

## WILL QATAR TAKE A LEAD IN THE EMERGENCE OF AN ARAB AND ISLAMIC SCIENTIFIC RENAISSANCE IN THE TWENTY FIRST CENTURY?

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Once upon a time, the Arab world was the leader in science and Arab scientists have established and help shaped the foundation for science and medicine. Just to cite a few names: Avicenna, 980 to 1037; Averroes, 1126 to 1198 and many others. However, the current situation can simply be qualified as disastrous. There is a deep technology divide between the Arab world and the industrialized world because of the lack of support for science and technology in Arab countries, which has led to: marginalization of developing Arab countries, making it hard for them to meet their basic needs and to participate in the global economy and manage the environment.

Then comes Qatar with a bold and very ambitious initiative directed mainly towards the Arab expatriate scientists. The idea is to create a partnership between the Arab scientists and the Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development through which Qatar's scientific research and development can be developed.



During the first meeting of the scientific founding committee in December 2005 in Doha. From left to right: Abdallah Al Kubaissi, Alaa Al Hosseini, Ali Fares, H.H. Sheikha Mouza Bint Naser Al Misned, Farouk Al Baz, AbdelAthem El Sebti, Abduljalil Lahmanate, Nagwa Abounaga, Rabi Mohtar, Fathy Saoud and Abdelali Haoudi.

Under the auspices of Her Highness Sheikha Mozah Bint Nasser Al-Misned, Chairperson of Qatar Foundation for Education, Sciences and Community Development, the first Conference of the Arab Expatriate Scientists was held on April 24-26, 2006 in Doha, Qatar. As a result, 200 Arab scientists have been invited to this first gathering (<http://www.igatar.qa>).

The goals of this conference were twofold: the current infrastructure and the possibilities for future scientific research in Qatar through the establishment of scientific research projects, the Research Support Fund, Science & Technology Park and the Research Centers in Education City, and the Collaboration Channels and Partnerships by devising communication network building methodology and standard setting for creating research working groups.

Qatar foundation has a plan to position Qatar as a centre of scientific research. A science and technology park is in the making with a view to attract R&D facilities of multinational corporations including Microsoft, which has set up a research unit there, as have European aircraft maker Airbus, oil giants Total and Shell, and General Motors. Qatar will strongly target and get engaged into emerging and strategically-important fields such as biomedicine and biotechnology (genomics, proteomics, bioinformatics, stem cells), Environmental and Sustainable Development Technologies, Information technology and Nanotechnology. Research in each of these areas is critical to the health, well-being and economic prosperity of Qatar and will help ensure a recognized position on the map of world-leaders in innovation.

As a result of the first conference of the Arab expatriate scientists, a Doha declaration and action plan have been adopted

(<http://www.mozahbintnasser.qa/output/page277.asp>).

For the Arab world to recapture its lost glory in the fields of science, the most important step would be to invest in their human capital, through providing high quality education and well supported scientific re-

search. In order to ensure high quality education there must be a vibrant research component developed as well. In addition, the focus of attention of policy makers and development agencies should be on the development of local capabilities to develop, adapt and use technologies. There is little or no technology development in the region.

This conference has generated lot of excitement and high hopes. Now, a follow up committee has been set up to come up with innovative strategies on how to move forward with this historical initiative and most of all how to make it a big success. Failure is not an option at this time. In September 2006, the follow up committee will meet in Doha to officially present the strategy for organization and implementation of the Doha declaration.

Will the strategy meet the high expectations of Arab scientists? Will Qatar leave up to the expectations of Arab scientists? Will this initiative be the first step toward a revival of the lost glory of Arab and Islamic science? Will this be at least a successful initiative to jumpstart science and technology in Qatar and set an example for others to follow? One thing is sure, it is a historical, very ambitious and noble initiative and deserves the support of the scientific community.



While Boeing is creating the next generation of the 747 jumbo jet to fly in 2009, Qatar is investing in generation of knowledge workers for the future. Who knows, it may become one of the future technology powerhouses.

Source of photo: BBC

During a plenary session on science and technology in the Arab and developing world, role of technology transfer, April 2006, Doha, Qatar.

