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## World Economic Forum on the Middle East

### C-100 Session on Education, Citizenship and the Culture of Peace

Sharm El Sheikh, 20 May 2006

The session was opened by **Katherine Marshall**, Director and Counsellor, World Bank, Washington DC and Chair of the Education Subgroup of the C-100, who also moderated the discussion. Great interest in the subject was shown by the presence of influential figures such as **Suzanne Mubarak**, First Lady of Egypt; **HRH Princess Lolwah al Faisal** of Saudi Arabia; **Sir Derek Plumbly**, Ambassador of the United Kingdom to Egypt; and **Tomas A. Christensen**, Head of Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Denmark. The level of interest from the participants was also extremely high. As a first C-100-labelled session in the public programme, it attracted participation of over 120 people – well beyond its designated capacity (many had to be turned away even though many extra chairs were brought in.)

In her introductory remarks Marshall stated that the Education Group had high hopes from the session both in terms of inspiration and also in terms of volunteers to help develop work in this critical area. She observed that the level of attendance illustrated what has repeatedly been discovered that when asked about priorities for the C-100 the answer is always: “*Education, Education, Education*” – yet it is actually hard to find anything more challenging than this area too. It raises a wide and complex set of issues relating to culture, citizenship and peace, not only in the Middle East but also in the rest of the world. Again it embraces not just children but also adults. It is critical as it shapes how people form their views of religious issues and other cultures.

The discussion was opened by the panel of distinguished experts.

**Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu**, Secretary-General, Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), Jeddah, proposed that the C-100 participate in a major project for a history of mankind aimed at demonstrating the historical weakness of the idea of a necessary clash of civilizations. Wars are caused by political and economic issues not culture and civilization. This exercise would be inspired by that of UNESCO undertaken after World War II and would ideally involve a wide partnership with NGOs as well as UNESCO, and the C-100 could help build this alliance.

**Yousry Saber Hussein El Gamal**, Minister of Education of Egypt, offered support for additional materials and educational resources aimed at promoting harmony and tolerance and in particular he emphasized the needs for new media to be used and not just textbooks.

**Ismail Serageldin**, Director, Bibliotheca Alexandrina, Egypt urged the promotion of a particular educational methodology and ethic embracing empirical study and openness to new ideas, key features which he found to be central to those periods when Islam was at its best. He also emphasized that the concept of citizenship can be used in ways that allow individual human rights to be seen without the potential confusion caused by felt needs to promote one religion against another. He also stressed the need for governments to make education a top priority, which in many parts of the MENA region and beyond was simply not happening. Education is a strategic priority and it is not satisfactory to allow the gaps to be filled by sometimes harmful religious institutions.

**Lamin Sanneh**, D. Willis James Professor of Missions and World Christianity Professor of History, Yale University, USA, spoke of his work researching Madrasas in Africa which he said had in many ways done a fine job and are distinguished from some aspects of Western education by their central place in the community and in the way they engage the whole community. He urged that specific steps be taken to see how this partnership with the community could be recovered and used to promote a harmony that honours difference and not just uniformity. He also commended the idea of books that teach common values and ethics from a religious base that transcends faith divides.

**Niels Priesler**, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Education, Denmark, advocated the case study method as a successful technique used in Denmark (looking at the ways in which religion has been manipulated for political ends in such instances as Northern Ireland). He also suggested that making education in this area intrinsically based on dialogue had proved very helpful. He also stressed the need to teach that values are not derived in a unique way from any one religion but are, at the deepest, common to all.

The work of **First Lady Susanne Mubarak** was also referred to as she was present. She has founded an Institute of Peace Studies and has produced an excellent manual for teaching about the culture of Peace. Mubarak made the point that there has to be active teaching of the culture of peace in order to succeed over time and that a critical factor is teaching the teachers.

**HRH Princess Lolwah Al Faisal** said some countries, and Saudi Arabia in particular, are in fact investing heavily in education and moreover it is women who are taking the lead in this area.

**Michal Rutkowski**, Director, Human Development Department, Middle East and North Africa Region, World Bank, Washington DC, spoke about preliminary insights that have informed the forthcoming major report on Education in the Middle East & North Africa region. He said that crucial among these was not that the region's expenditure is uniquely inadequate but more that the failure to engage parents and communities in the educational process can lead to less than satisfactory results in relation to the money spent.

In the open discussion that followed, the C-100's work in the field of education was urged and supported. Some suggestions included:

- Exchange programmes should be a priority for the C-100 to support.
- Teaching should not simply be about knowledge but wisdom, and this should include the wisdom of all the religions.
- A critical factor is teaching children to recognize that they have complex identities, not simply one identity, and still less simply one religious identity (as this latter idea tends to foster a hostile view of others with a difference religious identity).
- Any attack upon people who are identified for the purpose of that attack by their religion has a bad influence in reinforcing this as their primary identity. This needs to be overcome through education.