

UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL,
SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION

Address by
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On the occasion of the launching
of the Science, Technology and Innovation Policy of Lebanon

Beirut, Lebanon 27 April 2006

Your Excellency, Mr Fouad Sanioura, Prime Minister of Lebanon,
Distinguished Ministers,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for me to be in Beirut this morning for the launch of the science, technology and innovation policy of Lebanon. This is my second visit to your beautiful country and it occurs at an opportune moment to witness how Lebanon is reorienting itself towards a future based on peace, democracy and prosperity.

Let me begin by expressing my gratitude to the Government of Lebanon and particularly to you, Mr Prime Minister, for inviting me to address this important event. Let me also express my sincere thanks for the warm hospitality with which we have been welcomed.

UNESCO, as the specialized agency within the United Nations system for science, is honoured to be associated with the Lebanese National Council for Scientific Research in the challenging endeavour of formulating Lebanon's national science policy. I wish to underline the fact that this exercise is the result of a collective effort and that the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (ALECSO) and the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) have made decisive contributions.

We live in a time of rapid change and many factors are reshaping national science and technology systems. These include globalization

and the growing international dimension of science as well as the increased recognition of the importance of mission-directed research and of greater returns on research investments. In addition, there is the involvement of different stakeholders in the scientific enterprise, the strong ties between science and society, and the need to meet the environmental requirements for sustainable development. It is vital that policy-makers at all levels have a sound understanding of this new set of conditions so that national science policies and programmes can be so designed that they provide the best support to science, technology and innovation.

Governments have an important role to play in creating an environment in which science can develop and innovation can be facilitated. Science policy must allocate resources in a way that reflects the actual state of science and its capacity to address the needs of society. This requires a participatory approach and continuous dialogue between policy-makers and the scientists who lead the work. The Lebanese Council for Scientific Research stands at the strategic interface between science and government.

UNESCO supports national science policy reform initiatives with a view to contributing to the achievement of a country's economic and social goals, including growth and the creation of jobs, sustainable development, the improved well-being of citizens and advancing the frontiers of knowledge. UNESCO also pays particular attention to the integration of science, technology and innovation policy with other

aspects of government policy, which is growing more importance in the development of increasingly globalized knowledge economies.

There is, of course, no single science policy formula that works to foster the development of science, technology and innovation in all regions. Consequently, it is important to analyze national systems of innovation in order to compare experiences from different economic and cultural settings, to propose good practices, and to reinforce and reform such systems:

The priorities for scientific research in Lebanon include areas such as the sustainable management of coastal areas and marine resources of energy, water and biodiversity; biotechnologies and their applications both for agriculture and health in Lebanon; information and communication technologies (ICTs) as tools and products and their diffusion in the business and industrial sectors; web technology and the Arabization of software; and, finally, smart materials and technologies. I also note with great interest the area of the ethics of science and technology.

Most of these priorities correspond, to a large extent, to the areas of UNESCO's actions in the sciences. We have always recognized the fact that the contribution of science cannot be based only upon the value of research and knowledge on their own terms but must also be justified by their relevance to and effectiveness in addressing the needs of society and in meeting the macro-economic objectives of

government. This is a challenge at national and international levels. Scientific progress has been marked by major advances in knowledge accompanied by a great improvement in living conditions. Acknowledging this fact, UNESCO has recently launched an International Basic Sciences Programme (IBSP) with a view to mobilizing the international community in favour of basic research and its applications. I hope that Lebanon will be an active partner in this programme.

In the field of health, for example, a large number of diseases can now be controlled more effectively. Thanks to science, new cures and treatments are being generated, thus increasing life expectancy. Furthermore, new technologies have contributed to making surgery safer. That is why I appreciate the fact that this area is identified in your Science, Technology and Innovation Policy (STIP) for priority action with the objective of playing a lead role within the region. Agricultural technologies, also identified in the STIP, are increasing crop yields while reducing the need to spray herbicides and insecticides on your crops and into your environment. The controlled application of biotechnologies in this domain has great potential. Here again, UNESCO has an important programme in the area of biotechnology and I invite you to take part in its activities.

Water has also been identified in the STIP for priority action. The rational management of water and its related ecosystems is UNESCO's principal priority in science. A number of UNESCO water

science institutes and centres have been created. They act as a source of expertise and may provide training opportunities for your specialists. I invite you to take full advantage of the possibilities that UNESCO offers in this area.

The new ICTs are revolutionizing the way we learn, work and play. In particular, these technologies also offer great potential to increase productivity, promote economic growth and revolutionize how we deliver 'services. UNESCO has useful experience and expertise in the ICT area and we are ready to cooperate with you in the implementation of this component of the STIP.

In order to realize your national objective of creating a new knowledge-based society, it is necessary to deploy scientific resources, including ICTs, for economic and social development. While there are many challenges to be overcome, your commitment to redesigning Lebanon's science, technology and innovation policy is a clear sign of your determination to succeed.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The reform and revitalization of the Lebanese scientific research system is an important challenge. Given the tradition of excellence in your country and the contribution of Lebanese scientists and engineers at the regional level, this reform will have a positive impact not only in Lebanon but also in the whole region.

In commending the efforts of the Lebanese Government to develop and adopt a new science, technology and innovation policy, I would like to assure you that UNESCO will be one of the partners that will support your efforts. I hope this meeting will be the beginning of a process whereby UNESCO and the Government of Lebanon shall work together to build an international partnership from within and outside the UN system and to mobilize the resources necessary for the implementation of the new policy.

In closing, I would like to extend my best wishes to all of the national and international experts and to thank them for having made their experience available to ensure the success of this process.

Thank you.