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Senate

CHEMISTS WORKING COOPERATIVELY

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I rise today to share with my colleagues news of a truly historic conference of Middle Eastern chemists held December 6 through 11, 2003, in Malta. Chemists from Egypt, Iran, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, the Palestinian Authority, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and United Arab Emirates gathered in Malta to attend the conference, which was entitled: "Frontiers of Chemical Sciences: Research and Education in the Middle East." The conference was chaired by Dr. Zafra Lerman of Columbia College Chicago. The purpose of the conference was to bring scientists from Middle Eastern countries together under the same roof to work on different issues of common concern.

The Malta Conference was a phenomenal success. The multinational exchange of ideas and information led to the creation of new partnerships in the areas of science and education. The conference was so effective that all the participants involved agreed upon the need for a second conference, tentatively scheduled for 2005.

The Malta Conference permitted participating scientists to address important scientific issues pertinent to the future of the Middle East, but it did more than that. All areas within the Middle East were represented, demonstrating there are some issues that can bring everyone together around a common goal of improving our world and society. This meeting reinforced the fact that the advancement of scientific research and education are vital forces for all nations of the world, and it demonstrated that science and education can help nations that are distrustful of each other to reach across borders and work cooperatively to address common concerns.

The conference chairperson, Dr. Lerman, is the distinguished Professor of Science and Public Policy and head of the Institute for Science Education and Science Communication at Columbia College Chicago. Dr. Lerman received her Ph.D. in chemistry from the Weizmann Institute of Science in Israel. She founded and chaired the Department of Science and Mathematics at Columbia College, where she developed an innovative approach to teaching science to non-science majors which received international recognition. Dr. Lerman is active professionally with national and international associations in the fields of science, science education, and scientific freedom and human rights. For 15 years, she has chaired the national American Chemical Society Subcommittee on Scientific Freedom and Human Rights. She also serves as Vice-Chair for Chemistry for the Board of the Committee of Concerned Scientists and chairs the International Activities Committee of the American Chemical Society, in addition to numerous other positions.

Dr. Lerman has received the Presidential Award for Excellence in Science, Mathematics, and Engineering Mentoring and is a 1998 Kilby Award Laureate for extraordinary contributions to society through science, technology, invention, innovation, and education. In February 2001, she was elected a Fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

I hope my colleagues will join me in congratulating Dr. Lerman and the organizers and delegates of the conference for their superb work. This event serves as a shining example of the progress available to nations that make the effort to promote understanding and cooperation.

I ask that Dr. Lerman's summary of the conference be printed in the RECORD.

The summary follows.

Summary of Malta Conference

From 6 to 11 December, 2003, chemists from Egypt, Iran, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Palestinian Authorities, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and United Arab Emirates gathered in Malta to attend the conference "Frontiers of Chemical Sciences: Research and Education in the Middle East."

The success of this conference tells us that science and scientific research are not just methods of improving the human condition but

can also be ways of crossing illusive national and political barriers that bar effective collaboration among neighbors. The invited participants included presidents of universities, members of the respective countries' national academies of science, and a former minister of science. By engaging a stunning array of world-class scientists from the Middle East, as well as selected scientists from England, France, Germany, South Africa, Taiwan, and the U.S., the resulting discussion broadly enriched our understanding of specific scientific issues important to the area's future. The fact that all segments of the Middle East were represented suggests that there are fundamental scientific issues that connect us all.

Six Nobel Laureates served as working group leaders on subjects of common interest to Middle Eastern countries. The subjects of these working groups included: "Environment, Water and Renewable Energy," "Research and New Methodologies in Science Education," "Cultural Heritage and Preservation of Antiquities," "The Use of the Synchrotron to Facilitate Research in the Middle East (SESAME Project)," among others. Participants committed themselves to continue working together after the conference via e-mail and through smaller regional meetings. Among suggestions offered for future topics were: nanotechnology, computational chemistry, and solar energy.

All participants wrote that the conference organization was excellent, that the conference exceeded their expectations, and that the opportunity to work with the Nobel laureates was especially appreciated and it led to stimulating and informed discussion. 100% of the participants felt that a second conference, probably in 2005, would be needed. All indicated that they would want to attend and that they would recommend it to their colleagues. Most expressed willingness to participate in the organization of such an event.

A joint proposal between Israeli and Palestinian participants in the Malta conference was written on water purification and submitted to USAID-MERC.

One of the conference working groups, which concentrated on the synchrotron being built in Jordan (supported by UNESCO) for all the Middle East scientists, raised the urgent need for scientists trained in the use of a synchrotron. Dr. Yuan T. Lee, the Nobel Laureate who is science advisor to the President of Taiwan, offered during the conference three full scholarships for scientists from the Middle East to spend a year learning to use the synchrotron in Taiwan. An agreement is already signed, and the selection of the three Middle Eastern scientists is in progress.

The President of the Technion (Israel Institute of Technology) offered to provide three full Technion scholarships for any interested student from an Arabic country.

A group of Palestinian participants met in February with their Israeli colleagues in the Weizmann Institute of Science. As a result, an agreement was signed for Palestinian students to study for MSc and PhD at the Weizmann Institute of Science; a committee is now working on financial arrangements needed to run the program.

One of the Israeli participants has been invited to present a lecture in Egypt. All the Egyptian participants expressed their interest in attending his lecture; some extended additional invitations for him to visit and present seminars at their institutions.

Dr. Roald Hoffmann, one of the American Nobel laureates, offered to run an intensive workshop in a Middle East location for graduate students from all the participating countries. This idea was accepted quite favorably by the participants; the location is now being discussed.

Ultimately, all the participants agreed that science is, indeed, a shared language between them all, and that the things they have in common are more numerous than the differences that separate them. The desire among the participants to continue the collaborations and to meet again is proof that the conference succeeded in overcoming barriers heretofore perceived as insurmountable.