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UNESCO Special Envoy HE Sheikh Mohamed Bin Issa Al Jaber initiates signing of joint declaration by the UNESCO Director General and the President of Mauritania.

During the 1990's Mali, one of the poorest countries in the world, experienced rapid economic growth. Alongside this economic development democracy flourished and there was relative stability. However, the steady collapse of state control in the North of the country led to a significant decline in the security of the region, exacerbated initially by an influx of arms from the 2011 Libyan civil war, and later on by the arrival of the Saharan branch of al-Qaeda.

In 2012 insurgents seized control of the North. This was followed by the destruction, in June 2012, of many ancient shrines in Timbuktu's mosques. Although the buildings were recognised as UNESCO World Heritage Sites they were considered idolatrous and destroyed by elements of the insurgent force.

On the 11th December 2012, the UNESCO Director-General and the President of Mauritania signed a joint declaration calling for the protection and preservation of the cultural heritage of North Mali.

At the event Sheikh Mohamed Bin Issa Al Jaber, UNESCO Special Envoy, was thanked for his continued support of UNESCO. Sheikh Mohamed later announced his intention to organize and sponsor, at UNESCO, a conference of donors for the restoration and preservation of the cultural heritage of Mali, and in particular Timbuktu, funded by the MBI Al Jaber Foundation, a longstanding partner of UNESCO.

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MBI AL JABER
Foundation



Message from the Chairman

This edition of the Review comes at a very exciting time for us: we are celebrating not only 10 years of the MBI Al Jaber Foundation but also 10 years of the London Middle East Institute, both of which I am extremely proud to have been involved with as Founder and Patron. The past decade has seen many changes in the world, and nowhere more so than in the Middle East, particularly in the last few years.

The need for study of the region is greater than ever, and the LMEI, through its very active programmes, is playing a vital role in bridging the gap of knowledge and understanding between the Middle East and the wider world.

An example of this is the upcoming conference at LMEI on the subject of Yemen and the challenges it is currently facing. In partnership with others, in this case the British Yemeni Society, the LMEI leads the way in bringing the best and most current scholarship on the Middle East, not only to academics but to the general public.

Dr Hassan Hakimian, MBI Al Jaber Director of LMEI, and the LMEI Board have ambitious plans to develop the institute through the expansion of existing programmes, activities and publications and the introduction of new ones. We wish them every success for the future.

The Foundation will be celebrating the first 10 years of both institutions, and looking forward to the next, in a series of events, and I hope to see you at some of them. In the meantime, this Review highlights a few recent activities of the Foundation and, in keeping with the Yemen theme, revisits some of the achievements and experiences of our Yemeni Alumni.

Mohamed Bin Issa Al Jaber
Chairman

The Politics and Economics of Britain's Foreign Aid

The Foundation focuses its resources on three key areas; education, cultural dialogue and good governance. It was therefore a significant moment when one of our Trustees, Sir Tim Lankester, published his recent book "The Politics and Economics of Britain's Foreign Aid" which explains how weak governance and a lack of transparency between conflicting policy agendas has led to the Pergau dam aid project being considered "a prime example of how not to give aid".



The construction of the Pergau dam was one of the most controversial projects in the history of British aid, not least because of its very high cost but also due to its link with a major arms deal. After two parliamentary enquiries and significant media coverage, in a landmark judgement the aid was deemed to have been unlawful.

Sir Tim worked at the World Bank and the British Treasury before serving as Private Secretary (Economic Affairs) to Prime Minister James Callaghan and then to Margaret Thatcher. It was later on in his career, when he was serving as Permanent Secretary to the Overseas Development Administration, that he was perfectly placed to provide a non-partisan account of how government can go so wrong.

Alumni News

Focus on Yemen

The Foundation has been awarding scholarships for over a decade, and has an Alumni body that reaches from Mauritania to Iraq. In this issue of the Review we celebrate the achievements of two of our Yemeni Alumni who are working with UN agencies in the country.

Farouk Al-Salihi

Farouk Al-Salihi studied for a Masters Degree in Comparative Politics at LSE in 2009. Since his return to Yemen he has been working for the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), a specialized agency of the United Nations.

There are six on-going IFAD-funded programmes and projects in Yemen. Their goal is to empower rural people to achieve improved diversified and sustainable livelihoods. They are largely focused on the poorest, most marginalized parts of the country, particularly mountainous zones and remote coastal areas. Programmes such as the Dhamar Participatory Rural Development Project and the Al-Dhala Community Resource Management Project invest in participatory rural development and resource management, rain-fed agriculture and livestock, and social and economic services.

You can read Farouk's interviews with beneficiaries in the 'Voices from the Field' section on the IFAD website (www.ifad.org). Farouk also contributes articles to the al-Arabiya website.



Fahmia Al Fotih

Fahmia Al Fotih was at the University of Westminster studying an MA in International Relations. She has shared some of her educational experiences in this article, a fuller version of which will soon be appearing on the MBI Al Jaber Foundation website:

I was born in a tiny mountain village in Yemen: the first daughter for my parents and the third among eight siblings. Before I went to school, my "kindergarten" was under a tree where an old man taught us the Arabic alphabet and to memorize Qur'an verses. I still remember vividly the one-hour walk to the school on a mountain top attended by students from different villages. There were no chairs or tables: we used to sit on the floor.

Despite the fact that I was 5-years old, I had to contribute to fetching water, grazing animals, harvest, and helping my mother with house-work. Girls traditionally had to focus on the duties that would prepare them to be good housewives. Therefore, as a child, I never imagined a world existed beyond my small village or that one day I would go beyond the borders!

I was the only girl in a boys' high school – the maximum education a lucky girl could obtain was 6 grade – my father was very open-minded and believed in education for all.

Going to university was not easy: I wanted to study Media but instead had to study English literature to be a teacher. Whilst at university, I contributed to the first English newspaper in Yemen and on graduation became a journalist, the only female reporter in the newsroom. Journalism was like a shelter through which I could freely and openly express my opinions, trying to change and make a difference in people's lives, to bridge the gap and spread understanding, and to correct stereotypes and stagnant traditions.



In addition I taught young people and it was an excellent combination.

Being awarded a Foundation scholarship was a turning point in my life. I studied an MA in International Relations at the University of Westminster. My course was a real challenge as I did not have a background in political science and I was engulfed by an educational system very different from the one back home. I was also overwhelmed by the diversity of cosmopolitan London, gender equality, by freedom and human rights.

I studied with classmates from different parts of the world which enriched me about other cultures and lived with a lovely British family, thus experiencing British culture genuinely and closely. Studying in London has liberated me and allowed me to not only explore a wide array of subjects, including media, gender and politics, but also explore myself. I learnt how to think globally and act locally.

The Foundation helped me to attend a conference in London where I met the founder of Women Without Borders. Once back in Yemen, she contacted me and together we launched SAVE-Yemen (Sisters Against Violent Extremism) which is the first anti-terrorism female platform.

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'Yemen: Challenges for the Future' Conference at the London Middle East Institute

The MBI Al Jaber Foundation will be supporting 'Yemen: Challenges for the Future', a high-level international conference being held at the London Middle East Institute, SOAS, on 11th and 12th January 2013.

Twenty-two years after unification, and in the context of recent conflicts and uprisings, Yemen finds itself at yet another historical juncture. The political transition and forthcoming national dialogue offers a rare opportunity for the country and its people to address the multitude of social, economic, environmental and regional problems they face. This international conference, organised jointly by the British Yemeni Society and LMEI, brings together academic and professional specialists on Yemen to discuss recent research on the country and the challenges ahead.

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I am now working with the United Nations Population Fund as a communications analyst promoting and raising awareness about gender and population issues in order to help reduce maternal mortality in Yemen. I also promote UNFPA's policy, programme implementation and work among partners, civil society, international and local media and the public. It is a challenging job as the mandate of UNFPA is culturally sensitive so communication plays a vital role to address the issues appropriately.

I truly hope that all the work and efforts will come together for a better life for all people all over Yemen. I hope to continue serving my people in Yemen, trying to make a difference in their lives so that I return the favours bestowed on me.

Strengthening the Euro-Arab dialogue with UNESCO



The Euro-Arab Dialogue Conference was opened by H.E. Sheikh Mohamed Bin Issa Al Jaber, H.E. Dr. Mustafa A.G. Abushagur, Prime Minister of Libya and Madame Bokova, UNESCO General Secretary.

The International Conference of National Commissions for UNESCO 'Euro-Arab Dialogue: Contribution to a New Humanism', organized by UNESCO in conjunction with the MBI Al Jaber Foundation, was held in Vienna in June 2012. Approximately 200 participants from 67 nations took part in the conference aiming to strengthen Euro-Arab Dialogue and foster tolerance and mutual respect. Among the delegates in attendance were senior representatives of the Arab League Educational Cultural and Scientific Organisation (ALECSO); the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO); the Arab Bureau of Education for the Gulf States (ABEGS); and the Council of Europe. The opening was chaired by H.E. Sheikh Mohamed Bin Issa Al Jaber; Madame Bokova, UNESCO General Secretary and H.E. Dr. Mustafa A.G. Abushagur, Prime Minister of Libya.

The main objective of the meeting was to agree new terms of reference and an action plan to develop Euro-Arab cooperation, particularly around the concept of the 'new humanism'. This has even more significance now, due to the Arab Spring. "We are in a process of change. Up to now, freedom of expression and human rights was more or less non-existent in those states. Now everything is changing, the countries are on a good path. Also Europe will benefit in many ways. I am very optimistic about the future", said Sheikh Mohamed.

For their engagement in this dialogue, the promotion of coexistence and the culture of tolerance in a bid to enhance international cooperation, Irina Bokova, Director-General of UNESCO, and Sheikh Mohamed Bin Issa Al Jaber, Founder and Chairman of the MBI Al Jaber Foundation, were honoured with the ISESCO Gold medal. Dr. Abdulaziz Othman Altwajiri, Director General of the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO), presented the medal as "recognition of the efforts of UNESCO and the MBI Al Jaber Foundation to promote coexistence and dialogue."