

Speech by Her Highness Sheikah Mozah Bint Nasser Al Missned

Consort of His Highness the Emir of Qatar

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Community Development

On the occasion of the Innovations in Education Conference-II:  
Technology, Empowerment and Education

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## **Director General, Distinguished Guests**

I am delighted to be here with you this evening to open the second of Qatar Foundation's Innovations in Education Symposia. I am especially honored to share the podium with the Director General of UNESCO and offer him and his delegation a warm welcome to Qatar. It is also a pleasure to see some of you back again from the Symposium launch two years ago for this series of fresh discussions.

## **Ladies and Gentlemen**

This symposium series is a manifestation of cooperation on various fronts.

At Qatar Foundation we believe innovation on a national level happens by design, so we are making a sustained investment in building links between academia and enterprise, research and industry. We are working to develop a national pro-innovation culture, supportive of invention, calculated risk taking and responsibility. We are also trying to bridge gaps between research and application in order to put research

into action. We consider cooperation between teachers, researchers, and policy makers of critical importance. This symposium, a practical measure to nurture this culture of research and action, is a testimony to this vision.

This year our symposium is particularly special for it marks two important events – the 10th anniversary of the Qatar Foundation and the 60th anniversary of UNESCO - and a new era of cooperation between the Qatar Foundation and UNESCO. For over 10 years, QF has been striving toward its mission of developing Qatar’s human resources and we are honored to join with UNESCO to extend the reach of our programs. UNESCO’s objective of education for all is fully compatible with the aims of QF and will be reaffirmed again when Qatar hosts the Regional Review of Education for All in the Middle East.

### **Distinguished Guests**

Research is generated from asking the right questions. Over the next few days we will ask many questions in an attempt to discover the

equation for success in the relationship between technology, empowerment and education. How can we assure greater international access to education? How can we use technology fully to transcend barriers of class, race, and gender? How can technology assist in generating employment and more productive economies? How can scientific reasoning promote the critical thinking skills necessary for democracy? How can technology promote democracy? Certainly, it is critical that we, in the Arab region, find the right solution to deal with our deficits in both empowering our people and technological development, and perhaps it is time we tried to connect the dotted lines between our failures in both these areas. Our economies, our education systems and our minds are governed by authoritarian systems that sustain the status quo and our role as consumers, not producers. While GDP in MENA registered an annual increase of 5.5 percent from 1993-2003, which is the second highest in the world, productivity, which measures how efficiently resources are used, increased by about 0.1 percent annually during the same period. This is only one-tenth of the world average productivity increase. So, it is clear we have the material resources to progress in the right direction, but we are not doing so. Often, in our region, the acquisition of technology is

seen as an end in itself. But the acquisition of technology is useless unless it is cushioned in the culture of research, innovation and social security that is required to use the technology properly to generate knowledge based production. We need to move from what the director-general of ILO called "the urban alleyways" of unemployment and despair to what one of our panelists calls "gardens of democracy". How do we do so?

First, a huge investment in research and development is required across the region. It has been estimated that collectively the Arab countries spend approximately 0.24 % of their GNP on R&D while the highest rated countries in the world spend 3.1%. While it may not be a fair measure to group all the Arab countries together in this statistic, we must admit we are not up to international standards and set the necessary priorities to invest in our future.

Still, it is not enough merely to invest in R&D but the state is responsible for designing and supporting effective innovation systems which use existing technologies and generate new technologies. This requires developing institutions capable of diffusing knowledge,

developing public policies that govern technology development, establishing proper educational and training systems, providing an advanced communication structure and a favorable economic environment for growing technology industries.

But, let us not forget our most critical investment – our youth. We need to place our trust in the youth of our nations to carry the responsibility of the future and see them as part of the solution for our region. 58% of the population of MENA is below the age of 25 years and the rate of youth unemployment is estimated at 25.6 % - the highest in the world. It is clear that we have been unable to link educational orientation to labor market requirements. The growing youth bulge and unemployment rate have become a cause of alarm and insecurity. The blame for this scenario rests fully on our shoulders, not on those of our youth.

I prefer to consider the youthful population as an incredible strength in facing the challenges of a knowledge driven economy. A large, rapidly growing, youthful population can be an engine of material development - provided with the proper atmosphere conducive to economic growth - such as high levels of investment and appropriate types of technological know-how. It is our responsibility to meet the challenges ahead of us

through creative employment generation and appropriate technological development. Youth can be part of the solution for our region.

### **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

When we look forward to the future, we should always carry our pasts with us. Bringing our traditions into the present is also a critical part of the equation for success, especially in our region.

We need only look to the role of science in our tradition. Islam encourages people to reflect on nature in order to achieve knowledge and there has been no division between religion and science, or in other words, no perceptual dissonance between progress and faith. In fact, the unity of science and religion has even been considered as a unique aspect of Islamic civilization with many scholars and philosophers also being mathematicians. It is not coincidental that Arabic was considered the language of science until the 12th and 13th centuries as there has always been a strong connection between Islamic philosophy and Science.

I hope we can face the technological and scientific challenges of the present with the same spirit as our ancestors who developed the sciences to explain their world. How can we revive this spirit of curiosity, confidence, risk taking and innovation?

The first element is confidence. Rather than fear opening ourselves up to others, we should strengthen ourselves so we are ready for the various encounters we will face. We need confidence to be able to use technology properly, not just acquire it. We need confidence to approach technology as an instrument of creativity, rather than withdraw from it as an instrument of cultural homogenization.

Another important step towards a culture of innovation is the acquisition of the critical reasoning necessary for nurturing a culture of research, quality, and social security. In order to research and produce, people must be able to analyze in an innovative way, take chances, question the accepted, and forge new paths of discovery. Likewise, citizens must be active players in generating strong civil societies, and participating enthusiastically and critically in the development of their nation. The

space for innovation, whether it is in academic research, technological development, or simply the space to speak one's mind in our families and schools, is a sacred space we must protect.

This culture needs to be built inside the curriculum in order to promote reasoning and creativity. But at the same time we must accentuate that classrooms are not isolated from society. Unless social reforms in attitudes and political reforms in the structure of society take place, we will never have the environment conducive to developing a productive culture and economy. Instead we will keep exporting our brain power and suffering from outdated institutions and political structures. Such socio political reforms are essential elements in promoting a culture of innovation. Indeed, political stagnation is directly related to technological stagnation.

At Qatar Foundation we are trying to move toward a culture of innovation and recently we hosted a founding gathering of Arab expatriate scientists to assist us keeping our best minds at home by offering the proper environment that welcomes and fosters innovation, rather than fears and rejects it.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

This gathering of researchers and practitioners can also offer valuable insights into addressing these challenges. By establishing action task forces at the end of this symposium, we hope you will carry on your discussions over the next two years, and perhaps address some of the issues I spoke of today. I place my trust and confidence in this distinguished group to work together to foster the essential elements of a culture of innovation, and progress.