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THE TIDES OF CHANGE:
REFLECTIONS ON ARAB REFORM

By

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Introduction

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great honor to address you today on the occasion of the Freeman lecture at the University of Minnesota. Orville Freeman was an outstanding public servant, one of that unique group of Americans who mixed idealism with pragmatism, whose exemplary career in public service remains an inspiration to those devoted to the public good. He was one of “the best and the brightest” that president Kennedy brought to Washington.

Allow me to start with important words that President John F. Kennedy addressed to another university, half a lifetime ago. Speaking of world peace, he said:

“For, in the final analysis, our most basic common link is that we all inhabit this small planet. We all breathe the same air. We all cherish our children’s future. And we are all mortal.”

Those words are as pertinent today as they were over a generation ago. In the post 9/11 world, it is important that the US and the Arab and Muslim world remember that common humanity, and build a new basis for common understanding and mutual respect. This will require greater sensitivity on the part of the US at a time of profound change in the Arab and Muslim worlds.

There are few topics that are as high on the global agenda today than the issue of reform in the Arab and Muslim worlds. Having been closely involved with these issues for a number of years, and most recently in terms of the efforts launched at the Bibliotheca Alexandrina, the new library of Alexandria, that I have the honor of directing, I feel that my address brings the passion of the engaged more than the detachment of the scholar. Nevertheless, given the distinction that you have bestowed upon me by inviting me here, I will try to keep a balance between fervor and distance, engagement and detachment.

Allow me to cover the following points:

First: the changing world scene;

Second: a framework for Arab reform: The Alexandria Declaration

Third: key elements of the reform agenda, including the status of women;

Fourth: the tides of change that confront us all; and

Finally: The challenge of tomorrow and the dream that could yet be a reality.

I. A Changing World:

The Emerging World:

Consider the paradox of our times. We live in a world of plenty, of dazzling scientific advances and technological breakthroughs. Adventures in cyberspace are at hand. The Cold War is over, and with that we were offered the hope of global stability. Yet, our times are marred by conflict, violence, debilitating economic uncertainties and tragic poverty. The US, seared by the agony of the monstrous disaster of September 11, 2001, is bent on deploying its enormous might and its considerable resources to root out the cause for such evil. The world, including the Arab and Muslim worlds, stand ready to participate in destroying this evil and to systematically attack the bases of terrorism, fanaticism and extremism.

Why then are there so many differences between the US and the Arab and Muslim Worlds? While there is considerable overlap between the Arab and Muslim worlds, they are not the same. The Muslim world is some four to five times larger in population than the Arab world and stretches from Morocco to Indonesia, and from central Asia to Sub-Saharan Africa, not counting the Diaspora of migrant and settled communities in the countries of the north. Today, I will focus my discussion on the Arab world, though much of what I say can also apply to the Muslim world. For now, let us start by looking at the world as it appears to many in the developing world, including the Arab world.

A View From The South:

Our world is in the throes of rapid transformation, with a future only dimly perceived. The post-war order is creaking and requires retooling from the security council to the Bretton Woods institutions. Yet the political will to forge the new multilateralism is lacking. Europe is busy constructing its wonderful new edifice, and the US seems intent on pursuing its own course. Yet the wisdom of the architects of the post-world-war II system needs to be reflected as we enter into the new century. We recognize our common humanity, but shy away from the consequences of accepting such a view. For surely we cannot accept that half of humanity is ill-fed, ill-housed, wracked by disease and blighted by ignorance.

Our new world is emerging by the action and the inaction of the powerful. It is one that could make a difference for so many if the powerful choose to act in those areas where they will empower the weak and marginalized to become the producers of their own bounty and welfare, not the recipients of charity or the beneficiaries of aid... Replacing despair with hope, anger with love, enmity with friendship, conflict with cooperation. Yet the world that is emerging is not like that. It is one where hate and suspicion have overtaken the urge to altruism and collaboration, where the clash of civilizations is advanced as a substitute for the cold war, and where the misdeeds of a few are projected onto guilt by the many. Stereotypes abound:

A powerful, hegemonic west, that insists on seeing us through stereotypical eyes: The Arabs and Muslims are intolerant and prone to violence and terrorism, Sub-Saharan Africa is a problem case, riven with war and littered with the corpses of well-intentioned development efforts.

For us, the arrogance of power has blinded the west to its own record of misdeeds in our region, and today, the west, smug in its rich self assurance, insensitive to our predicament, perpetuates the very conditions that prevent us from rising to claim our rightful place among the nations of the world.

We must strive to challenge these prejudices and stereotypes, on both sides. I believe that we reformers in the Arab world will do our part and we stretch out our hands in friendship, confident that – as president Kennedy said – the creation of a new world order is in the interest of all. I hope that this lecture will be perceived in that light.

The Arab societies of today want to define themselves in terms of the present and the future, but still retaining their links to their heritage, without remaining captives of the past. In so doing they are confronting the dominant, hegemonic constructs of hyper-mediated western societies, that are blithely setting the global agenda from world trade to consumer taste. The images of those western societies seem as pervasive as their discourse. Many in the Arab world -- as in many developing countries -- fear the spread of this "westernization", and want to assert their separate cultural identity.

What is the Arab world:

Many in the western world think of the Arab world as one of oil, deserts and camels, authoritarian governments and militant fanatics. The Arab world is one of the most diversified regions in the world. From the war-torn deserts of Somalia to the chic cosmopolitan streets of Lebanon, from Egypt's Monuments that defy time to Dubai's gleaming structures that run ahead of tomorrow's dreams, the Arab World is a seething multi-faceted reality that transcends any short-hand, sound-byte description. It is a classic case of the "blind men and the elephant" where each description is partly right and essentially lacking or wrong. So what makes it one Arab World?

A shared heritage and history for one thing. Islam is an essential component of that, but not all Arabs are Muslims and not all Muslims are Arabs. In fact, the vast majority of Muslims are not Arabs. A shared language, Arabic, and a shared sensibility is certainly part of the equation. Recall also that inter-Arab labor mobility has been very significant in the years that succeeded the oil boom of the 1970s, and has marked the coming of age of the now-dominant generation. Above all, the empathy is real. For many Arabs, the issues of Palestine and of Iraq are not distant foreign policy issues, they are deeply felt "family" issues. People react as they would for the catastrophes that befall members of one extended family.

But are there other elements that unify them? Yes. The Arabs are a proud people, and today, more than ever, they yearn for freedom, self-rule, democracy and the rule of law. Long postponed in the name of national and international imperatives, reform will no longer be denied. The forces of change are challenging the forces of stasis on every Arab society. A younger generation is pushing open the gates to the labor force and to public life. Recall that over 50% of the Arab World is under 25 years old. And that, more than anything has put the Arab Reform Agenda front and center in every Arab capital.

The US avowed and declared intent to promote regime change throughout the Arab world has certainly helped focus national and international attention on the issue, and has helped the simmering pots to boil. And yes, it has certainly removed the evil and tyrannical regime of Saddam Hussain and his cronies, opening the way for a new generation of Iraqis to take charge of their own destinies, and to breathe – for the first time in decades – the air of freedom. But, it would be disingenuous to ignore the very real problems that remain in Iraq, or to claim that the very considerable achievements, especially with the remarkable success of the January 30th, 2005 election, have taken Iraq out of the woods. Much remains to be done. In every country, we need truly national champions of the reform to step up to the plate. Reform, credibly articulated from within, not perceived as the artifact of external forces and their puppets or the result of forced intrusions, is reform that will take root and succeed over the long haul.

II. Implementing Arab Reform:

A Vision for Arab Reform:

By early 2004, the ongoing drama of events in the middle east fueled unprecedented anti-US feeling, and more generalized anger against the injustices of an unfair world, and the major powers in it. Against this background, the calls for Arab reform emanating from the US and the EU generated resentment and suspicion. Most voices in the Arab World rose to reject these proposals and assert that reform cannot be imposed from the outside. Experience has shown that reforms to be successful and lasting must be home grown and driven by forces inside the societies concerned. It was against that backdrop that the idea of a civil society initiative, based in Alexandria, was born.

In march 2004, 160 distinguished Arabs from 18 Arab countries, gathered in the Library of Alexandria in Egypt to firmly and unambiguously state their positions on the all important issues of reform. Could they possibly agree on a coherent statement?

They did. The Alexandria Declaration of March 2004¹ is a remarkable document, for its clarity, its balance and its comprehensiveness. It sets a course and defines a framework, covering everything from Political reforms (democracy, human rights, freedom and the rule of law) to Economic reforms (removing trade barriers, youth employment, regional integration and integration with the world economy) to Social reforms (family, education and the removal of all forms of discrimination against women) , to cultural reforms (the religious discourse as much as the public and media discourse, promotion of rationality and the scientific outlook). It categorically condemns all forms of terrorism, and focuses on the internal situation in many Arab countries. It recognizes that the start positions of many Arab countries are very different. But if it does make allowances for these differences, it nevertheless, calls for reforms to be implemented without delay or hesitation.

What is more, the 160 participants actually drafted the document collaboratively, and produced this forthright statement in less than 48 hours of deliberations. They even agreed on a whole program to actively pursue the mobilization of the Arab civil Society around the themes of reform, and immediately started implementing this follow-up program, as can be seen from the Arab Reform Forum² established within 24 hours of the conference in March 2004. Every one

of the promised actions did actually take place: conferences, lectures, internet linkages, and discussion forums all happened on schedule. A more direct and vibrant involvement of the civil society is beginning to take hold.

Some ten days ago, a second conference, coming exactly one year after the Alexandria Declaration, allowed us to take stock of the situation. The results are quite encouraging. Attended by some 500 delegates from 16 Arab countries, presenting some 120 “success stories” of the actions of the civil society, the conference witnessed a marked change in the tone of the discourse and the tenor of the discussion.

President Mubarak who had encouraged the first meeting with a speech inviting the civil society to be a partner with government in promoting the reform process, again came ahead of the formal opening to the conference and gave a historic speech in which he praised the Alexandria Declaration, and stated that it provided the framework for much of the reform thinking. He saluted it as the authentic voice of the Arab civil society and listed some of the momentous developments that he has sponsored. But more on Egypt in a moment.

The struggle for reform: an iron triangle of competing forces:

Today, reformers, including myself, are locked in an enormous struggle with conservative, anti-reformist forces for the hearts and minds of our people. We are one point of a three-way tug-of-war, an iron triangle of competing forces locked together in an inescapable showdown. The first point of this triangle, and still dominant in many Arab countries, is the remnants of the statist bureaucracies and old-line politicians, ideological heirs to the 1960s socialist centralized power of then secular regimes who battled the Muslim brotherhood, and who to this day fear openness and actively seek to intimidate differing voices and who would use any excuse to do so. The second point of this triangle is their nemesis, the radical right, the Islamist currents, ideological heirs to the Muslim Brotherhood, who would reject the openness to our rapidly changing world, and take us back to a form of theocratic government, where not only the rights of women and minorities are trampled afoot, but also all those who do not agree with the specific interpretation of Islam that is being advocated. These are not the extreme militant groups of fanatics who wage terror on all societies in the name of Islam. They are mainstream groups in society today, and tend to be the most powerful street presence in opposition to the statist forces. Finally, the small but rapidly growing liberal forces of democratization and change constitute the third part of that triangle. By the very nature of the movements that they represent, no two parties of this triangle can actually form an alliance against the third. They are all locked into a real and profound ideological combat for the future of Egypt and the Arab world.

Egyptian Reform: Reviewing the facts:

Let us take a harder look at Egypt’s reforms.

Why Egypt? Because in the final analysis by sheer historical, cultural and demographic weight, Egypt counts in the Arab world.

Quietly, despite the recurring barrage of criticism in the US, and the impatience of some of us reformers who want a faster pace of change, much has been done in Egypt. More serious reform than in any other country in the Arab world!

Let us review some facts.

Much has been done to liberalize the climate of debate and discussion in Egypt, and much remains to be done. Compare the situation in Egypt today with what it was like in the 1980s. Just in terms of numbers:

- The licensed Newspapers went from 27 in 1982 to 504 today, not counting about 1100 journals (of which about 585 are scholarly)
- Radio and Broadcasting channels went from 106 in 1982 to 529 today
- Public TV channels went from 2 in 1982 to 32 today, plus 6 privately owned channels.

Of course, today, TV channels from all over the world are available on cable and dish, and the number of choices that one has to access news and entertainment is enormous.

Internet subscribers went from 75,000 in 1997 to 3.3 million in 2004. Freedom of expression on the internet is absolute, with chat-rooms proliferating, and it is becoming an important alternative source of news in relation to Broadcasting (Radio and TV).

There is a wide margin of freedom of expression, and governmental legal censorship is light by any standard. Official censorship focuses mostly on extremist Islamist propaganda and hate literature. It tends to approve many films, videos, novels and plays that are considered “obscene” by large segments of society. But a vigorous form of political and intellectual censorship by self appointed groups is effectively curtailing the full use of the available freedoms. Different segments of society are struggling to set the boundaries of the permissible and the acceptable. This is a struggle that must be joined on the side of liberty and freedom of thought and expression by all caring individuals.

While the battles with our self-appointed censors continue, the 2004 Alexandria meeting and the new open door to the civil society that it heralded, came on top of a year of important changes that witnessed the abolition of the hated state security courts (but not the emergency state security courts), the creation of a human rights council headed by former UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, a ban on imprisonment for any journalist on the basis of what they write, and a declaration that the president was ready to discuss even constitutional reform. The emergency law could be replaced by a new law on terrorism.

A new government headed by a 52-year old IT specialist and including a number of ministers around 40 years of age, took over in July 2004. The economic team promptly set to the task of important reforms that were felt within the first six months: they slashed and simplified both taxes and custom tariffs, unified the multiple exchange rates, abolished the crazy-quilt of special exemptions to many industrial ventures, established the qualified industrial zones which had been held up in the limbo of committee discussions for six years. They liberalized the exchange rate transactions, facilitated one-stop-shop investment authority to attract FDI, removed the

shackles off the commercial banks to operate freely in foreign exchange transactions and revived the stalled privatization program.

In the meantime, the Alexandria Library was continuing its program of intense public debates about reform issues: from education to economics to youth. We also invited foreign leaders to share their experiences with reform.

All this has given many in Egypt high hopes that far-reaching reforms are in the wind, and that further changes are likely.

Then came the bombshell: President Mubarak called for a constitutional amendment to allow for multi-candidate contested presidential elections to be decided by the popular vote for the first time in Egypt's history.

This enormous step did not receive adequate international attention perhaps because of the highly publicized arrest of an opposition figure³. Whatever the legal merits of the case against him, his arrest before trial was a most unfortunate decision. It was subsequently reversed by his release, but not without damage to the image of Egypt internationally. However, I believe that these are the manifestations of rear-guard actions of old statist forces who are disoriented and worried by the President's march towards greater freedom of expression and greater public participation, and by the erosion of state control as market forces gradually take over large parts of economic decision-making.

A Civil Society Initiative:

What made the remarkable Alexandria experiment work was the support of President Mubarak of Egypt to maintain that space of freedom that the Library of Alexandria provided. By design, the conference banned Ministers currently in office, as well as non-Arabs from participation. The intent was to produce a truly independent, home-grown Arab view of reform. President Mubarak not only gave his blessings to this Civil Society initiative, he also came for a special, separate meeting, hours before the scheduled start of the conference, to deliver a speech that invited the civil society to come in as partners in the long and arduous tasks of reform. He emphasized the need for reform and its urgency, and that the basis for reform must be respect for human rights and the removal of all forms of discrimination against women.

This was the first time that President Mubarak inaugurated a non-governmental affair, and he effectively opened the door to the Civil Society to play a real role in shaping Egypt's future. Initiative is not the monopoly of government. In his second address a year later, just a few days ago, he lauded the efforts that had been done, explained his historic decision to ask for the amendment of the constitution to allow for contested presidential elections by secret ballot and popular vote, and he lauded the Alexandria declaration as the framework for much thinking on reform and reaffirmed his belief in the role of the civil society.

It will be up to us – members of the civil society – to push the reform agenda, show imagination and come up with real proposals, promote public discussion and undertake effective actions at the community level as we assume a much bigger role in bringing the Egypt of the 21st century to life.

Today in the Arab world everything is still left to the governments to decide, and the public is there – like a spectator – to judge their performance with applause or cat-calls, but not really expecting to participate at all. It is time for the spectators to become engaged citizens, and to take charge of their destiny. That is what a civil society effort is all about, and we have only just begun.

III. Key Elements Of Arab Reform

Many have focused obsessively on the political dimensions of reform. But I have no doubt that this will come. It is the most obvious, and possibly the simplest of the various aspects of reform to achieve. The Alexandria Declaration had, correctly, focused on the socio-cultural and the economic in addition to the political. Of these, the hardest and arguably the most important will be the socio-cultural dimensions of Arab reform.

Liberating The Arab Mind:

Today, I reaffirm that the key element of reform will be our ability to liberate the Arab mind, for it is in our minds that the new Arab renaissance will be created. And it is the responsibility of the intellectuals, all of us who drafted the Alexandria Declaration and tens of thousands like us throughout the Arab world, to liberate the Arab mind from the fear of intolerant fanaticism or state despotism, from the shackles of political correctness or the insecurities of being disconnected from a rapidly evolving world. We must liberate the Arab mind so that Arabs can soar, take in from the new and make it their own.

That, my friends, is the true revolution, creating a new order of things. There is nothing more difficult to take in hand, more perilous to conduct, or more uncertain of success than to take the lead in the introduction of a new order of things, because the innovator has for enemies, all those who have done well under the old conditions, and lukewarm defenders in those who may do well under the new.

But it is our destiny to have been here at this time, and we must try. For it is better to try and fail than too have failed to try. And the first thing we must try to break is that sterile, tired and tiresome debate about Modernity and Tradition.

We need to respect tradition and integrate it into the present and use it as a foundation for launching a better future. We need to fashion a critical approach that interprets tradition in contemporary terms, just as the great jurists of the past did in their day.

Indeed we need to create a new discourse, and that new discourse, critical, open and tolerant of the contrarian view, will be the basis for the creation of a mode of cultural expression. A new language that permeates the arts, letters and the public realm, that incorporates the new but anchors it in the old.

A new language, where in the words of T.S. Eliot ...

Every phrase and sentence is right
 When every word is at home
 Taking its place to support the others
 The word neither diffident nor ostentatious

An easy commerce of the old and the new
 The common word exact without vulgarity
 The formal word precise but not pedantic
 The complete consort dancing together

Every phrase and every sentence
 is an end and a beginning.

T.S. Eliot – Four Quartets

The modernization of values and the values of modernization:

The modern discourse has internalized what we could term the values of science. Science as a way of thinking, as a world outlook from cosmology to evolution, from quantification to logical deduction, has permeated our outlook and our way of thinking. This is still at odds with the shrill self-righteous discourse that permeates much of the Arab world today. The advocates of that discourse, try to claim a uniqueness to our societies that would justify this disconnect from the global contemporary discourse. They seek refuge in past achievements to avoid confronting future challenges.

But contrary to what some would have us believe, there is much in our Arab/Muslim tradition that has to do with the promotion of science. Today, as we confront the voices of extremism, we can find strength from the legacy of the golden age of our own civilization. Indeed, our culture has much to be proud of. It was very much the Arab/Muslim Civilization that helped spawn the renaissance, and that laid the foundation of the modern experimental method, accepting the authority of observation and experiment rather than the authority of the ancients. Listen to the modern voice of Ibn Al-Haytham⁴, known in the west as Al Hazen:

“He who searches for truth is not he who reviews the works of the ancients... It is the duty of he who reads science books, if he wants to learn truths, that he should set himself up as an opponent to all he looks at.. [accepting only what is supported by evidence and argument].”

--- Ibn Al Haytham, *Al Shukuk Fi Batlaymous*

Likewise, listen to the voice of Ibn Al-Nafis⁵ on accepting the contrarian view, subject to the test of evidence and rational analysis.

“When hearing something unusual, do not preemptively reject it, for that would be folly. Indeed, horrible things may be true, and familiar and praised things may prove to be lies. Truth is truth unto itself, not because [many] people say it is.”

--- Ibn Al-Nafis, *Sharh' Ma'na Al Qanun*.

How different these enlightened voices from the past sound compared to the frenetic ranting and condemnations of the new and the different that we see and hear everywhere in the Arab and Muslim worlds today! Armed with our past legacy of scientific detachment, we can better address the challenges of opening up to the global discourse with its scientific component, and push for the modernization of our values so that they become the values of modernization.

The values of Science:

We must see science as an integral part of our culture, that informs our worldview and affects our behavior. It promotes fundamental ethical values. Indeed, as Bronowski said: "Those who think that science is ethically neutral confuse the findings of science, which are, with the activity of science which is not."⁶

It brings imagination and vision to bear on concrete problems and theoretical speculation. After all, in Blake's immortal phrase: "What is now proved was once only imagin'd." Imagination and vision are at the very heart of the scientific enterprise. Again, Bronowski put it beautifully when he said: "..we are the visionaries of action; we are inspired with change. ... We are the culture of living change."⁷

In fact, the values promoted by that scientific outlook: honesty, honor, truth, and the use of reason, are profoundly Islamic values. These were the values in the period when Islamic science was defined as the contributions that Muslims made to the collective scientific enterprise, rather than an effort to dissociate ourselves from the rigor of scientific debate by claiming a separateness to our scientific enterprise. So let us not allow the essence of these arguments to be sidelined by arguments about Islam and the west. Let us reclaim, as intellectuals, our right to reason, let us liberate the Arab mind.

Let us use these liberated minds to create a better future for all. And in that framework, the status of women comes to the fore...

The status of women

No issue looms larger on the reform agenda than the status of women. It is the ultimate litmus test for whether the Arab societies have finally made a transition to the 21st century.

Global experience highlights the emerging centrality of women. They are the true vectors of development. There is ample evidence that the key to development lies in the education of girls and the empowerment of women. These are the single most important actions that any developing society can undertake: the education of girls and the empowerment of women.... And speaking from this podium, as a Muslim Arab man, let me be clear: there is no cultural specificity argument that can be tolerated to justify depriving women of their human rights in the name of tradition, or to mutilate girls in the name of custom.

Indeed, women's rights are human rights. These must be protected by the rule of law, where all are equal before the law, and no-one is above the law.

But there is more. Women are not just victims of oppression or vectors of change. They are the artisans of social capital, that lattice of values that is the glue that holds societies together. It is they who repair the torn social fabric of communities in the difficult post-conflict situations. They are the custodians of values, who nurture these values in the next generation

New civil society movements have emerged. Mrs. Mubarak founded an international movement devoted to women and peace⁸, the first to emerge from the Arab world. I am proud to work with her and others in a peace movement that is all about empowering women. But we must engage all men in this endeavor. Men must not just to be made to understand, they must be mobilized. Women's issues are society's issues, and men must be involved. We need to breathe with two lungs!

Crimes against women, such as rape, trafficking and honor killings, reflect pathological behaviors by men. I am appalled by such behavior from members of my sex, and it is clearly an issue for both women and men.

Hand in hand, empowered women and enlightened men will build that better future we all dream of. We cannot continue to focus on building the women of tomorrow and not worry about transforming the men of yesterday!

A credo

The world will judge us by deeds not declarations, and we must "walk the talk" in our effort to promote a culture of peace and justice opposed to the culture of hate. Reform is a journey, not a destination. It is crafted by the serious debate of engaged citizens as they struggle with the challenges of their changing times. But beyond actions, declarations of principle are important. For the principles guide the actions. People need to know where we stand. So allow me here and now to declare what my colleagues and I believe:

The world is my home
 Humanity is my family
 Non-violence is my creed
 Peace, justice, equality and dignity for all is my purpose
 Engagement, rationality, tolerance, dialogue, learning and understanding are my means.

With outstretched hands we welcome all those who share these beliefs...

I submit that a widespread adoption of this credo will make it possible to empower philosophers, writers, artists and critics to pour forth their myriad contributions that fashion culture, identity and the very fabric of society. They are all necessarily the artisans of this new Arab renaissance. Thus will they rise up to the tide of challenges that confronts us today...

IV. The Tides of Change

There is a Tide...

For there is a tide out there ...

There is a tide ...

There is a tide of humanity,
a population growing and multiplying
in the remotest corners of this vast Arab world,

Millions of young people demanding a right to a decent life,
a life without fear or despair,
a chance to break free of the misery of poverty...

That tide, that unstoppable tide of human ambition will not be denied...

And if it is, then it will be a tide of anger, of hate, of violence, that will engulf all before it and consume us all in its fiery embrace of rejected present and foregone tomorrows.

There is a tide ..

A tide of suffering,

Of children malnourished, stunted, deprived,

They haunt our television screens and our dreams..

In Somalia, in Sudan, ... Our brothers and sisters, our children, fellow human beings ..

Left to their fate...

While a new class of rich consumers discuss the prices of everything and the value of nothing...

There is a tide of ignorance and greed

that ravages society and destroys our heritage...

A tide of intolerance and obscurantism,

That wants to stop the march of time and freeze our minds

That teaches hatred and fear

But also...

There is a tide of new awareness...

There is a tide of

understanding of our interdependence,

not just among economies,

but among all people and even all living things...

A tide of awareness that the rights of all women and minorities and the weak and the poor are indivisible from our own...

There is a tide of awareness that the past practices of governance and the new specter of intolerance and bigotry cannot be accepted, for they will surely bring misery and wretchedness on our selves and our children..

There is a tide of awareness that we cannot let the world move into the dawn of a new tomorrow while we remain debating the glories of our yesterdays...

There is a tide of new technologies,
that can help us to grapple with the complex realities of our lives..

There is a tide of new possibilities...

We have the knowledge, the science, the expertise,
to be part of the scientific revolution that is accompanying the new millennium...

Knowledge that can cure disease and double harvests,
bring water to the deserts and create humane cities, where equity and justice can prevail.

There is a tide of possibilities that the genius of the Arab people can unleash..

But that genius can only be unlocked by freedom and thrives on liberty, unbounded inquiry and tolerance.

Yes, there is a tide..

There is a vista of possibilities
where the scope of our achievements is bounded only by our imagination and constrained only
by our determination to succeed.

Yes...there is a tide in the affairs of Men
which taken at the flood leads on to fortune ...

Fortune, not just in terms of more economic growth, although that, too, can be accommodated..
Fortune, not in terms of accumulation of dollars in national or foreign bank accounts..

but fortune in terms of true well-being.

Fortune in terms of quality of life.

Fortune in terms of the satisfaction of doing what is good.

Fortune in terms of a better understanding of ourselves and our neighbors.

Fortune in terms of leaving a better world for our children, and our children's children,

Yes ...

There is a tide that leads on to fortune.

Omitted, all the voyage of their lives
is bound in shallows and in miseries ...

If we fail in bringing about this change in the way the Arab people think about themselves and the world...

If we fail to persuade our colleagues in governments, the media, the universities, the streets of our cities and the fields of our countryside...

If we fail to go beyond the exhortation to do good...

Then the poor among our nations will indeed be denied, the world will indeed be poorer and future generations will indeed suffer.

Then our future will indeed be bound in shallows and in miseries ..

On such a full sea are we now afloat, and we must take the current when it serves or lose our ventures

The sea is indeed full, it is full of threats, and full of promise.

We have the opportunity not just to navigate this sea, but in fact to show the way towards a more responsible relationship with each other and with the world, to show how reform can lead to new vistas and how development can be equitable and sustainable.

We will seize these opportunities, we will succeed in creating that better future, that Arab renaissance...

For...

There is a tide out there...

There is a tide in the Affairs of Men...

Which taken at the flood leads on to fortune.

Omitted, all the voyage of their lives
is bound in shallows and in miseries.

On such a full sea are we now afloat
and we must take the current when it serves
or lose our ventures⁹.

Better Tomorrows:

We will Not lose our ventures.

We will create the new world, guided by a vision...

A vision of a caring society where (in keeping with Gandhi) there would be

NO Politics without principle
NO Wealth without work
NO Commerce without morality

NO Pleasure without conscience
 NO Education without character
 NO Science without humanity

A vision where a people's greatness is measured by the quality of the lives of their poorest citizens not by the size of their armies or the scale of their buildings..

A vision where the future is for all, as open-ended as knowledge, as random as play, as surprising as human imagination and ingenuity ...

This is the vision of a new future for the Arab World...
 A true Renaissance...

A vision of a people, secure in their knowledge of themselves, and their openness to the "Other" in a free commerce of ideas and of knowledge...

Yes! We must change the world...
 It can be done, it must be done, it will be done.

Envoi:

It is often said that the longest journey starts with but one step. The Alexandria Declaration was a giant step on the right path. It was an exercise in empowerment, and of giving voice to the forces of reform. As we go forward, we are willing to engage with others around the world to learn from their experiences. It is clear however, that reform must be home grown and driven by forces internal to the societies concerned.

Reform, and more generally development, is like a tree. You can nurture its growth only by feeding its roots, not by pulling on its branches.

Please do help us.

Help us establish links to the rest of the world in the age of the internet.

Help us by supporting education.

Help us promote rationality, science and technology in our societies.

Help us with your books and your experience.

Help us with access and the free flow of information.

Help us learn to learn.

Help us discover the new and the unknown, in that great human journey of discovery of the self and the universe...

Help us in myriad ways, but do not try to impose upon us a new form of tutelage.

Perhaps it is time to recall the wise words from a senior U.S. military officer and statesman about how the people of the United States, despite a traumatic ordeal that shook the national psyche to its foundations, should deal with a part of the world torn by war, poverty, disease, and hunger. He said:

"...it is of vast importance that our people reach some general understanding of what the complications really are, rather than react from a passion or a prejudice or an emotion of the moment....It is virtually impossible at this distance merely by reading, or listening, or even seeing photographs or motion pictures, to grasp at all the real significance of the situation. And yet the whole world of the future hangs on a proper judgment."

The speaker was General George C. Marshall, outlining the Marshall Plan in an address at Harvard University on June 5, 1947. Surveying the wrecked economies of Europe, Marshall noted the "possibilities of disturbances arising as a result of the desperation of the people concerned." He said that there could be "no political stability and no assured peace" without economic security, and that U.S. policy was "directed not against any country or doctrine but against hunger, poverty, desperation, and chaos."

It is that generous spirit of America that needs to be revived, and in that you will find friends in the Arab and Muslim reformers who will welcome the helping hand of friendship, but not forced dictates of a powerful hegemon. I am optimistic that we will be able to build this understanding based on mutual respect. I am sanguine that you will recognize that the engaged citizen of the Arab world is keen to take charge of his own destiny, rejects tutelage and is unbowed by a history where the doors to freedom and self expression are being opened only now. I am confident that you will hear my voice, symbolic of many other reformers, as I say to you with Henley's *invictus*¹⁰:

Out of the night that covers me,
Black as the pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be
For my unconquerable soul.

In the fell clutch of circumstance
I have not winced nor cried aloud.
Under the bludgeonings of chance
My head is bloody but unbowed.

Beyond this place of wrath and tears
Looms but the Horror of the shade,
And yet the menace of the years
Finds and shall find me unafraid.

It matters not how straight the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll,
I am the master of my fate:
I am the captain of my soul.

Thank you.

¹ The Alexandria Declaration is posted in Arabic, English and French at www.arabreformforum.org

² See www.arabreformforum.org.

³ The arrest of Mr. Ayman Nour, like that of Prof. Saad Eddin Ibrahim two years earlier, received much international publicity and was very negative for the image of the Egyptian Government. It is important to note that the Egyptian Judiciary released Mr. Nour pending trial. In the earlier case against Prof. Ibrahim, the Egyptian judiciary rejected the government arguments, reversed the “state security court’s” conviction of seven years hard labor, and dismissed all charges against him. These state security courts were subsequently abolished. However, Prof. Ibrahim did end up spending time in jail until his conviction was reversed, and the episode continues to be a major source of international criticism of the Egyptian authorities.

⁴ A distinguished Arab mathematician, Ibn al-Haytham (965–c.1040) was born in Persia, but made his career in Cairo. His Optics, which relied on experiment rather than on past authority, influenced Kepler and Descartes.

⁵ Ibn al-Nafis (1213-1288 A.D.) reputed in medicine and jurisprudence, worked in Mansuriya Hospital in Cairo. His major original contribution of great significance was his discovery of the blood's circulatory system, which was re-discovered by modern science three centuries later. He embarked on writing a medical encyclopedia comprising 300 volumes, and although incomplete at the time of his death, *Al-Shamil fi al-Tibb*, remained a milestone of science and medicine in the medieval period.

⁶ J. Bronowski, Science and Human Values, pp. 63-64.

⁷ J. Bronowski, The Abacus and the Rose, p. 118.

⁸ See www.womenforpeaceinternational.org

⁹ William Shakespeare, Julius Caesar, Act V

¹⁰ Invictus (meaning unconquerable in Latin) was published in 1875 by the poet William Ernest Henley (1849-1903)