

*How demographic realities shape
the political climate in the Middle East*

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Thank you for inviting me to address this esteemed gathering. I have addressed several model UN programs in many parts of the world, and I always find the discussion stimulating. The international character of Science Po at Menton is unique as it borders the Mediterranean, the lake that connects both shores, north and south. It has witnessed how demographics shape political realities in the Middle East. Many decades back Europeans opted to leave Europe for the warmth of Climate & heart of Alexandria and Damietta. Today, the same Mediterranean bears witness to the opposite movement- youth originating from the Deep South risking their lives in search of a better future on the opposite side of the Mediterranean. Very often, their families sell their valuables to finance a journey that often ends the very lives they were looking to better. This scene encapsulates the title you have picked for my talk today- a subject that I find brilliant.

You have pinpointed what is perhaps the most critical challenge facing the Middle East today. Changing demographics fell within my mandate as Minister of family and population. I lived this complex problem and struggled to make a difference. No one line ministry, no one government can single handedly provide the solution to such a cumulative problem. It requires concerted national, regional and international partnerships. The role of the civil society is crucial. Such complexity has led some to put it aside and the challenge remains overlooked. The Middle East is blessed with its youth bulge- which represents over 50%of its population. It is a blessing that comes with a huge responsibility. We must invest in our youth. We must empower them with quality education that extends beyond the classroom, and into a lifelong learning process. “Education first” means that states must translate their commitments through starting budgetary allocations with education. Adolescence health services must also be available to all without any discrimination. Our failure to show such a commitment will turn a window of opportunity into a ticking time bomb. Girls’ education is a profitable investment that must be made.

Demographics are often linked to political stability. Demographics are directly or indirectly linked to poverty, which when coupled with inequality often gives rise to the plague we know as extremism. A report by the ME Institute in Washington paints an accurate picture of life in certain parts of the Middle East: rapid population growth, poverty, and lack of opportunity characterize their daily lives. But on the other, social media, and television project images of the comfortable lives lived by those more fortunate. These images compound existing frustrations of those who watch in the knowledge that this is unattainable through no fault of their own. Additional frustration comes from the conflict brought about

by social changes: that between traditions, and modernity as projected by the media and exercised by the elites.

In the past frustration had led to deviances such as drug and alcohol abuse. Today, extremism has taken center stage among deviant behavior for those without outlets for their frustration. The ME Institute in Washington calls for balanced development that encompasses education, health, human rights, good governance, rule of law, strong institutions, and environmental protection” as a means of eradicating extremism. Ladies and gentlemen, issues like education, cultural awareness, strong institutions, and the environment lay at the heart of my vision for UNESCO. Through its work on Education, Cultural, Science, Information and Communication, Oceans, Water, Gender Equality and most recently Climate Change is a key - if not the key. Watch 10 seconds of the news on any given day, and you are reminded that extremism knows no borders. Extremism is a battle for the minds.. it is a battle for regaining a culture of peace- a battle which underscores the critical role of UNESCO as the organisation that can deal with the root causes of such problems.

As I set my sights on UNESCO and as I make the biggest bid of my career, I do so bearing hopes, dreams, and pain of billions of people around the world. I make my bid for UNESCO at a time when the world population reached seven billion humans, but when humanity appears to be at an all time low. My bid comes at a time when we as a people have made numerous expeditions to outer space, yet we remain oblivious of the suffering and struggles that characterize the daily lives of some people in not so remote corners of the world. I come from the Middle East, a region which continues to be viewed as problematic. I was born, bred, nurtured and succeeded in Egypt- a country which gave UNESCO fame in the field of Heritage protection. While I have been fortunate to have received quality education and enjoyed tremendous success in my career both as a diplomat and a social development engineer, I have lived the challenges and continue to see the problems around me daily. I have been to the remotest of villages and heard the concerns of the most marginalized of people- people living in the knowledge that their inability to send their kids to school sets them up for an uncertain future.. but who stood powerless in that knowledge. I have taken these concerns and given them a platform to become vehicles for change all the way to the top of my country's legal system. The result has been a historic paradigm shift in Education, culture and legal reform which today continues to work for those enablers who helped engineer it. I bring considerable experience under my belt, and the opportunity to head UNESCO, and to lead this unique organization, and to massively scale this experience could fundamentally transform the way nations collaborate to eradicate poverty and contribute to peace and security through education, science, and culture As DG, I will bring to UNESCO a unique blend of third world life experience coupled with first class diplomatic experience at the multilateral and bilateral levels. My experience as a citizen of the developing world is that political participation often takes a back seat to the struggle that characterizes people's daily lives. Yes, parliamentary life in Egypt began in 1886, but it was not until the January 25th revolution that Egyptians rediscovered the notion of political participation. Although Egypt has been a republic since 1952, it wasn't until 2011 that Egyptians showed a keen

interest in exercising their voting rights. Why? Very simply Egyptians have been too busy dealing with the repercussions of the country's demographics- yes, we boast a young, fast growing population, but it is a population that needs access to quality education, healthcare, housing, and jobs - needs which government scrambles to meet. As such, young graduates worry about saving to buy a house, and competing to get a job.. needs which dwarf that of political fulfilment, which takes a back seat to living. Whereas mortgages and health insurance are givens in a developed economy, a nascent mortgage industry, and a non-existent state health insurance compound the worries of many youth in our part of the world. Quality of education is another key element of Middle East's demographic makeup. Low/no cost Public schools offer sub par education, which must be supplemented with private lessons which increase the burden on families of Egyptian students- whose parents once again find no interest or stamina to exercise their right to political participation. Sub par education in turn translates into low political awareness, which completes the vicious circle of low or no political participation. The advent of ICT, and particularly social media broke the demographic norms which had previously paralyzed Political participation. Inspired by the events in Tunisia, and enabled by Facebook groups, and tweets, Egyptians rekindled their political participation in January 2011. Politically, and thanks to social media, Egyptians went from zero to hero literally overnight in 2011.

Lessons learned:

Our approach should be none other than:

Human rights based: it is our guarantee and enabling environment; devoting equal and adequate attention to all domains comprising the mandate of UNESCO. SDG's is a package with causal relationship and not isolated goals. As DG, I will work on all domains in a comprehensive and cost effective manner.

Education:

Education is the single most important weapon we as a global community must use to fight the extremism and violence that pops up in every corner of the globe. Thanks to globalization, the internet, and social media, promulgation of extremism and violence has never been easier. We must fight fire with fire. We must use cutting edge technology to deliver quality education to every corner of the globe. Access alone is not enough, quality is crucial. We must ensure "Equitable and inclusive quality Education; as a lifelong learning process for all as well as "technical and vocational education and training and higher education and research. Prevention of extremism is the only way. Trying to cure extremism is taking too long, and too many lives have died in vain. The right to education is also the most effective strategy for the realization of other rights- including that to political participation. Education is the only vehicle for a culture of peace and human rights-centered governance. I am proud to have successfully initiated and coordinated a Girls Education initiative- an initiative that was hailed by UNICEF as a flagship model. I aspire to leading UNESCO towards implementation of many more, larger scale initiatives.

Half of the world's population is under 25 years old. The percentage of young people in developing countries is set to rise to 89.5% in 2025. These young women and men will have to cope with the consequences of the unsustainable use of the Earth and its resources. Young people represent an enormous potential for change: yet they yearn for educational, scientific, cultural and communication resources and opportunities needed for their personal development, access to decent jobs, civic participation and mutual understanding. These young people represent a potential for change if access to education can be ensured and if their involvement in decision making processes can be strengthened. Young people are not only agents for economic growth, but also a force for social transformation and progress, with peace and equitable and sustainable development as core objectives.

In short, No single country, however powerful, can cope on its own with the challenges that have arisen. Shared values and standards are increasingly necessary to ensure global peace and prosperity. The world must work together through an organization like UNESCO to empower the youth.. to strengthen their minds, to broaden their horizons.. to enable them to carry the burden of future generations towards slowing the decay of the environment, the decay of minds, and towards reconstruction of our global society. As DG, I look forward to taking this bull by the horns!