Higher Education in the Arab World: Building a Culture of Innovation and Entrepreneurship

Adnan Badran
President, AAS

At Shoman foundation in Amman 2011, I gave a paper on Science & Technology and Innovation and concluded that our march is stand-still in the Arab region, no progress, we are advancing as good consumers of technologies made by others. Now in 2018, we are moving as Arabs but marching backward. We wasted $900 billion since 2011 on wars, conflicts in the Arab countries; Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Libya, Sudan, Somalia, and conflicts among the Gulf countries, and let us not forget the earlier civil war in Lebanon, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Gaza and the West bank and so on.

Conflicts have widened to bring hatred with ideological, sectorial, ethnic and have divided people in the region, millions killed or driven out of their homes. We are living in a failed states, while the world is rocketing in advancement of science and technology and innovation, therefore unemployment is
diminishing and wealth has been created every day in peaceful stable environment.

At the AAS in Beirut we meet every year in November to address a priority theme related to the Arab region on higher education and science advancement and we publish a book which is widely distributed and read in the world, but less read in the Arab World. Apparently, our region has lost hope and inspiration even in reading. Fear, dogmatism and apathy are prevailing. Quality and relevance of learning and research are down the drain.

What shall we do? How do we inspire the academia of our society through higher learning institutions to wake up and stand for the millennium challenges, how do we reform our teaching/learning process from rote teaching to enquiry-based learning to ignite the minds of men and women in building critical thinking, strengthen science, math, linguistics, ethics, behavior and team work and learning to live with others.

In our conference today, we are going to deal with another aspect of higher education: Building Culture of Innovation and Entrepreneurship.
There is a need of an inducing environment we have to build on our campuses, not only in science and technology, but also in humanizing science through philosophy, logics and social sciences.

A student named Qutaiba addressed a question to the current PM Dr. Omar Razzaz in Jordan on the social media when he was minister of education, asking if there is hope of reforming education, or shall he immigrate to another stable and peaceful land. The PM replied, advising him to stay. Today with the high unemployment rate of 20% in Jordan and high-jacking taxes to unprecedented rate (one of the highest in the world) and the highest cost of living in Amman which is currently, the most expensive city among Arab capitals to live in, many in the social media are calling again on Qutaiba “run and run” Qutaiba before it is too late.

So is there hope to implement reforms in our region, or shall we follow Qutaiba and look for the future of our children and grandchildren somewhere else, a promising stable land.

In the horizon, is there an end to our problems?

Thank you.