

Presentation
by Ambassador Abdallah Baali
at
The National Academy of Sciences
on
The US-Muslim World Science Partnership

June 8, 2010

This is the second time that I have the honor and privilege to speak inside this prestigious institution. My previous visit here was on the occasion of the official launch of the Algerian-American Foundation for Culture, Education, Science, and Technology, chaired by Dr. Elias Zerhouni.

Allow me to extend my sincere congratulations to all those who organized this event and to express to them my gratitude for inviting me to partake in it.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Mankind is highly indebted to the women and men of science who, throughout history, have accomplished immense progress in areas as vital as health, agriculture, and energy. Mankind also owes a lot to them for having succeeded to be vehicles of openness and bridging gaps between peoples, by creating communication channels, by conceiving and disseminating innovative ideas, and by establishing cooperative endeavors which transcend divides as well as borders.

The preeminent role played by science and technology is all the more evident nowadays that we are facing challenges whose complexity and scope are such that we could address them only if we are united.

Building an interdependent and prosperous global society, establishing strong ties among peoples around immaterial heritage common to us all, and highlighting the place of knowledge in the relations between nations is today a noble aspiration as much as an imperious necessity.

In this endeavor, the United States has a foreground role to play. Beyond the specific significance and power of this great country, it is mainly to the creative spirit and the innovative capacity of American scientists that we owe an unprecedented acceleration of scientific and technological development in the world, since the end of the Second World War. The United States are also the country where debate over the role of science and technology as a catalyst in international relations has been the richest and boldest.

It is, therefore, to his honor that President Obama knew to take the felicitous decision to place such key domains at the heart of the relations between the United States and the Muslim countries.

We need hardly recall here that the Muslim world is the cradle of one the most brilliant civilizations in History which has profoundly influenced modern civilization. In this respect, I am pleased to quote Hegel who, in Lectures on Philosophy of History, asserted that science and knowledge, namely philosophical, were a legacy of the Arabs to the Western world. Voltaire, in his Preface to An Essay on Universal History, the Manners and Spirit of Nations from the Reign of Charlemagne to the Age of Lewis XIV, affirmed that the Western world “received almost everything from the Arabs.”

Essentialist theories, which pretend to explain the alleged backwardness of the Muslim world by invoking culturalist perceptions, do not stand up to scrutiny. The Muslim religion, whose first Koranic verse is an exhortation to seek knowledge, served as the foundation of the great civilization which blossomed in the Islamic world and a prime mover of scientific revolution that the world has experienced.

Our countries, on the other hand, have suffered from several ills, including what is usually known as “Brain Drain”. None of these ills is irreversible, however. Thousands among Algeria’s brightest minds have left the country and contribute today in leading-edge areas to the development and prosperity of the United States and other countries around the world. Instead of perceiving that as an irremediable loss, I lean towards believing that those women and men are in fact a real bridge connecting Algeria to the United States and a formidable opportunity we ought to take advantage of for the greatest benefit of our two peoples.

In Algeria, each day tens of thousands of young women and men are paving the way in our schools, universities and laboratories, for development and modernity.

Strengthened by such human capital, it is imperative that we devote the appropriate means and create the required conditions for the emergence of a genuine scientific and technological renaissance. This is why we have decided to devote from now on one per cent of the country’s GDP to scientific research, with that share increasing to 1.5% in 2011.

This also explains Algeria’s commitment to strengthen its ties with your country, as it has done with others, in the fields of health, science and technology. Algeria’s commitment has translated into the conclusion with the US of a scientific and technological cooperation agreement covering a wide array of areas, including seismology, industrial research, agriculture, energy, space, health, environment, and water resources management. In the same vein, the two governments have signed a cooperation agreement in the area of peaceful use of nuclear energy.

Today, it is a high priority for us to give fresh impetus to this commitment whenever possible. Universities, such as Merrimack and Denver, expect to develop an ambitious exchange program with Algerian universities. Others, such as the University of Michigan and University of Constantine have already established a lasting partnership with the support of the U.S. Government, to whom I express all my gratitude. Another partnership project between the universities of Houston and Boumerdès is very dear to me and I am confident that it will secure the same support from the U.S. authorities, because what is at stake is the lasting success of the high-level technical education model taught in the English language in Algeria.

Projects undertaken in key areas, such as education, environment, health, and water, exchange programs established with U.S. universities and research centers, technology transfer programs, including the one recently organized by the Commercial Law Development Program in close collaboration with our Embassy, and the frequent visits of delegations between our two countries are just as many achievements that we intend to expand and turn to good account in a resolute and sustained manner.

It is in the same spirit that I have decided to fully support the Algerian-American Foundation for Culture, Education, Science, and Technology, convinced that I was that this institution will carry out in an exemplary manner the noble mission it has assigned for itself, by creating synergies, generating opportunities, and spanning bridges between our two countries.

It is for the same reasons that I pledged my full support for the Algerian Start-Up Initiative, which aims to establish start-ups in Algeria in cooperation with Algerian executives from Silicon Valley. And it is with pleasure that I learned from one of the initiators of the project - an

Algerian researcher holding 187 patents for inventions – that the number and quality of the projects submitted for consideration were beyond any of their expectations. This is further evidence of the creative spirit and the vivaciousness of our young people, who only ask that their initiatives be supported and that their energies be channeled.

However, as significant as may be our achievements so far, we have not yet explored all the potentialities offered within the range of our partnership.

Indeed, there are considerable possibilities that we should take advantage of in areas as diverse as water resources, environment, nanotechnologies, solar energy, pharmaceutical industry, and health.

Algeria is also particularly interested in scientific research in agriculture and materials science. We wish to establish with the United States a partnership in this area, where our country counts more than 300 laboratories.

We have put in place as well 19 networks including backbone projects conducted in Algeria and involving scientific experts outside of the country, including experts from the US.

Moreover, establishing virtual bridges between American and Algerian researchers and between universities in both countries would be very beneficial and we intend to resolutely work on it.

Finally, teaching English in our country is a high priority. In this respect, greater involvement of the U.S. side in promoting the teaching of this language would be highly appreciated.

The Algerian scientific community expects a lot from the visit that Dr. Elias Zerhouni made to Algiers last March, considering that promising avenues supporting fruitful cooperation in various areas have been explored and whose implementation requires mobilization of significant resources and means and rigorous and resolute follow-up.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As we celebrate the first Anniversary of President Obama's Cairo speech, let me assure you that the Muslim world intends to grasp the opportunity presented by this historic speech and build with the United States new relations based on mutual respect and shared interests and, in all evidence, science and technology can form the foundation onto which these relations can develop and flourish.

I am now very glad and proud to introduce to you a man who needs no introduction, a man who is equally respected and admired in Algeria where he was born and raised and in the US where he completed his education and rose to become, in 2002, the 15th Director of the National Institutes of Health where he managed to initiate the now famous NIH Road Map for Medical Research.

Dr. Zerhouni who is Professor of Radiology and of Biomedical Engineering at John Hopkins University has never been as active as after he left office in October 2008. He then became a Senior Fellow in the Global Health Program at the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and member of the Board of the King Abdullah University of Science and Technology, before

President Obama appointed him as his Special Envoy for Science and Technology. He has 212 publications and holds 8 patents.

Dr. Zerhouni is not only a man of science and a brilliant mind, he is also a man of courage and virtue and great humility, and surprisingly for a man of science, a very personable guy!

Please join me in welcoming Dr. Zerhouni.