society. The reform measures are those that allow the existing structures to adopt and adapt such transformations rather than impede them. It allows mechanisms of change to be incorporated into the reality of the political order so that the ongoing processes of change do not become hostage to the will of the few, but reflect the broad currents of society in an ongoing and continuous fashion.

*Third:* Reformists are pragmatists. They are doers. Who temper their idealism with the know-how to get things done. They build alliances and they listen to the views of others as they hone their arguments and sharpen their positions. Their positions evolve. However, revolutionary change implies a vision of the alternate reality being created by the revolutionaries, who arrogate themselves the legitimacy of acting outside the law. For many members of this elite self-appointed individuals, be they intellectuals or activists, their higher moral purpose justifies trampling afoot both legality and all those who do not agree with them. However, reformers like myself are as concerned by the process of change as we



are by the exact outcomes of the change process. Thus, it becomes essential that the steps by which we get from here to there must be under scrutiny, and must be held to the same high standards of behavior in terms of transparency, accountability and free flow of information, that we would hope to see permeate society more fully. Revolutionaries use coercion, reformers rely on reason.

At any rate, the local discourse has now adopted the term “reform” in its calls for jettisoning the obsolete parts of the past and for adopting what is seen as desirable in the new. It is now a widespread and unstoppable current that will not be denied. We are trying to achieve our vision by moving our societies to a development path where the growing gap between them and those who have proceeded ahead of us, will be diminishing and ultimately closed.

As we collectively debate and act, evaluate our actions and debate some more ... we have successfully launched in the civil society in Egypt a deep current that complements many of the noticeable changes that occur on the political arena. This is worth a few more clarifications.

## **DEEP CURRENTS**

As I look at societies, local, national, regional or global, I am struck by the difference between two types of forces that affect events or activities. There are those that grab the

headlines, that are the focus of intense debate and make or break careers. They are undoubtedly important, but they lack the staying power, the lasting effect that real societal change is based on. The other kind of force is the deep currents that affect societal values, where attitude shifts may appear to be imperceptible at some point and then one day, things that were deemed unthinkable become commonplace. Sometimes these deep currents interact with burgeoning technologies to initiate profound changes.

I have likened these two types of forces to the winds on the surface of the ocean and the deep currents that move enormous amounts of water such as the Gulf stream in the Atlantic, or the el-Niño effects in the Pacific. These deep currents are not easily seen or felt, but they have a profound impact on our lives, they even affect the weather. In the meantime, the surface storms are very important and they can reach hurricane force, and they can destroy and sink ships and drown people and destroy property in the billions. All scientists would agree that shifts in the deep currents are far more significant even if they take years to become measurable.

The parallels with the discussion of reform are clear. It is the deep currents that have the lasting effects. It is at the level of the deep currents that the Bibliotheca Alexandrina

(BA), worthy heir to the Ancient Library of Alexandria, seeks to act on Egypt and the Arab world. Organizing a debate between the political candidates would make good television, but would not have a lasting effect as arranging for committees of experts to review and revise the mathematics and science curricula of the schools. Tackling the educational system reforms and changing the priority structure of the national scientific research program to name, but a few of the components that go into the “deep currents”. It is to affect these “deep currents” that the BA targets its actions. We are thus locked into a battle for the hearts and minds of a generation of young Egyptians, promoting rationality, tolerance, openness, dialogue and understanding in the face of obscurantism, extremism and xenophobia.

The means for bringing about reform, transition and transformation, is the support of a strengthened civil society. A civil society that rides these deep currents and acts on the shared values they generate. Strengthening the civil society is a long-term effort that requires mobilization, dialogue, creation of common positions, identification of opportunities for common action, recognizing successes, evolving a best practice approach, and systematically involving people in the day-to-day affairs of the communities they live in.

The long-term action needs to be seen and understood by others. It needs to be the basis for mutual support by like-minded groups and needs to return to the basic values we hold dear. Beyond the values, there are timeless questions of the individual *vs.* the community, how to draw the boundaries so that freedom does not become anarchy, and liberty becomes license. These timeless questions will be constantly debated and constantly redefined by every society in every generation. Freedom of Expression, women's rights as human rights, the meaning of citizenship, and so many other topics that seem at first sight to be acceptable without question, but whose application invariably throws up some of these timeless questions of boundaries and how we can, and must, keep shifting them to ensure ever more freedom and well-being to ever more people.

## **THE PATH FORWARD**

Many ask me what can you people at the BA do? What can a few intellectuals do?

Plenty

Never doubt the ability of a few thoughtful dedicated citizens to change the world. Throughout history it is the only thing that has!

Margaret Mead

We have a vision

We make our vision, and hold it ready for any amendment that experience suggests. It is not a fixed picture, a row of shiny ideals which we can exhibit to mankind and say: Achieve these or be damned. All we can do is to search the world as we find it, extricate the forces that seem to move it, and surround them with criticism and suggestion: Too far ahead there is nothing but your dream; just behind, there is nothing but your memory. But in the unfolding present, man can be creative if his vision is gathered from the promise of actual things.

Walter Lippman, *Drift and Mastery*

## **THE FUTURE**

We, who believe in democracy and in liberty, are going to win ... The statists and the Islamists are standing against the irrevocable march of history. The past 400 years are a global march towards liberating the human mind from the shackles of dogma, and liberating the human condition from slavery, colonialism and despotism to where government for the people, by the people and of the people is not an exception,

but the norm. Setbacks can be seen as momentary, mere blips in the sweeping march of history, and mere footnotes for the scholars and historians of tomorrow.

Much has been done to make the world a better place for all. The twentieth century was one of struggle for emancipation. Colonies were liberated, women got the franchise, racial, ethnic and religious minorities and non-conformists were all acknowledged to have political and civil rights that derive from their common humanity. Around the planet, more people than ever enjoy these freedoms. This has not come easily, and the blood of millions was the price that was paid to reach where we are today.

On the socio-economic front, in the past 40 years, the developing countries have doubled school enrollments, halved infant mortality and adult illiteracy, and extended life expectancy at birth by an amazing twenty years. Much more is on the way, and we are conscious of the need to share the benefits of our new technologies to make sure that they also benefit the underprivileged and the hitherto unreached.

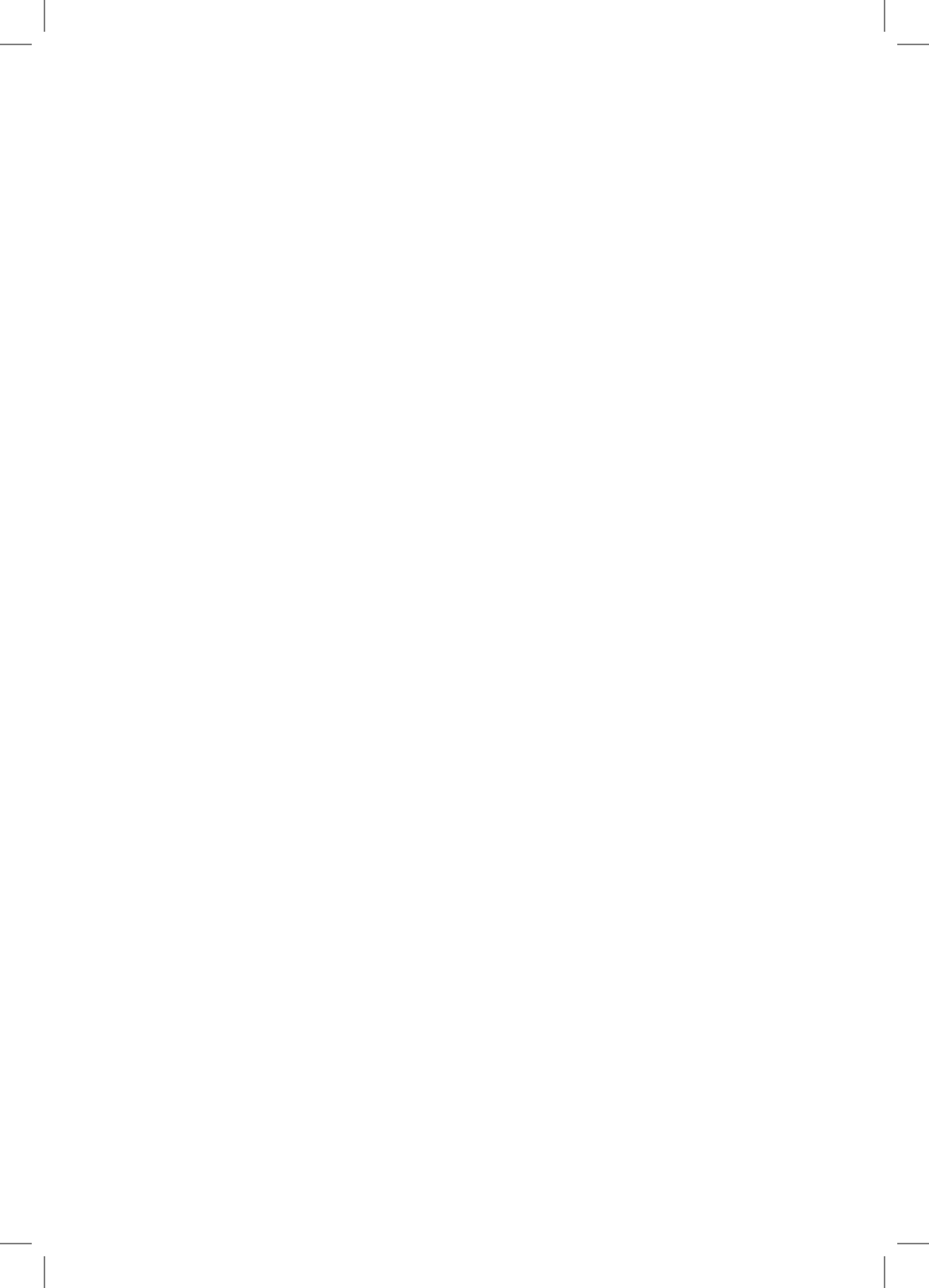
Democracy is here, and it is spreading. It will inevitably take root as more and more people recognize that the cure for the ills of democracy is more democracy.

However, that does not mean we will win tomorrow. Consider for a moment Renaissance Italy ... Think of

Florence: the Medici, Michelangelo and the explosion of talent and liberation that flowed from the Renaissance ... Who today remembers Savonarola? Savonarola (1452–98) ruled Florence for five miserable years (1494–98) when he chased out the Medici men, forced the Medici women to burn their fineries in public and to wear nothing but harsh cloth, he confiscated their jewelry and melted it, and proceeded to declare those who opposed him as heretics and had them burned at the stake, until he himself was murdered. Today, Savonarola is seen as an aberration...

However, if you lived in Florence during Savonarola's rule, you would not have been easily convinced by the arguments of a Mr. Serageldin who would have told you, not to worry, that Savonarola was doomed because he stood against the march of history, that he was a mere blip, destined to be a footnote in the history books chronicling the marvelous march of the Renaissance.

So let me answer the question you set to me as the title for my lecture: Yes, Democracy is feasible in the Middle East. In fact, not only is it feasible in the Arab world, but *it is inevitable* ... The question is not if, it is when...





# ALEXANDRIA DECLARATION

## Arab Reform Issues: Vision and Implementation

12–14 March 2004

Bibliotheca Alexandrina

*in collaboration with*

Arab Academy for Science and Technology

Arab Business Council

Arab Women's Organization

Economic Research Forum

Arab Organization for Human Rights

## INTRODUCTION

1. Participants in the **Issues of Reform in the Arab World: Vision and Implementation** conference, organized by the Bibliotheca Alexandrina in collaboration with civil society institutions in the Arab world, met from 12 to 14 March 2004 to discuss the reforms needed to develop Arab societies. The participants stated that they are fully convinced that reform is a necessary and urgent matter, that it stems from within Arab societies and that it should address the aspirations of the people to develop a comprehensive reform project, covering political, economic, social and cultural aspects. This project should allow addressing the individual situation

of each country while fitting within a general framework that highlights features shared by Arab Societies. This should allow each society to push forward its own reforms, while avoiding isolationism. It should also lay a strong foundation for regional cooperation that would forge a more positive and functional Arab entity on the international scene.

2. However, internal reform should not divert our attention from dealing with pressing regional issues on our agenda. At the forefront of these issues is a just solution for the Palestinian problem based on international resolutions that provide for the establishment of two independent and genuinely sovereign States, the liberation of occupied Arab territories and the recognition of the independence and territorial integrity of Iraq.

In addition, the Middle East should be declared an area free from weapons of mass destruction. All territorial problems should be resolved peacefully without external interference so that these problems do not provide an excuse for foreign intervention in the affairs of the Arab region, which would put it once again under foreign tutelage.

3. The people of the region, by virtue of their history of civilized behavior and in keeping with their vision of a promising future, emphatically condemn terrorism in all its forms, reject all modes of religious fanaticism, and seek to

embody values of tolerance and creative interaction between cultures and civilizations.

4. Arab societies have the maturity and historical experience that enable them to contribute to our common human civilization, and are, indeed, capable of taking charge of their affairs and reforming their internal conditions; while interacting fully with the outside world and its many experiences of reform, in accordance with a list of specific priorities that runs as follows.

#### **FIRST: POLITICAL REFORM**

5. Political reform refers to all direct and indirect measures for which governments, civil society and the private sector are responsible—measures that could help Arab societies and countries advance, without hesitation, towards building concrete and genuine democratic systems.

6. As representatives of Arab civil society, when we talk of democratic systems, we mean, without ambiguity, genuine democracy. This may differ in form and shape from one country to another due to cultural and historical variations; but the essence of democracy remains the same. Democracy refers to a system where freedom is paramount value that ensures actual sovereignty of the people and government by the people through political pluralism, leading to transfer of

power. Democracy is based on respect of all rights for all the people, including freedom of thought and expression, and the right to organize under the umbrella of effective political institutions, with an elected legislature, an independent judiciary, a government that is subject to both constitutional and public accountability, and political parties of different intellectual and ideological orientations.

7. This genuine democracy requires guaranteed freedom of expression in all its forms, topmost among which is freedom of the press, and audio-visual and electronic media. It calls for adopting free, regular, centralized and decentralized elections to guarantee transfer of power and the rule of the people. It also requires the highest possible level of decentralization that would allow greater self-expression by local communities, unleashing their creative potentials for cultural contributions to human development in all fields. This is closely linked to achieving the highest level of transparency in public life, to stamping out corruption within the framework of establishing good governance and support for human rights provided according to international agreements. The rights of women, children and minorities, the protection of the fundamental rights of those charged with criminal offences and the humane treatment of citizens are on top of the list. All this is in keeping with accepted

practices in those societies that have preceded us on the road to democratic development.

8. We hereby present a number of specific visions for political reform, and deem it important that these visions should be translated into tangible steps to be taken within the framework of a partnership between governments and civil society. These visions include the following.

### **Constitutional and Legislative Reform**

9. Since the constitution is the basic law of the state, its articles should not be inconsistent with the model political system sought by society. It should also be consistent with the international covenants on human rights. This means that articles of the constitution should reflect the changes and developments that have actually taken place. Furthermore, any constitutional article that contradicts the demands of genuine democracy in the Arab countries should be amended, and modern constitutions should be drafted for those countries that have not yet reached that stage of democracy, aligning the provisions of the constitutions with the objective of society in its quest for democratic evolution. This would include:

- a) Clear-cut separation of the legislative and executive powers.

- b) Rejuvenation of the forms of governance to guarantee regular and peaceful transfers of power in accordance with the prevailing circumstances in each country. A modern state is based on institutions and regulations, not on goodwill.
- c) Organizing free and periodic elections that will safeguard democratic practices and ensure the non-monopolization of power by placing time limits on holding the power of government.
- d) Abolishing arrest or detention as a result of free expression in all Arab countries and releasing all prisoners who are not put on trial or against whom no indictments were issued.

### **Institutional and Structural Reform**

10. A democratic system is closely linked to the presence of strong institutions incorporating the three recognized branches of government: the executive, the legislative and the judiciary, in addition to the press, the media and civil society associations. These institutions should be reviewed to guarantee their sound democratic practices. Consequently, this requires full transparency, the selection of effective leadership, a defined term of office, and the effective enforcement of the principle of “rule of the law” with no exception, irrespective of any justification.

11. Hence, the representatives of civil society, civil and non-governmental organizations represented in this conference affirm the need for the abolition of extra-judicial and emergency laws and extraordinary courts in any form and under any name, currently in effect in many Arab countries, since these undermine the democratic nature of political systems. Regular laws can adequately address all offences, with no need for extraordinary laws. This is a fundamental requirement for democratic legislative reform. Similarly, the elaboration of an effective legislation to deal with terrorism without compromising civil liberties and political rights is an integral part of legislative reform.

### **Unleashing Freedoms**

12. The freedom to establish political parties within the framework of the law and the constitution, providing a forum for all intellectual trends and civil political forces to present their programs in a free, equal opportunity competition for governing, within the liberties provided for in international covenants.

13. Arab countries which have not ratified the following set of international and Arab agreements should do so now:

- a) The Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
- b) The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

- c) The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.
- d) The Modernization of the Arab Charter for Human Rights Project, as drafted by a team of Arab experts (December 2003).
- e) All international conventions on the rights of women providing for the abolition of all forms of discrimination against them.
- f) The International Convention on the Rights of the Child providing for a better life for Arab children.

14. Freeing the press and media from all forms of governmental influences or hegemony. Free press is the pillar of the democratic system and a clear representation of the freedom of expression and transparency. This can be achieved by developing the media, the laws regulating the publication of newspapers and the establishment of broadcasting stations and television channels based on independent ownership, and management and transparency of finance. Thus, strengthening the ability of media groups to organize and conduct their affairs, without external interference by government authorities.

15. Allowing the establishment of civil society institutions by amending the restricting laws on founding societies,



syndicates and volunteer unions, regardless of the nature of their activities whether political, social, cultural or economic, to guarantee its freedom in funding and mobility. Control of foreign funding should be done by following the methods applied in advanced societies. Undoubtedly, amending the legal framework that controls civil society should be given priority in the consideration of issues relevant to the democratic development of society. Such amendments are also related to activating the means of participation in political life as well as getting rid of the sense of alienation and marginalization, from which Arab citizens suffer for lack of any active and effective participation in the making of their future. Lastly, these amendments will guarantee effective contributions by the civil society in issues that require teamwork and voluntary initiatives.

16. Encouraging public opinion polls and freeing them of any obstacles as one of the basic democratic methods. Founding institutions and research centers to work on Arab public opinion polls and to encourage the conducting of such polls regularly on all political, social and economic issues, would provide accurate data that could help decision-makers and social planners. In addition, these will draw an accurate graph of public opinion trends that have to be taken into consideration when making any decision.

## **SECOND: ECONOMIC REFORM**

17. Economic reform includes all legislation, policies, and measures that would free the national economy and turn it efficiently in accordance with market mechanisms. This would be done in a manner that would ensure economic prosperity and facilitate integration with regional and global economies.

18. Needless-to-say, this economic concept implies the resolution of many debates and controversies over the orientation of the economic system, including many details, such as the role of the State, the relationship between the role of the State and the market, and the social dimension of development.

19. All participants agreed that the current performance of Arab economies does not meet the challenges that need to be confronted, nor does it reflect the latent potential of our financial and human resources. This deficient performance of Arab economies and the requirements of the future call for a radical economic reform to change the current situation. Slowing down the implementation of the economic reform has an enormous cost that will only increase with time. The Arab economic situation is captured by the following indicators:

- a) Decline of economic growth rates of the gross national income and the per capita income compared to international indicators;
- b) Decline of the Arab countries' share in international trade, with exports limited to primary products, and with a marginal share in the high-value-added products;
- c) Reduction of the Arab region's share in foreign capital flows, including direct and indirect foreign investments;
- d) Failure to generate job opportunities for new job seekers with a sharp increase in unemployment rates, which are higher than the average in developing countries, mainly among youth groups and women;
- e) Increase of poverty rates in Arab countries among the unemployed as well as the employed.

20. The gamut of policies proposed and implemented in the region have focused mainly on creating overall stability, and reducing rates of inflation through the triad of stabilization, privatization and liberation. Such programs did not address other important issues, such as unemployment and the provision of basic social services.

21. In the predominantly young Arab world, youth employment, the quality of education and of social services,

and micro enterprise programs should be essential elements in reform programs. There should be clearly established priorities, with a special focus on the institutional framework required to achieve overall social and economic reform.

### **Structural Reform**

22. Therefore, we propose the following to achieve structural reform:

- a) Arab countries should declare clear plans with specific time-frames for institutional and structural reform, with a precise definition of the role of the State in encouraging economic activity and providing an enabling environment for the private sector, and for the public sector in those areas where it has a comparative advantage, and suitable competencies. This should be done with clearly-defined plans to effect a radical change in governmental administrative systems, to minimize the bureaucracy, and to raise the efficiency of governmental authorities dealing with investors, importers, and exporters, in such matters as taxes, customs, and license issuing authorities.
- b) Encouraging privatization programs, including in the banking sector, with appropriate regulation to safeguard the public interest, while reducing government investment, except in strategic areas

and for public goods, and abolishing economically unjustified government monopoly rights in order to encourage the private sector, attract more investment, and maximize the participation of the private sector in generating job opportunities.

- c) Setting criteria and regulations to enhance the quality of national products and to establish national councils supporting competitiveness, along with carrying out and making public continuous evaluation results.
- d) Inculcating good governance rules for economic activity, with special focus on transparency, accountability and the rule of law.
- e) Information and data are extremely important to make decisions and for a realistic and sound analysis. There is a need to pass laws that would obligate authorities producing economic data to make this data available and easily accessible, whenever needed according to clear and agreed rules. Comprehensive databases of Arab economies should be prepared.
- f) Ensuring environmental conservation in all economic activities.
- g) Participants also call for providing mechanisms suitable for training those employed in agencies that either supervise or participate in economic

activity, directly or indirectly, such as businessmen's associations, banking unions, as well as prosecutors and the judges who are responsible for dealing with cases and disputes related to new economic and financial transactions and tools, such training to be provided the training institutes for judges.

23. On the regional scale, we would like to emphasize:
- a) Developing Arab financial sectors in general, and banks in particular, and encouraging the establishment of big banking institutions, as well as the modernization of networks of Arab stock markets.
  - b) Developing and networking the infrastructure for information technology in the Arab world.
  - c) Activating Arab agreements by setting achievable objectives and identifying some priority sectors housing good chances of success in promoting greater inter-Arab economic cooperation, such as transportation, electricity, energy, and information and communication technology. A follow-up body affiliated to the Arab Economic Unity Council should be established to regularly report results to the Arab Summit and to make these results and reports public.

- d) Agreement on a binding framework to liberalize trade in services between Arab countries.
- e) Organizing an Arab labor market through drafting and ratifying a multilateral agreement to coordinate the movement of Arab labor within a fixed-term time-frame, and to define work conditions for the duration of stay in host countries and determine the responsibility of the labor exporting countries in evaluating the skills and capacities of the labor force. They should also prepare training programs for Arab labor to enable them to enter foreign markets, according to protocols and evaluation standards agreed upon with foreign countries.
- f) Establishing an Arab institution, funded and managed by the private sector, to train leaders in management in order to enable new generations to develop and carry out reform programs.

24. To increase the Arab world's effectiveness within the international economy, we suggest:

- a) Calling on developed countries to open their markets to Arab exports, especially agricultural products.
- b) A highly efficient specialized administration should be formed and affiliated to the League of Arab States

in order to positively participate in world economy by increasing the exports of goods and services, increasing the relative share of foreign investments in Arab countries, and benefiting from education, training, and work opportunities in different markets. Such an administration should follow up on world trade issues, empowering Arab countries to actively participate in the World Trade Organization, coordinating Arab positions, defending their interests, training and rehabilitating Arab cadres to negotiate issues of trade liberalization and agriculture, and ensuring access to market for industrial products.

25. To promote investment, we would like to emphasize:
- a) Resolving, forcefully, problems that obstruct Arab and foreign investments.
  - c) Establishing an effective mechanism to settle economic disputes among investors.
  - e) Dealing with Arab investments in all Arab countries in a manner equal to national investments.
  - g) Encouraging innovation, attracting investment necessary for research and development, launching projects in high value added goods and services, and protecting intellectual property rights.



26. Addressing poverty in its multiple dimensions, including social and political marginalization, lack of participation and constrained opportunities for upward mobility. This precludes reliance on economic growth alone as sufficient instrument for poverty reduction. It calls for the adoption of a closer implementation timeframe to fight poverty in conformity with the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals.

27. Given the importance of the employment issue, especially with regard to Arab youth and women, we suggest:

- a) Developing micro and small enterprise funding programs to help solve the unemployment problem, while paying special attention to women.
- b) Empowering women to participate in the national workforce and to make use of their experience and qualifications.
- c) Reviewing current economic policies from a fully-employment perspective, to address five million new Arab job seekers annually, with special emphasis on promoting youth employment. This will only be achieved by implementing policies that could raise actual economic growth rates to no less than 6%-7% annually, on average, over the coming decade. This

requires integrated policies to increase investments, promote capacity building, and better direct and mobilize local and foreign savings.

28. Participants emphasized that Arab civil society and private sector institutions can contribute to economic reform. This contribution would be achieved by participating in priority-setting, and by working hand-in-hand with governments in implementation. Civil society institutions have an important role to play in following up with governments on measures and solutions regarding reform.

29. In order to implement these proposals, the participants call upon the Bibliotheca Alexandrina to organize, in collaboration with the League of Arab States, a series of conferences and specialized seminars to discuss these issues in a manner commensurate with their significance and technical specificity.

It is important that these discussions take place within a workable framework that responds to the challenges the Arab economies are facing on the local and regional levels, with a view to come up with specific proposals to be submitted to Arab governments. The most important of these topics are:

- a) Arab financial sectors and investment constraints.
- b) Unified customs system and inter-Arab trade.

- c) Arab competitiveness and evaluation standards, establishing national councils for Arab competitiveness and the unification of evaluation standards.
- d) Incubators for high technology products.
- e) Public resources management in the Arab world.
- f) Good governance of economic activity.
- g) Raising the level of economic media.

### **THIRD: SOCIAL REFORM**

30. Recognizing that the Arab community, as a whole, possesses great social and cultural resources; it is time to make maximum use of these resources to establish a viable, cohesive Arab society that is capable of solving its problems, and subsequently, moving forward to effectively achieve progress and participate in forging its own future and the future of the world. This involves working towards achieving the following goals:

- a) Developing a pattern of family relationships that would help create an independent, distinct and free individual capable of taking responsibility for his/her choices. This requires a review of some of the values that continue to negatively affect the Arab life, such as submissiveness and obedience, and substituting them

with values of independence, dialogue and positive interaction.

- b) The media plays a fundamental role in building the general culture of individuals. Therefore, this requires affirming the role of the media in re-building the values that support development and modernization, such as equality, tolerance, accepting the other and even the value of difference. In addition, these values have to go hand-in-hand with concepts like precision, commitment to perfection and other positive values that would help transform Arab society into a new and functional society.
- c) Directing Arab societies towards acquiring, disseminating and producing knowledge. This requires focusing on five integrated and interrelated issues that work towards achieving a society of knowledge. These are:
- Confirming the need for human development and setting education as a priority.
  - Achieving technological development and providing the basis for its infrastructure.
  - Developing strategies for scientific research.

- Supporting free enterprise and encouraging creative innovation.
- Providing a supportive environment for a society of political, economic and cultural knowledge.

31. To ensure this, the participants recommend the following:

- a) Setting Arab criteria for education output at all levels in line with international criteria that provide a baseline for gauging and evaluation. However, adopting these criteria should be only the starting point that each country can build on and add to.
- b) Establishing organizations to evaluate the quality of education in each Arab country. These organizations must be independent from Ministries of Education and should be connected regionally, allowing for exchange of graduates and the free movement of citizens on the job market.
- c) Keeping the State's financial support of, and responsibility for educational institutions while maintaining the academic independence of these public and private establishments. Furthermore, private financing of higher education should be allowed provided that it is for non-profit purposes.

- d) Promoting scientific research and increasing its financial and human resources, linking it with the institutions responsible for production and development, and erasing all red tape policies that hamper the freedom of research and the production of knowledge.
- e) Aiming at de-centralization and flexibility in running these institutions.
- f) Coordinating the output of the educational system with the changing needs of the job market, economic growth, and the building of competitive capacities.
- g) Inviting the civil society to share in financing education and contributing in running and monitoring it in Arab societies.
- h) Granting students the privilege to practice their political rights including peaceful demonstration, free expression of their opinions, and democratic elections in student unions. Students must be permitted to participate in running their own educational process and allowed difference of opinion.
- i) Eradicating illiteracy, especially among women, in no more than ten years.

- j) Focusing attention on the Arabic language, developing its curricula and agreeing upon a set of criteria to conduct comparative studies in that area.

32. Working towards achieving social stability in Arab societies. This requires the reformulation of effective policies that secure justice in the distribution of wealth. Thus, there is also a need to end the social marginalization of certain social groups through establishing policies that emphasize respect and implement international declarations of human rights. There is also a need to focus on the empowerment of women, promoting their participation in the development of society and eliminating all forms of discrimination against them. This is closely related to the issue of integrating youth, enhancing their participation in society and providing immediate solutions for the issue of youth employment. Last, but not least, there is a need to develop the conditions of Arab childhood and formulate the effective social policies to deal with people with special needs and the elderly in the Arab world. Furthermore, the problem of the increase in the rate of poverty requires an effective strategy to address this in the light of the solutions suggested by the United Nations and other international organizations.

33. It is our belief that we should address the negative political, social and economic practices in the Arab countries.

Therefore, the participants find it necessary to formulate a new social contract between the State and the citizen in Arab society. This contract should define clearly the rights of the State and its duties towards the citizen and, likewise, outline the rights of the Arab citizen and how to safeguard them.

#### **FOURTH: CULTURAL REFORM**

34. Participants in the Conference took into consideration all local and regional cultural problems and challenges, addressing them from a perspective that asserts a set of indispensable cultural priorities:

- a) Inculcating rational and scientific thinking through encouraging and funding scientific research institutions and allowing civil societies the freedom to develop such institutions. Simultaneously, any form of religious extremism that may exist in educational curricula, sermons in mosques and the official or private media must be completely eradicated.



- b) Encouraging the continuous revision and renewal of religious discourse to reveal the civilized, enlightened aspects of religion, such as promoting intellectual freedom, allowing interpretation of religious matters to benefit the individual and society and facing all forms of rigidity, extremism and literalism in comprehending religious texts. The reform of religious discourse should be consistent with the spirit of science, rationality and the requisites of contemporary life. This will eliminate pernicious contradictions between the freedom of thought and creativity on the one hand, and the tutelage, imposed in the name of religion, on the other. Religion calls for persuasion through debate and does not impose intellectual terrorism on those who may disagree.
- c) Freeing and developing female culture to achieve equality between the sexes in education and employment in order to ensure full social participation.
- d) Providing a cultural atmosphere to promote democratic development and peaceful transfer of power. This can only be achieved by confronting atrophied customs, and the rudiments of decadent political systems that can prevent any effective political participation or

reform. Consequently, this will change the political and social view of women and augment their cultural and scientific participation. Since cultural development is the foundation for any development, the first step that must be taken towards any radical reform cannot succeed without spreading the culture of democracy through educational curricula and the media.

- e) Renewing cultural discourse and freeing it from the elements that prevent dialogue with the others, and accepting differences and, renewing all related discourses, such as political, social groups and media discourses.
- f) Reforming and activating Arab cultural institutions through financial and moral support to widen the range of their plans and coordinate between them and other cultural organizations.
- g) Canceling any form of censorship over intellectual and cultural activities to support freedom of thought, augment creativity and free it from any religious, traditional, private or political authority under the pretext of public interest. The advance of nations depends on guaranteeing freedom to all intellectual and creative thinkers.

- h) Promoting cultural efforts on the national level and strengthening the concept of interdependence in cultural economics.
- i) Preserving the Arabic language and developing it for digital information technology.
- j) Encouraging cultural interaction with the entire world to ensure the diversity of the creative human culture and promote effective contribution to international organizations without going against our cultural identity or cultural heritage.
- k) Confirming that science is a main component of culture and a major path for future vision, which establishes a general cultural consciousness in the knowledge-based society, and is the best way to advance in every field.
- l) Documenting Arab culture annually to monitor the mechanisms of production and the forms of follow-up and coordinating the efforts to organize the activities of professional Arab cultural syndicates and publishing the results.

35. Encouraging national cultural exchange through the following measures:

- a) Exempting Arab cultural production from any kind of censorship or customs regulations in all Arab

countries, while, simultaneously, raising the level of competitive programs against programs that represent foreign cultures.

- c) Developing mutual digital publication projects for newspapers, magazines and books, to overcome distribution problems and the obstacles hindering the flow of Arabic publications.
- e) Activating governmental and civil translation institutions and coordinating their selections along two parallel-synchronized lines: translating from Arabic into all languages, and translating from all living languages into Arabic.
- g) Encouraging creativity and intellectual creative achievements on both the national and regional levels. This will provide more motivation for cultural production, and could be achieved through offering valuable prizes and various forms of national and regional celebrations.

## **FIFTH: CIVIL SOCIETY FOLLOW-UP MECHANISMS**

36. Highlighting the reform aspects that the Conference has discussed requires establishing a cohesive set of implementation mechanisms, which would provide

for following-up on the agreed suggestions and recommendations.

We, therefore, have to focus on the role of Arab civil society in reform, especially in the different sustainable development fields. This requires taking the following measures:

- a) Establish an Arab Reform Forum at the Bibliotheca Alexandrina to act as an open forum for initiatives, intellectual dialogue and Arab projects. This will include all initiatives whether those relevant to Arab reform or other initiatives that are related to all forms of dialogue and cooperation with the international civil society. This will be done through arranging joint seminars and dialogues, both on the Arab and international levels. Such seminars will discuss general development issues, while particularly highlighting the roles of youth and women in development, in addition to carrying out joint projects in various fields of development. Linked to this activity is the creation of an Arab Societal Observatory, to follow the activities of Arab civil society and evaluate political, economic, social and cultural reform programs through a comprehensive list of qualitative and quantitative indicators.

- b) Civil society institutions in every Arab country will select a number of the non-governmental organizations that have achieved success in the fields of development and human rights, to present their activities and assess their social contributions. This will be through a general Arab conference, to be held annually in Alexandria or any of the Arab countries to highlight the role of the civil society in development.
- c) Organize national Arab conferences in each country to discuss the reform ideas and to present successful experiences on both the Arab and international levels. The Bibliotheca Alexandrina will host the next conference on “Reform in Egypt”.
- d) Organize regional Arab seminars to discuss different issues of reform.
- e) Establish a follow-up committee, which will convene, at least once every six months, to review the achievements and provide support for the dialogue forum once it is established.

## CONCLUSION

37. The participants confirm that the implementation of the reform visions they have drafted will not be the sole

responsibility of governments. Both the civil society and governments should shoulder such responsibility. The promising future of our Arab nation will only be achieved by investing and dedicating creative capacities, genuine initiatives and continuous work in both vision and implementation.

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