

THE FOURTH ARAB WORLD CONFERENCE
THE ARAB WORLD: SHAPING THE FUTURE

SPEECH BY
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TOWARDS REACHING A CRITICAL MASS
March 28, 2009

H.E. DR. Youssef Boutros Ghali, Minister of Finance of Egypt
Dr. Jorge Dominguez, Vice Provost for International Affairs, Harvard University
Excellencies, distinguished guests,
Ladies, gentlemen, colleagues and friends,

On behalf of the Executive Board of Harvard Arab Alumni Association, it gives me a great honor to welcome you all to our fourth Annual Arab World Conference in the magnificent city of Cairo.

At the outset, I would like first to extend our sincere gratitude to H.E. Dr. Ahmed Nazif, PM of Egypt for offering his patronage to our conference; it is an honor and a privilege.

The Harvard Arab Alumni Association or HAAA, as we would love to call it, was established in 2001 to pursue three primary objectives.

1. To create a professional network and provide a platform for All Harvard alumni and students with an interest in the Arab world through conferences, newsletters, city dinner series – we actually had four dinners this year in Dubai, Cairo, Riyadh, and Doha attended by more than 200 alumni and their spouses; and through students' grants - we just awarded this year's HAAA Undergraduate Scholarship Award in the amount of \$3,000 to a student for a six-week summer project in Syria.
2. To increase the student body and professional representation of the Arab World at Harvard University through a number of programs such as Project Harvard Admissions that helps in the orientation and recruitment of Arab students interested in studying at Harvard U; the HAAA Scholarship Fund that provides financial support to Arab students; and our Membership Directory that has a section on "The Arab World at Harvard", which provides a listing of the educational and research centers and initiatives about the Arab World at Harvard University for interested researchers and professionals.
3. To provide a forum for dialogue and debate on issues of interest and concern to the Arab World through conferences and special initiatives. Each year, we hold two

major events: "The Arab World Conference", which is organized in a different Arab city around a current theme addressed through different perspectives, such as today's conference, and "The MENA Weekend at Harvard" held in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in the U.S., and jointly organized with the Arab Student groups in different schools at Harvard.

In a nutshell, we are creating a two-way bridge between the Arab World and Harvard University: one way is increasing the representation and visibility of the Arab World at Harvard and bringing Harvard to the Arab World, through our alumni network, which is extremely diverse, representing almost all countries in the Arab World and spanning almost all institutions at Harvard University.

To this end, we collaborate with the national and local Harvard clubs in the region and many of our events are jointly organized with them. We also work very closely with the Harvard Alumni Association and I'd like to seize this opportunity to thank them for their unwavering support over the course of the last few years.

Our activities though are not confined to Harvard alumni but open to students and graduates of other leading universities and educational institutions; many of them are present here today and we highly appreciate their participation as it greatly enriches the quality of our events and programs.

While we, at HAAA, have benefited individually from the quality of education that we received at Harvard that helped us in unveiling our "veil of ignorance" and in our upward career mobility, we strive to help as many young and professional Arabs to profit from this opportunity based on meritocracy. Also, as we value the intellectual power that exists at Harvard, we would like to mobilize its academic and research resources in order to contribute to the development of our nation, in whatever small increments we can. In this regard, we are realistically ambitious.

We sincerely believe that it is our duty and responsibility towards our communities and our countries. We trust that HAAA along with other similar organizations, educational institutions, and research centers are increasingly creating a critical mass that will eventually reach the tipping point of taking the Arab World to a different plane of political, economic and social development and prosperity. I am here reminded by the words of the great Arab poet and writer Gibran Khalil Gibran, who said: "Progress lies not only in improving what is, but also in advancing toward what will be."

In this endeavor, we are grateful to our sponsors who have been supporting our work throughout this journey. Their generous contribution was a critical cornerstone in the foundation of our organization and its success. And here, let me be clear, I am not only referring to the financial support, which was not affected even in times of economic downturn and financial contraction, but also to their contribution to our conferences and events with quality speakers, who enrich the discussion with their unparallel

expertise. This continued commitment is also attesting to their belief in our mission and the relevance of our programs.

As we proceed in today's conference to discuss "Shaping the future of the Arab World", let me emphasize that the best way of predicting the future is to make it. We can only do it by pushing the frontiers and exploring uncharted territories. And as George Bernard Shaw once said: "Some people see things as they are and ask why? But, I dream things that never were and say: "Why not"?"

Thank you.