Democratization of Education

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 **Education as a Human Right**

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 “A tsunami comes and remakes the coastline and changes things dramatically. It both destroys some things, but it also creates new things.” – Stanford University President John Hennessy likening the latest wave of online education to a tsunami.

**Your Excellency, Shaikha Mai bint Mohammed
Minister of Culture**

Excellencies, Distinguished Friends, and Colleagues,

It is with great pleasure that I join you here today at Shaikh Ebrahim Bin Mohammed Al Khalifa Center for Culture and Research to address the democratization of education. I am honored to share the stage with these esteemed individuals before you and to address an audience of such engaged leaders in education and culture.

**Introduction**

Four decades ago, I built Talal Abu-Ghazaleh Organization with the aspiration to promote intellectual property rights and contribute to the development of a knowledge society in the Arab world. Over the years, our Organization’s scope has broadened, our number of companies has grown; we expanded to become a global leader in professional and educational services. In that time, some things have remained constant – particularly our commitment to consistency and quality.

We have ridden the wave of change over the decades, adapting to technological advances and reinventing ourselves along the way. I wish to share with you some experiences and qualities which have contributed to our success.

We diversified our services:

* 28 specialized companies offering 50 professional, educational and business advisory and other services (software solutions, translation, legal, recruitment, etc.).

We expanded our geographic coverage:

* 80 global offices, staffed by nationals and expatriates, and 150 national representatives worldwide.
* Recently established offices in Kabul, Geneva, and Lagos.

We became a knowledge Organization:

* State of the art ICT infrastructure, E-solutions, and skilled professionals in all sectors.
* We launched in Cambridge University the IT Skills Award towards internet literacy.

We created our own intellectual property assets:

* 80 inventions for web-based operations.
* Authored and published six dictionaries.

We harnessed the power of information:

* 20 databases supporting our services with unparalleled resources.
* In January 2013, we plan to launch our Arabic Digital Encyclopedia (TAGIPEDIA), starting with one million entries.

We serve the societies we operate in:

* 64 corporate social responsibility projects in human capacity building.
* I personally chaired many global CSR initiatives.

We work harder all the time to stay first:

* 14 internal mandatory training programs.
* Quality control, performance evaluation, and productivity indicators for everything we do is benchmarked to excellence.
* For us, failures are not fatal, successes are not final; one is a bridge to the other.

We believe in innovation and competition:

* 36 firsts in our Organization in our ongoing search for innovations and creations.
* Our competitors force us to constantly seek excellence, avoid mistakes, and keep us in a state of productive alertness.

We are a law-abiding organization:

* Not a single conviction in court since our inception in 1972.

We continue to enhance our global brand name:

* The Arab Society for Intellectual Property is launching an Arab Brands Association (building on our experience in brand protection and enhancement) to promote Arab brand names.

We built a firewall between family and the family-owned businesses:

* All of our offices, operations, and services are managed by top quality (non-family) expert executives and professionals.

We are our own Internet service provider:

* We own and control our own dedicated high speed secure Internet line.

In January 2013 we will have our own TAG Cloud:

* The first private sector cloud in the Arab world.
* We are now providers of cloud computing consultancy services

**What Comes After:**

Building on these achievements, today I would like to announce the launch of Talal Abu-Ghazaleh University – our endeavor to promote world-class education as a human right and a crowning achievement of our success. We are maximizing the potential of our Organization, utilizing cloud technology, a dedicated Internet line, and our global offices to make this dream a reality.

New information and communication technologies have not only created unprecedented opportunities for democratizing education and making universal access to education possible but  these technologies are also transforming the whole environment for knowledge creation, dissemination, and acquisition –thereby reinventing the very concepts on which traditional education and pedagogics are based.

As a result, it is not just that physical barriers can be overcome, but even cognitive constraints can be bypassed. For example, electronic games have been shown to successfully teach new mental, intellectual, and physical skills to young people who may have intellectual or other limitations.

It is, therefore, imperative for thinkers, leaders, policy-makers, and educational practitioners to carefully consider the implications and impacts of the new technological environment on traditional models of education – which may no longer correspond fully with the way the younger and the future generations will learn about the world around them.

We need new and innovative educational methods to go forward in meeting the challenge of creating a universally accessible and democratic educational system worldwide, so that all citizens of the world have equal educational opportunities for their betterment.

The theme of this lecture, “Democratization of Education,” is most fitting to our objectives, as no venue could be more appropriate than this place. Innovation, action, breaking barriers – the mission of this lecture rings true for our goals here today.

Education, at its core, cultivates knowledge and amplifies an individual’s potential. Through the rapid growth of the Internet’s capabilities, it is possible to develop the reach of education, to level the field of opportunity, and to spur students’ creativity and level of interaction.

Our Organization has successfully done brick and mortar education: Talal Abu-Ghazaleh Graduate School of Business in Jordan is the only FIBAA-accredited MBA in the Arab world; and we have just launched TAG University College in Bahrain.

Today’s announcement is about making the shift from bricks to clicks.

I have nine grandchildren – all of whom grew up with the Internet and were exposed to its intricacies with almost inherent understanding. Their experience is increasingly like that of every other student born in the information age. In the near future, the virtual world and the real world will become synonymous – it will become impossible to unlink the two. We must recognize the rising symbiotic relationship between technology and education.

Access to elite, world-class education, however, remains exclusive and unaffordable to the majority of students around the globe. For the first time in history we are in position to do something about it. Access to world-class education is an inevitability whose time has come.

Imagine, if you will, you are a financially disadvantaged student in a country where the costs to travel abroad for education are unthinkable. Imagine that the only way to improve your situation is to have access to world-class education. Imagine a one-stop digital portal that allowed you to earn a degree from America, vocational training from Australia, and lessons in English from the United Kingdom – in order to be hired for a job here in Bahrain.

Imagine if there was a system in place that would take a ground up approach with students, helping them achieve their goals. A system that wasn’t interested in high student turnover rates, but one where success of educational outcomes was paramount, and the teaching of applicable skills was its primary focus. A system that attributed its success to its alumni and held responsible the institutions that inadequately prepared students for the workforce. Imagine it was accessible without leaving your home, without ever having to travel or needing a visa. This is a great need for people not only in developing countries, but citizens around the globe.

Talal Abu-Ghazaleh University is that system to meet this need. Talal Abu-Ghazaleh University is our endeavor to democratize education, promote global citizenship, and empower citizens who have been disenfranchised by the technological revolution. Our mission is to make accredited educational programs accessible to everyone, everywhere. Instead of competing with institutions, we are a global educational alliance – collaborating with elite universities to deliver their education, online, to achieve our mission.

The first university to join our alliance was Canisius College, the premier private university in Western New York. As a Muslim, it is an honor to partner with a Jesuit university because it shows that no matter where we come from, our objectives for education are universal.

Through this University I want to change peoples’ attitude toward digital education – to show that it is the way of the future. Digital education stemming from international institutions compels individuals to understand their interdependence and the interconnected nature of the modern world. It allows for world-class higher education to reach across cultures to learners who are unable to afford the costs of travel.

I see world-class education as a human right and I want to put the power of choice and contribution into the hands of students. Talal Abu-Ghazaleh University makes it possible for transformational societies to embrace new concepts from the ground up. We promote affordable, elite education for all, not simply “education for all.”

I come from business. We do not build on calls of goodwill; we build feasible and sustainable projects. We need to shift gears from "free education" to affordable, “elite education.” We will not help our grandchildren by providing unrecognized and unaccredited education.

In 2011, the United Nations proclaimed that access to the Internet is a basic human right. As UN GAID chair, I fought for this declaration and contributed to its drafting. I believe that using this standard we can accomplish the same with higher education. The capacity to make it accessible to every person on this planet exists. The technology exists. The human will must match its potential. We need a human rights declaration for elite education for all.

My friends, it is not solely the Internet, or information technology, or social media that makes this University possible – it is the aggregate of human ingenuity. Our Organization has dedicated the resources necessary to deliver elite education and instill pride in learning.

In my different capacities, I have aimed to address educational issues throughout my career. Now I sit on the World Trade Organization Future of Global Trade Policy panel and I chair the Global Challenges Forum Foundation in Geneva. Education reform is always a subject of discussion when looking at the future of business and trade. We – *educators, innovators, and business pioneers –* are the people in a position to do something about it, to make positive contributions to our world.

My friends, please share this vision with me.

I thank you for your attention and wish you every success in your undertakings.