



*In loving memory of*  
*Rami Makhzoumi* 1977 - 2011



Ladies and Gentlemen,

I – Introduction:

- Thank you, Keith.
- First off, let me start by saying it is a true privilege to be standing here before you today, and to be part of what we at YAL, believe will play a fundamental role in laying the seeds of betterment between the US and the Arab World.
- We are here to celebrate the successful completion of the 2009 Arab American Business Fellowship. This program is now in its third year, and was borne by a meeting of minds, and a need to act, by the BDA and the YAL. The Fellowship program then seemed the best vehicle to achieve our ultimate goal, through exchange and dialogue. I'm glad to say, that the idea has translated not just to have been the right vehicle, but has created a more far reaching result and impact, than we initially imagined. The past 3 years has witnessed 60 Fellows, and 60 multinational companies engaged across both Regions. This year we are celebrating 27 Fellows, 15 of which are Arab and 12 American. We are very proud of all our Fellows, and above all of what they pose in terms of possibilities.
- I'm sure certain members of our audience would question the rationale behind such a program.
- Why did YAL, an organization dedicated to education and entrepreneurship in the region, start an exchange program?
- Not the usual student exchange program, but an executive exchange?
- And why between the US and the Arab world?
- The answer is: In programs such as this one, we at YAL saw an opportunity for not simply rebuilding, but transforming a fractured relationship, in manner that can serve our greater goal: our future.
  
- We at YAL, as representatives of the Arab world, have made it our mission to address the region's most pressing issue - unemployment.
- The rising rates of unemployment and the falling average age of the population mean that the Arab world needs to generate at least 100 million jobs by 2020.
- By then, the Arab world will have the youngest population of any Region. This presents us with both the greatest threat as well as the greatest opportunity for our future



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- Either we take our successes and lessons from our Region and those from other parts of the world, and truly begin to empower our youth, develop and educate our leaders and re-instate our historic entrepreneurial spirit. Or, we will see furthering unemployment, greating gaps in the disparity of wealth and education, and ultimately, an increasing potential for radicalism to be nurtured.
- At YAL we have chosen change, we have chosen our youth to make change, and we intend to support them to realize change.
- President Obama's speech in Cairo, reiterated many of the directions we at YAL have already taken in the past five years.
- We, like Mr. Obama, believe in the power of youth to change the world. We too believe, as Mr. Obama so eloquently put it, that education and innovation will be the currency of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.
- To that end, we have invested significant time and resources in creating a knowledge infrastructure in the Arab world by partnering with leading knowledge centers and hubs in the region.
- Employers in the Arab world have constantly complained that fresh graduates lack the skills and work experience to be hired.
- We have strived to correct the ill effects of outdated curricula by providing Arab graduates with the relevant skills so that they are better able to navigate the demands of the modern-day workplace.
- To nurture a culture of innovation in the Arab world, we provide entrepreneurs with access to high-level business executives, themselves entrepreneurs, as mentors. We forge Partnerships with likeminded organizations to create a network of support, which provides business knowledge, as well as financial and infrastructural support.
- So enabling our Youth to economic prosperity, by equipping them and exposing them to possibilities, is manifested by not just the AABF, as a program, but also echoes the Vision, President Obama has articulated for our two Regions.



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- We at YAL, have been since our inception, doing the very things the President wants to achieve, in the Arab World. We are the only Pan Arab non-profit, non-governmental organization that is made up of not just today's leaders, but also those of tomorrow. We not only believe in change, our actions have manifested change.
- However despite our achievements, and our proud history, we know that we need to work with other Agents of Change. We need to work with other individuals, organizations, and nations, who fundamentally believe in the need for change. It is in that light that we both offer our hand to the US, as the right partner in the Region, and extend our other, requesting knowledge, expertise and a true will, to support our collective Vision.
- Over the years, as I mentioned; 60 Fellows have gone on this journey.
- The potential impact however is not in the 60, but in all those they then touch. The numbers are potentially massive.
- These are people who assume great responsibility in their professional and personal lives. With that responsibility, inevitably comes leadership.
- These fellows, these leaders, by their very nature, interact with and impact a great deal people. However, is it not just the exponential nature of those numbers... It is what the make up those numbers are. The people our Fellows touch are not just their senior peers, but are also, and perhaps more importantly made up, of the leaders of tomorrow.
- Bottom line, we have the right leaders instilling hope and change in the right people, across both Regions.
- Our Fellows are the Ambassadors of change, the conduits to bridge building, and above all the enablers of prosperity for our two worlds.
- I had the honor of meeting with the Fellows yesterday evening as they returned from their trip. It was tremendous listening to them, and how much benefit they personally gained through the exchange. It was also reinforcing, to hear, the impact this program had on the personal lives and views of its participants, and those they have reached to, since.
- This impact however could have never been attainable without those People and Organizations, who believed in the program. I would like to use this opportunity now to recognize those critical contributors.



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- This celebration is for **all** who made today possible, and allowed for the future to be within our grasp.
- Firstly it was The Dow Chemical Company that saw the possibilities of this Program. As a visionary multinational, they decided to lead the way for other companies in the region and put their time and resources into this Program.
- Without our Program Partner Business for Diplomatic Action, this Program would not have been realized. Their knowledge and desire to make real change was and continues to be at the heart of this partnership.
- I would like also here to say – that the Program would have also not been possible without the National US Arab Chamber of Commerce and the US Centre of Citizen Diplomacy.
- Because of the will of all our Partners and contributors the AABF Program has become a testament to the power of collaboration, a power President Obama alluded to in his speech in Cairo in June of this year.
- It is on that note, that I welcome you all here today, to continue, to collaborate, to continue our dialogue, and to continue to stride hand in hand to build the right, and a bright future for us and for those that will come after us.
- Thank you