

The Arab International Women's Forum Conference
“ From Partnership to Prosperity: Women in the arab World, France and the
International Community”
Paris 3 - 5 March 2009

Speech of H.E.Mrs. Bahia Hariri
Lebanese Minister of Education and Higher Education

I am honoured today to participate with all the Arab, French and European Women at this conference that is taking place during these extremely complicated times of the world, the ‘world economic crisis’ which has touched the life, stability and security of everyone all over the world.

Being a significant player in the global economy, the Arab world assumes a big responsibility toward containing this crisis and its consequences on our communities and countries, and on the global economy in general.

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Arab woman has accomplished major milestones in the last few years taking initiative and leadership in economic, social, cultural and political fields.

And it’s worth mentioning, that the first years of the twenty first century witnessed a progress in the achievements of the Arab women at the political level, through her full participation and involvement in the decision making process, and her ability to organize and leverage joint Arab frameworks in all arenas.

This lively energy faced many challenges that were defeated by the collaborative work, despite all the individualities found all over the world. This concept of partnership, networking, and the concern of all the challenges faced, made her role a pioneer in the growth of the contemporary Arab world.

And this would have not happened without the awareness of the Arab communities and its leaders concerning the importance of the role of the woman; empowering her to take her responsibility and fully participate in the decision making.

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

This is not the first meeting of the French and Arab women, it is a special and advanced chapter of a relationship that lasted centuries between our peoples.

We look forward to achieve the objectives of this conference through networking and innovative collaboration.

Conferences being the ideal framework for meeting, networking, dialogue and the search for the common between individuals and groups, countries and institutions, in order to establish partnerships in the social, cultural, economic and human spheres.

These conferences have evolved tremendously with the progress of the modes of communication, bridging distances between continents and people, which, in turn, had a great impact on the deepening of economic trade and cultural exchanges.

The advancement of the world of communication facilitated the transformation of our vast world to a small one, thus we are living now in the so called 'global village'. With this, our challenges have expanded as we now know more about what solutions and contributions are needed for the multitude of complex issues in this world.

Yes, we now live in a small world, however our responsibilities increased so we could no longer ignore the urgent human and social issues needed for the progress towards a more stable and secure world capable of taking appropriate actions. Because we will not be able to prosper and grow without

stability, and stability being not an internal matter for a given state or people, excluding others.

The human security has become a common issue, we can no longer build metal curtains around a society and close borders between one nation and another, or one culture and another. The world has become without borders, and the task of ensuring its security and stability is a common responsibility among all countries and peoples... large and small... strong or weak.

Therefore, the current conferences have taken an additional scope as we could easily meet, converse and exchange information through modern communication tools. For example, we could have held this conference or others while each participant staying in his/her own country discussing our thoughts, suggestions, issues and solutions.... if that is the objective of conferences, as in the past. However, we meet today and each one of us knows the other, and knows what the other has and wants.

Between the Arab World and France, there is a long history of communication, cooperation, cultural and commercial trade. This relationship has deep roots way back in history. From here came the invitation to the Arab International Women's forum to accomplish new and practical opportunities to meet our needs on clear themes and shared objectives to achieve the partnership that Europe has set with the Arab World since the Barcelona Process.

This partnership witnessed a huge development with practical and positive returns on investment through MEDA 1 and MEDA 2, as well as the policy of neighboring for the Mediterranean.

The invitation to this conference gives us the opportunity to work and produce in order to network and explore the possibilities of establishing a

balanced partnership to work together based on best practices for success, productivity and advancement, to strengthen the growth and prosperity, leading to stability in the production and markets, and generating job opportunities, building human capacity and empowering the individual to become a productive and valuable member of society.

Dear participants, ladies and gentlemen

It is time to review our common experiences, and evaluate the extent to which we achieved our goals, or not, and why not. As this is what made the European Union in all its phases a successful venture from the beginning, based on evaluation, feedback and review taking in consideration the needs of the European people. How to work with this union that keeps expanding in Europe, and how it confronted the phase after the fall of the Berlin Wall and worked on evolving its environment and containing it within its framework.

Dear esteemed participants of this Conference.... Yes, we do need this review.

The Arab International Women's forum that organized this Arab, French and European conference, may want to place the issue of the development of this relationship in the hands of the Arab and French women, especially after the tremendous success of women in areas of business and economics.

In fact, our societies are witnessing a fast development where the woman is taking her responsibilities towards her society and her country. And we are not here to discuss the state of the Arab Women, as I am certain that they are more than capable to meet their responsibilities. In fact our region is facing the challenges of instability...And I am not here to define the reasons for instability, as I am quite sure that you know the real reason behind it. It is the right to all people to live in a safe and secure country and enjoy their natural human rights as stated by the human rights constitution.

Dear esteemed participants,

Education is at the core of progress and development for all nations. And we saw in the past weeks, how the president of one of the largest countries in the world spoke about the importance of education and the return of the education issue to the forefront of priorities. As education means the future, and the preparation of the next generation; empowering them to take on their responsibilities, building their reality, and maintaining the accomplishments of their ancestors.

In my opinion, any initiative that does not consider the education issue in its heart, has no future. As education builds the human awareness among communities, it promotes freedom, and brings cultures and civilizations together.

And here I address my due respect to the French, Arab and European women for all what they may accomplish in their ambitious, responsible and effective partnership under this critical situation the world is passing through. So let's work to set this partnership as a model for an international cooperation able to face the consequences of this crisis and its impact on the economic, human, social and cultural growth.

Finally, may I take this opportunity to express my sincere thanks and appreciation to Her Excellency Madame Christine Lagarde, France's Minister of the Economy, Industry and Employment, the organizers of this conference, the Arab International Women's Forum, and the Greater Paris Investment Agency, for the opportunity given to me, hoping we will meet again in Beirut and all the Arab and European capitals.

Thank you for listening.