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## **The Beauty Of Our Dreams**

by  
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Excellencies, Ladies and gentlemen,

Welcome to the Library of Alexandria. Like its illustrious predecessor, the modern library aspires to be more than a meeting place for people of different cultures, but also to be a house of wisdom. I hope indeed that our deliberations will yield the kind of wisdom that we need so badly to confront our challenges today. These challenges, especially climate change, are perhaps greater than any we have faced since the end of the cold war. That was when we finally pushed back the specter of nuclear holocaust that had been hanging over our heads like a sword of Damocles since the end of the second world.

For me personally, welcoming you to this meeting is a very special pleasure. It marks the culmination of a journey that started with a meeting with Mr. Jean-François Benz and Laila Wold about two years ago, where they asked if we could indeed organize such councils in Egypt as they have elsewhere. Can Egypt play the kind of role that we should expect Egypt to play in these regional deliberations? And we promised to help. Dr. Abd Elaziz Hegazy was kind enough to take the lead with the support of Ambassador Hagar Islambouly, and here we are: Not just with an Egyptian delegation participating in the summit, but with the whole summit being held here in Egypt, in the Library of Alexandria!

My friends,

We are here to discuss truly vital topics. For it is indeed particularly important that National Economic and Social Councils and similar institutions should participate

in the debate that is forming public opinion. Building a general consensus in public opinion is so necessary in democratic states to support the difficult decisions that we all have to face. Our agenda in the coming two days certainly does cover these kind of topics. They are important topics, they deserve our attention and deliberations starting with this initiative that our President, Mohamed Hosni Mubarak, and President Nicolas Sarkozy of France, are currently heading. The idea of a *Union for the Mediterranean*. Where else my friends would it be more suitable to discuss a Union for the Mediterranean than in Alexandria? Alexandria, after all, was the intellectual capital of the first true Union of the Mediterranean 2300 years ago. Alexandria which remained for six centuries the center of the world of intellect as Hellenistic culture swept the Mediterranean, spreading rationality and openness everywhere.

### **The Union for the Mediterranean**

The *Union for the Mediterranean* takes from and goes beyond the Barcelona Process. It seeks to recapture the spirit of Barcelona, anchoring it in the concreteness of action driven by the conviction of a shared future. It seeks concerted movement and noticeable impact on our region and on the world, guided by our vision of our role in reshaping the world

The relationship between us on both sides of the Mediterranean must change. The youths on both sides of the Mediterranean will forge that new relationship. Instead of antagonism, they will weave a new relationship... It will not be one of rich and poor, not one of donor and recipient, not one of leader and follower, or one of charity or competition... it will be one of partnership and friendship. In the words of the great French/Algerian writer Albert Camus:

"Don't walk behind me; I may not lead. Don't walk in front of me; I may not follow. Just walk beside me and be my friend."

— Albert Camus

### **Contribution of the National Economic and Social Councils and similar institutions to realizing the Union for the Mediterranean**

The Nation State is still the unit of sovereign decision making. But the Nation State has become both too big and too small. It is too big to deal with its citizens as individuals. It appears distant and bureaucratic. Calls for greater delegation to local government and the rise of the civil society are manifestations of this reality. But the Nation State is also too little to cope with the great problems and

challenges of our times: from Environmental degradation, whether it is climate change or biodiversity loss, to economic and financial crises, where the integrated nature of the global system shows how contagion can spread like wildfire from one financial center to others all over the world. Acting effectively on these problems requires the concerted efforts of all. Multilateralism must replace unilateralism.

Furthermore, we live in a world where boundaries have become permeable to the ethereal commerce of capital and ideas. Connectivity has transformed our planet. The internet has shown how with the click of a mouse and the flight of an electron billions of dollars can move to the far corners of the earth at the speed of light. But it is not just capital that moves, it is also ideas...

Confronted by these complexities, it is essential that public awareness guide public decision-making. Public participation is critical to decision making. The emerging civil society – be it local, national, regional or international – is indispensable in decision making.

The National Economic and Social Councils and similar institutions can help generate the necessary consensus for action, for they can channel needed debate in a legitimate and constructive fashion. And action is badly needed today:

- Today when we are trying to overcome the worst financial and economic crisis in decades
- Today when we face the gravest environmental challenges in history
- Today when we confront profound societal changes as demography, ageing and immigration reshape our consciousness and our serenity

## **Economic and social consequences of the financial crisis on the Euromed region**

The scale of this financial crisis is unprecedented... But it is a moral and political failure as much as a technical one... where examples of morality should be set, the opposite was seen. Greed and those who allowed it to grow to such monumental levels unchecked have brought us at this pass... Small men, seeking great wealth or power, have too often and too long turned positions of financial leadership or regulatory responsibility into mere personal opportunity.

Major reforms are needed. They must be far-reaching, effective and equitable. They must be designed quickly. They must be undertaken by governments reeling under the magnitude of the disaster that they are grappling with. In particular:

- The EU is facing serious imbalances
- The need for collective action in spite of national sovereignties is paramount
- The need for unified legislation and controls are obvious.
- The new realities of a declining US, a rising far-east, a disconnected south and a disoriented Europe is before us

But on a broader scale I welcome the crisis for four essential reasons:

- For the for the time in decades, we can have a real discussion on the roles of the state, the private sector and regulation, without being closeted by the ideological blinders of those who believe that “governs best who governs least”.
- For the for the time in decades there is widespread recognition that solutions cannot be handled nationally and that multilateralism is unavoidable
- Luckily this is happening with the right US administration, an administration that is willing to listen to, and to work with, others.
- Finally, all this comes at a time when recognition of the environmental problem and its dimensions is also spurring international collaborative action

## **Climate Change and the Mediterranean: Environment and energy challenges**

We watch in consternation the hesitation and of national governments to change past policies in the face of mounting and unstoppable damage to our climate. These are the same policies that are causing this apocalyptic disaster around the

world. How can they expect that more of the same will somehow bring change?  
Albert Einstein once observed

"Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results."

— Albert Einstein

So let us not be afraid of change. Let us move forward boldly to stop the greenhouse gases that are transforming our climate. But mitigation of the emissions of these gases is not enough. Climate change is here and its negative effects on the most vulnerable on this planet are growing every day. We must act immediately on adaptation measures to limit the consequences that are bringing and will bring untold miseries on millions of human beings. As we seek a Copenhagen consensus, Mitigation and Adaptation must go hand in hand

We here in the Euromed region must address the disastrous results that climate change is having on our region. Not only greater drought, more extreme atmospheric events but also the agony of sea level rise.

Sea level rise threatens our existence. Jobs to cope with these challenges must involve more than each coastal city in our Mediterranean building defenses against salt-water intrusion into our soils and destructive waves on our shores. Can we collaborate in new ways? Some, as far back as Herman Sörgel in 1928, had suggested damming the Mediterranean (albeit for other reasons). Some, today, have, have suggested reviving and reinterpreting these old ideas of collaborating to control the level of the Mediterranean with dams at Gibraltar and Suez that would be matched with clean hydropower and navigation canals with locks to allow maritime traffic to continue to transit. I do not know if such schemes make sense, but I do know that the challenges before us call for this kind of bold imagination. They call for approaches that will require unprecedented international collaboration between societies, rich and poor; societies that truly recognize that their destinies are intertwined. I do know that in the process of pursuing such schemes, societies will bond together in common purpose. I do know that where the selfish policies of the past led to the destruction of the environment that we are trying to remedy today, the collaborative policies of the future, driven by youth with vision and determination, will create the better environment of tomorrow.

Is such collective action possible? Can we really make the Mediterranean our *mare nostrum*?

## **Towards an economic and employment strategy founded on a knowledge society in the Euromed region**

I know the difficulties of dealing with immigration. I understand the anxieties of dealing with multiculturalism. But, I also understand that the legacy of the financial and economic disaster we have encountered will bind us even closer together.

As we struggle to rebuild our institutions we can see how the consequences of that disaster are obstructing the march to a better future. Unemployment is high in the southern tier of rich Europe. One in four of European youth are unemployed. And the youth in the Muslim Arab countries south of the Mediterranean are also suffering from disproportionate unemployment. Our robust economic growth, which held promise to create jobs for the tide of young people that a surging population demands, has been slowed by the impact of the financial and economic crisis in the rich countries. In the youthful Arab world alone we need to create about 100 million new jobs in the next twenty years to absorb the cohorts of young people reaching working age in our societies.

Looking at these realities, is it any wonder that Europeans may be tempted by the hate mongers in their midst? Is it any wonder that unemployed youth in the south dream of greater opportunities in that same north that has fashioned the images of an opulent lifestyle that they see in their televisions, their cinemas and their cybercafés?

But the knowledge society will change that. For the knowledge society allows people to work together across political boundaries. We now need Europe to work with us so that it doesn't add to the brain drain of the most capable of our people but help us to build opportunities in the South so that we don't have desperate people seeking them in the North. The Union for the Mediterranean should help us build these kinds of partnerships where minds meet and borders disappear.

"Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things that you didn't do than by the ones you did do. So throw off the bowlines. Sail away from the safe harbor. Catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore. Dream. Discover."

— Mark Twain

We need new policies in Europe and in the Mediterranean, fortress Europe is not a policy for the future, it is not a policy that is compatible with the knowledge society that we seek to create, and it is not one that is compatible with the spirit of partnership. So let us try to redesign such policies and certainly we are here to try to discuss that and create a space. And yes, these solutions will be imposed upon us, because they are driven by demographic and cultural changes in the Euro-Med region that are unstoppable.

### **Demographic and cultural changes in the Euromed region**

Aging populations pose special challenges, but so do young and growing populations. If you do not create jobs in the south, the tidal wave of youth will seek them in the north. That tide will not be denied.

Today, there is violence in the streets, venality in business, corruption in public office, aimlessness amongst our youth, anxiety among our elders...

Today, there is a virtual despair among the many who look beyond material success for the inner meaning of their lives...

If we speak of our Mediterranean culture, it is time to revive concepts of truth, goodness, beauty, liberty, equality, and justice. These are not ideas to be scoffed at, they are to be lived by. Cynics dismiss these ideas. But cynics have never constructed anything, they have never achieved anything. They just scoff at other people's efforts. It is those who dare to dream who create the future. People like Monnet and Schumann who dreamt of a European community rising from the ashes and devastation of the Second World War. People like Eleanor Roosevelt, the prime mover behind the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, who said that "the future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams".

Enlarging freedom at home, ensuring regional equity and meeting the test of a changing climate and its consequences... that list is enough to challenge all our resources and to require all our strength. Let the debates in this worthy gathering be a first constructive step towards these valuable goals...

Thank you.