

**Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser's Speech for the  
Opening of the "Doha International Conference on the Family"  
16-17 April 2014**

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Peace be upon you,

*(As-salamalaykum)*

Ladies and Gentlemen

Recalling our commitments in a similar conference held in Doha in 2004 during the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the International Year of the Family, we welcome you and commend your continuous determination towards family issues at this conference. I see that the present conference is an appropriate opportunity to carry out an elaborate review of the accomplishments for two decades at the level of legislation, policies, applications and real changes.

As you know, the United Nations has summed up the concerns of humanity and outlined the need for comprehensive empowerment in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), all of which truly focus around family empowerment issues, from education, health, work and equality. However, what hurts us is to see the showiness of goodwill and high cadence towards the humanitarian rhetoric, which we have heard so often in the world but has no actual embodiment in reality, when the actual reality remains mere sayings devoted only by verbosity and little acts. This is proved further by the meager support that states have given to the United Nations Trust Fund on Family Activities. And I believe you have also heard some exemplary voices who alerted the world to the high economic cost of family

disintegration, an issue that necessitates the intervention of states in supporting and strengthening the family's ties, at least if viewed as a matter of profit and loss.

We believe that humanity at the moment greatly needs comprehensive global, national policies and programs that are geared towards family issues as an integrated social system without fragmenting solutions. We behold that the issues of men, women, youth and the child is a single issue: which is the issue of family with its own array of challenges and problems. An issue that starts with the development of minds and requires empowering all family members of their roles. Family empowerment in this sense is to create the conditions for the advancement of the roles in a coherent family that preserves and inherits the values of cohesion. However, the larger role falls on the state, through fixing policies and programs that work to save education and health care, addressing the causes of poverty, supporting the balance between life and work, and upholding the values of solidarity and communication between generations. Given that each community has its own social and cultural characteristics, just as all the countries of the world have their own challenges in the area of family issues, the implementation of appropriate policies and strategies should have its own characteristics and mechanisms, taking into account the unique peculiarities in values between countries.

## **Ladies and Gentlemen**

In this regard, I would like to talk about the issues of the Arab family in an era that Arab societies are undergoing a sensitive historic period whereby its identity, culture and future are threatened. Based on the belief that the family is the nucleus and unity of society, it is also the educational womb of generations: if it is good, society will be righteous, and if it is disintegrated

society will be incoherent. We, as Arabs and Muslims, have a religious, cultural and social heritage that sanctifies the relationship between parents and children and honors the values that maintain cohesion, solidarity and compassion among family members.

Throughout the course of time, the Arab family has called for many referential values to establish the cohesion and strengthen the inheritance of education between generations. Up until recently, authorities continued to regulate the lives of different Arab societies and the behavior of individuals, including the moral authority of religion, the family authority, the value judgment authority, and the legislative authority with its judicial context.

However, the cultural invasion that has swept the world through the flood of globalization in the last two decades has actually shaken the Arab man, created a disruption in the system of values, diminished the identity and cultural characteristics leading to the decline of values and led to slackness in terms of anticipating and addressing the challenges. Here we do not call to a regressive identity; rather we wish to be open with the world, to establish interculturalism with others, not through their identity —but through our own.

Cultural invasion has targeted the core of the identity of the Arab family: its culture, language and religion. The media and entertainment culture has played the most influential role in carrying the terms and consequences of this invasion, which has affected many of the Arab youth. We hurt deeply as we see young Arabs losing their identity, cases that blow the siren, lest this domination permeate future generations. Meanwhile Arab countries are preoccupied by political disputes or internal conflicts, ignoring their duties toward building and developing society. Perhaps no other region in the world is quite like most Arab countries, whose budgets are drained through

armaments, security requirements and media propaganda. How can the family be decent when the state is not?

The most shocking is that some Arab countries fund and support hundreds of satellite channels that contribute to the flattening of the Arab mind, promoting cultural literacy and manipulating the instincts of youth. This warns us about our losing bet with the future. Most likely, only a small amount of the vast sum of money that is wasted on these projects is enough to fund and create many of the development programs that are capable of empowering the family. Yet these projects would not have achieved their goals without the languor of the Arab elites or inaction in their intellectual, cultural and media roles to address the aspects of devastation and maintain Arab authentic heritage and the vivid cultural values.

We can see now that the rigid approach towards cultural heritage and values illustrates an ignorance that is unaware of society's evolution and which breeds misconceptions that impact societal and educational values. In order to allow our heritage –with its culture and values- to be a vital presence in the contemporary age, we must reproduce this heritage in harmony with the spirit of the age. By this we do not mean breaking the past, just as we do not mean jumping into the present, instead it is a process of assimilating and harmonizing our values with the cultural and social conditions of the age we live in.

Before it is too late, the present generation of decision-makers in the Arab countries must assume their historical responsibilities in support of family cohesion and empower them to actively contribute in development, enact legislation to protect the youth, women, child and the elderly, and develop comprehensive educational, media and cultural programs to preserve identity and cultural characteristics in the minds of young people. It is worth noting that there are plenty of relevant institutions in this regard to undertake such programs that yield the desired change. It will always be

evident that our nation will not advance toward a praiseworthy future if it did not protect the inherent values of the family, and if the youth did not enjoy the moral firmness against behavioral abnormalities and cultural immunity against the temptations of the products and media of the cultural invasion that flattens their minds.

### **Ladies and Gentlemen**

I believe that the experts and researchers in the area of family issues, which you are at the forefront of, are responsible to take the initiative and provide facts, figures and solutions for the decision-makers. In the same spirit, the decision-makers, whether in governments or international organizations, must take the initiative to make changes in accordance to the findings.

I appreciate your attendance and wish you success in all your endeavors.

Peace be upon you

*(As-salamalaykum)*