

MALTA VI

Frontiers of Science: Research and Education in the Middle East

Hilton Hotel, Valletta, Malta

November 10 - 15, 2013

HRH Princess Sumaya bint El Hassan

Science for Peace

Your Excellencies, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen:

We all share a commitment to finding solutions to the Middle East's many and multilayered challenges. I am so very disappointed that I have not been able to join you in person today for this vital and timely conference. You have all helped to mark Malta out as a centre for dialogue, engagement and understanding. Your dedicated participation in the Malta Conferences has made Valetta a place of peaceful and extremely productive exchange. Please be assured of my unstinting support for the work you do to help improve the quality of life of our Middle East citizens, through Science, Education and Innovation.

Meetings such as Malta VI have never been more important. For it seems that traditional diplomacy so often has little to offer the people of our region. And as conflict increases and resources become ever more depleted, it is a matter of deep concern that Science has no solid platform. Politics and ideology grab the headlines, yet the greatest challenges facing our region have yet to be addressed, and they have nothing to do with race, religion or political leanings. Put simply, the Middle East is at

an advanced stage of debilitating exposure to the three interlaced and immutable challenges that define our age yet remain unacknowledged by the major diplomatic actors in our region - the combined and interlinked stresses on energy, food and water pose unprecedented existential threats to all our people. These are challenges that only science empowered by a stoical political will can solve. Yet there is no agenda for saving our future. Until we accept that borders matter little in our region, or in the world at large, we will fail even to begin undoing the mistakes of wasteful generations.

I believe that it is in this starkly simple scenario that Science Diplomacy must fight for a voice. For this is a time in which ‘Science for Peace’ must become more than a slogan. The concept of Science Diplomacy is certainly not new in the Middle East, but if it is to succeed in helping to avert catastrophe, then we must acknowledge that the framework in which it must operate has changed irreversibly in recent years. Crucially, the global nature of environmental and resource pressures, combined with the globalization of knowledge and ideas, have made self-interested statecraft a dangerous and ill-conceived practice. Any objective assessment of our planet’s needs and our global population’s plight can only serve to underline the irrelevance of borders, trade barriers or cultural relativism. Rather, we must be gripped universally by the immediate threats to our shared future: The spiraling energy emissions of our growing cities, the changing weather patterns of our undivided atmosphere, the conglomeration of waste and pollutants in our swirling oceans, and the diminishing greenery of a unique planet under sustained attack.

In the midst of these realities, protecting the *status quo* of a broken regional polity, or seeking to build new relationships in the vein of tried and failed ones, is little more than arming ourselves to lose yesterday's war. We must learn quickly that states are battling with evermore challenging threats, and citizens are not always best represented by statesmen. Indeed, states are becoming weaker in the face of inexorable challenges to climate and security. As economic woes and political partisanship hobble the ability of many governments to plan for the longer term, It is hardly controversial to say that old-style multilateral negotiations are now a thing of the past when it comes to solving the world's critical sustainability challenges.

Of course, these are difficult times for governments around the world. With economic and political instability affecting large swathes of both East and West, it is easy to understand why those major issues of resource management and climate change have been left to one side. However, it should not be easy to accept. I believe that one of the greatest threats to our sustainable future is the short-termism that dominates much political and economic thought.

The Middle East is facing existential challenges that may be more apparent in certain places than others, but are universal in our age. We must acknowledge the real issues that we all face and we must facilitate the historic refusal of scientists to accept the *status quo*. It is this dogged approach that has spurred progress through the ages. Today, diplomats must think in the same way, for only scientific ingenuity, with the support of diplomatic creativity and drive can respond to the defining challenges of our 21st Century – in the Middle East and around the world. We must be ever-mindful of how we go about facilitating science cooperation, for

all of us come to the table with realised and unrealised cultural baggage. For this reason, we should be very clear from the outset about our objectives and our understanding of scientific universality. Scientists and diplomats alike must be agreed that standards should prevail over values, and we must acknowledge where we are before we can hope to plan a future in which inequality and depravation allows ideologues to seize a platform.

Ladies and Gentlemen: I wish you every success at the Malta VI Conference. I deeply regret that I cannot join you in your discussions, but I look forward to hearing of the successes of this great meeting of like minds.