

Speech by Mr. Talal Abu-Ghazaleh
Opening Session
Afro-Asian Knowledge-Based Society Initiative
International Founders' Conference

Your Excellency Dr. Tarek Kamel, Minister of Communications and Information Technology, representative of Dr. Ahmad Nazif, Prime Minister of the Arab Republic of Egypt and conference patron

Your Excellency Dr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, former United Nations Secretary General and Chairman of Egypt's National Council for Human Rights (NCHR)

Your Excellency Mr. Abdul Waheed Khan, representative of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)

Your Excellency Mr. Abdul Hamid Mamdouh, representative of the World Trade Organization (WTO)

Your Excellency Mr. Ahmed Hamroush, President of the Afro-Asian Peoples' Solidarity Organization

Your Excellencies the Ministers and Ambassadors

Representatives of African and Asian countries and Arab and international bodies

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would first like to convey the greetings of the UN Secretary General Mr. Ban Ki-moon as his vice chair at the United Nations Global Compact.

As I welcome you, and thank you for your attendance, I would like to express my pride in this special and qualitative presence which adds significance and interest to what we are about to approach.

I would also like to express my gratitude and appreciation to His Excellency Dr. Ahmad Nazif, the Prime Minister of Egypt, for his patronage, support and guidance, and his deputy Dr. Tarek Kamel, the Minister of Communications and Information Technology, who is attending the conference on his behalf, in addition to the ministers and state ministries and establishments that have provided us with facilities and helped the organizers to conduct their duties.

The arrangements to convene the conference took place prior to the criminal assault on the people of Palestine in the steadfast Gaza Strip. I assure you that even if the arrangements and the conference initiative took place after the declaration of this war, we would continue to prepare for it and launch it. This is because we will not allow this assault to cripple our nation's programs that aim to develop our countries and build an Afro-Asian future that we hope will have an effective bloc parallel to the European Union.

Because the geographical location of Palestine is at the heart of Africa and Asia, our efforts and programs today pour into the essence of this cause and its interest. Palestine, ladies and gentlemen, and its people, who are great providers of creative initiatives in the sector of information and communications technology, have achieved one of the highest rates of literacy and the elimination of computer illiteracy in the world, according to international statistics. Palestine, honorable audience members, will remain while the assault will be defeated, and we will not permit our occupying enemy to prevent us from building and creating a future that is to be owned by our generations, both now and in the future.

The idea of holding the conference came in consistence with the speech of His Excellency President Mohammad Hosni Mubarak at the African Summit that was held in Sharm El-Sheikh in the summer of 2008. This is what propelled me to seek out the organization that had the greatest role in liberalizing Africa and Asia, namely the Afro-Asian Peoples' Solidarity Organization (AAPSO). It is a deep-rooted organization, and we should all recognize its historical role.

I was happy with the responsiveness of the organization's president, my teacher, Mr. Ahmed Hamroush, and the organization's general secretariat, to hold the international Founders' Conference for the Afro-Asian Knowledge-based Society in Egypt.

Ladies and Gentlemen.... A few years ago, I defined a knowledge society to be, from my point of view, "a society that studies, communicates, innovates, creates wealth, judges, works, creates systems and advances in all of life's aspects through the use of digital technology. It is a society with a digital nervous system that is provided with unlimited resources to administer knowledge with the goal of fulfilling more advancement and creativity."

This initiative comes as a continuation and in consistency with previous efforts of the World Trade Organization (WTO), the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the African Union, the League of Arab States, regional Asian organizations and others. All these entities have emphasized the significance of our goal, which is represented in the evaluation and enhancement of continuous efforts for African and Asian peoples who aim to advance and develop the knowledge economy.

As the Arab nations expand across Asia and Africa, which both represent the geo-economic dimension of the Arab world, I am very glad to have the honor of working on this initiative.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the major nations of the world have reached plurilateral agreements rather than multilateral agreements that have focused on three sectors, which are: financial services, telecommunications and information technology. These sectors represent the infrastructure of electronic commerce. Therefore, we have an opportunity – and history will not forgive us if we do not take advantage of it – which is related to information and communications technology in the development of intra-trade in Asia and Africa in the area of services, so that these services can reach 80 percent of the domestic product of our states, as is the case in advanced nations.

To fulfill this end, this initiative was launched to increase awareness and assist in the creation of a knowledge-based society, which includes building human capacities, establishing policies and creating communication networks along with communication points and infrastructure.

This is because the knowledge-based society allows the transfer of knowledge with all its outputs, including education and the exchange of expertise; this in turn serves civil society and the goals of advancement and growth.

The world is now in a phase of transfer from an informational society, which represents the infrastructure of knowledge, to a knowledge society, where we will use IT to create knowledge with all its components and developmental dimensions. In the future, we will transfer into a wisdom society, where we will use knowledge for the welfare of society and the future of mankind. And so we are at the start of our journey towards becoming a wisdom society.

Ladies and Gentlemen, we seek to come out of this conference with a number of recommendations that I am sure will be fulfilled. These are:

- Creating a program that promotes awareness on the significance of understanding the technology of knowledge as a tool to assist in the growth and advancement of wealth and knowledge
- Building and developing a knowledge network between Asian and African countries to exchange knowledge digitally
- Creating an Afro-Asian business council to serve the nations of both continents
- Formulating taskforces specialized in all elements of building a knowledge society
- Launching a Cairo document declaration on the establishment of the Afro-Asian Knowledge-Based Society
- Creating a mechanism for this purpose that is initially formed by a direction and steering committee chaired by my brother, His Excellency Ambassador Said Kamal

For this purpose, I call on the WTO, UNESCO, the ITU and the African Union in leading this initiative.

Ladies and Gentlemen, there is no stronger evidence of Egypt's historical role of leadership at the regional level than its care for the AAPSO, since its establishment in 1958, and throughout its long history.

As chairman of the Arab Knowledge and Management Society from New York, and chairman of the pioneering Talal Abu-Ghazaleh Organization, or TAG-Org, which works at both the regional and global level, I place our expertise in the establishment of this initiative, as its mission in building capacities to serve growth and advancement is the mission of our organization.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I conclude by directing salutations and thanks to the Egyptian people under the leadership of His Excellency President Mohammad Hosni Mubarak,

who sponsored this initiative, and to the Egyptian government for all the assistance it provided.

On this occasion, I would also like to thank our guests, the conference attendees and representatives of the domestic, Arab and global media who joined us and continue to participate in highlighting the significance of this meeting. Thank you for your attendance and concern.

At the end, and on this occasion, I'm happy to announce the opening of the Egyptian headquarters of TAG-Org here at Smart Village, and the launch of the satellite channel TAG-IP TV on Nile Sat, also stationed here in Smart Village. This is the first satellite channel specialized in intellectual property issues at the global level, and it is being launched under the patronage of His Excellency Prime Minister Dr. Ahmad Nazif. This initiative is part of our organization's efforts at the global level to serve the objectives that our conference calls for today.

With my gratitude and best wishes to you all for a conference, discussions and results that fulfill our common goals.

Talal Abu-Ghazaleh
Cairo
January 11, 2009