

NATIONAL COUNCIL ON U.S.-ARAB RELATIONS

17TH ANNUAL ARAB-U.S. POLICYMAKERS CONFERENCE

***“TRANSITIONING THE WHITE HOUSE:
CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR ARAB-U.S. RELATIONS”***

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 31, 2008

**RONALD REAGAN BUILDING & INTERNATIONAL TRADE CENTER
WASHINGTON, D.C.**

**9:00-9:30: "FOUNDATIONS FOR CHANGE IN THE ARAB WORLD: A WOMAN'S
PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL PERSPECTIVE"**

Ms. Muna Abu Sulayman – Co-Host Kalam Nawaem ("Softly Speaking"), Middle East Broadcasting Corporation [MBC-TV]; Managing Director, HRH Prince Awaleed Bin Talal Kingdom Foundation

Transcript by Ryan & Associates

[DR. JOHN DUKE ANTHONY] Our theme is transitioning the White House, implications for challenges and opportunities in Arab-U.S. relations. I want to thank all of those who came yesterday. We realize that today is special day for many, Halloween where spouses need to get home to be either with their children or with their other half or significant other, to open the door for the children who come for trick or treats.

It was the same thing last year, on October 31. It's also Jum'ah, the Friday day of prayer, so many of our Muslim attendees and participants will use that occasion to pray. We do have two rooms here for prayer for Muslims and ask any of the National Council staff and representatives as to where they are. And we do this with joy and respect and esteem in our hearts to provide this facility and hopefully be seen as an act of cultural sensitivity to one of humankind's great faiths.

We have to start today's session an extraordinary person in the case of Miss Muna Abu Sulyaman. She is a leading media figure throughout the Arab countries, the Middle East and the Islamic world. In terms of researching and producing and directing various episodes dealing with issues pertaining to family, to culture, to education, to economics, to politics, and to gender.

She is the Executive Director of the Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Kingdom Foundation one of the most renowned, and rightly so, charitable foundations and institutions in the world, not just in her own country and in the region. She has been before that director of its strategic studies where in a visionary and programmatic capacity she has researched and sought out worthy causes in non governmental organizations with which her foundation can have an association or link to build the human resources capacity to sustain those organizations, projects, programs, events, and activities over time.

We're one of they are one of the beneficiaries of that kind of assistance but we're but one of many others. So is Harvard University, so is Georgetown's Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding, so has been the United Nations and innumerable other institutions.

The image of many people from the ruling family of Saudi Arabia not being actively engaged or in civic affairs is the opposite of the reality for those who are specialists and who have lived in the country and worked alongside of its people for any length of time. And certainly Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal would be at the top of the list of the individuals who has done something that he didn't have to do, and his staff didn't have to do, but out of conviction and compassion and commitment have done every single day since the establishment of the foundation.

In terms of her television programs those that she has researched and programmed and produced there have been more than 200 episodes on Middle East Broadcast Corporation television satellite stations that are viewed by tens of millions of Arabs worldwide. She has been recognized by the World Economic Forum, by the United Nations and by subgroups of the World Economic Forum as an extraordinary women leader.

She had been for the last 11 years also a teacher of American literature at King Saud University. There are very few amongst America's 4200 universities American professors who teach about Arab or Arabic literature. So you can understand how this person is indeed a bridge builder. It is

often said that the only thing longer than a person's shadow is an institution. That's two thirds true. One can also leave behind a role model, an inspiration for those who are with us and those who will come after us. That's Miss Muna Abu Sulayman.

[MUNA ABU SULAYMAN] Wow. That was a good introduction. Even I want to hear my own speech. Thank you so much. You are so kind. It is a pleasure to be here today with the National Council. John Duke Anthony and his team are so tireless in promoting the exchange of ideas and networks that are so needed and have to occur in conferences like this if you want to change the world.

According to Aristotle to give money is an easy matter, but to decide to whom to give it to, how large, when and for what purpose and how is neither in every man's power nor an easy matter.

Actually it is so tough that Warren Buffet subcontracted Bill Gates for it. There are so many calls for new innovative approaches to traditional giving all over the world, out with the old, in with the new. But what really works? What works? What works where? What are the issues you should try to work on?

These are some of the questions that we face at the foundation and I'm sure many of you on a daily basis. And in the fallout of the current global economic crisis the amount of people living in poverty is sure to skyrocket. We are going to end up paying a very high price for poverty, which is why we need to work together to find lasting global solutions to end poverty and not just fix outdated systems.

The United Nations Development Program, which I am an Ambassador of, has eight millennium goals. To end poverty, to improve people's lives, improve living conditions, and they are very well known.

The eighth goal, the last one, the one that calls for global partnership for development is not as well known. Yet out of all the goals, it is the most important. Otherwise we will never be able to tackle the enormous amount of problems facing humanity by ourselves. Like the rest of the world there is a growing number of Arab mavericks. I hate saying that word, but they really are mavericks. Businessmen who have taken the task of changing the world. And they do it through a lot of philanthropy.

They want to fuel development. And despite new strides being taken every day there is still a very long path to adequately bring the approaches, techniques and delivery to international standards. And they are very urgently needed. Facing them, and facing people who work for them like me, are a number of challenges and obstacles both from within and without our societies. And I am going to go into them because they are very important. But before I do that I want to just provide a little bit of context.

Regarding the beginning of Arab philanthropy is not new. A lot of people think it just started in the past 20 years. It's not. As long as Arabs have been around there has been a lot of giving. It stems out of being in the desert. If you don't do altruistic giving, one day you are going to die,

because you are going to need somebody to give. So we give and we share and it has lasted into the 21st century.

And also Islam, which a lot of Arabs are Muslims, has giving or Zakat. Every capable person has to give 2 1/2 percent of their savings not income, savings to charity for the neediest members of society. That's a lot of money, and you think if everybody gives money the Christians give the tithe and we give Zakat there wouldn't be a lot of poverty. Yet there is.

Zakat is supposed to be a mechanism that prevents wealth accumulation in the first place. It helps to keep the monetary circulation system of an economy healthy. It's a built in structure that attacks poverty from the inside out. And with oil prices rising even if they are at 64 right now, or is it 62, how much money are we losing, 60.. still it is a lot of liquidity that enables people in our parts of the world to be very much more generous. The difference is that now instead of only wealthy individuals giving we're seeing a lot of sovereign wealth funds coming in, even governments. And they are all trying to team up with NGOs and public sector to solve some of the pressing issues that we see.

The second misconception that I would like to talk about is the Islamic finance system. It's a competing economic model and we are here and a lot of you realize that the Islamic finance system is growing both in the West and actually in academia. Its not reactionary. It's not backwards, like a lot of people are saying. The reason it's reviving is that it works. There is an inherently creditable structure in that system, and that's a hot topic today.

For example, the system discourages massive deposits of liquidity, which is a hallmark of the capitalistic system. It's done through prevention of the excessive interest bearing loans, what Warrant Buffet calls financial weapons of mass destruction. Also not selling what one doesn't have. It seems very simple, but maybe wasn't so simple eight months ago. Its not very glamorous, the system is not very glamorous, it has a lot of good common sense. The added benefit is that when a system like that is applied it does prevent excessive greed -- I'm sorry wealth inequality. And therefore the job of the philanthropist is made easier. It's about fixing the social problems from happening in the first place and that's something that we need to really look at while we are regulating the market.

Another cultural misconception about philanthropy and women is that, and I'm sure I don't need to rehash the old misconceptions of oppression of women to this audience, and all of the differences between Islam, religion and culture. But what is not known is that the biggest donors in the Islamic world have been women. They're the ones who are funding some of the greatest civic and academic institutions because 1400 years ago they came to be in possession of wealth en masse, not one or two but everybody, so suddenly we had a new class of donors.

There are so many examples, actually have a hard time limiting them, but I am just going to actually say two examples, two of my absolute favorites. Fatima Al-Fihri is a wealthy Moroccan heiress in the 19th century. She founded what is often held up as the first institution of higher learning in the world at the Kairaouine Mosque in Fez.

Basically she was so envious of the Djemma where men went to learn that she feminized it she created the Djemaa'a the Arabic word for university today. Her university grew to be the seat of academic learning, Ibn Khaldun graduated from there and also somebody called Gerbert d'Aurillac. Maybe other people know him as Pope Sylvester the Second.

A modern parallel is the work of Shaikha Mouza Al Misnad the First Lady of Qatar. There is an impressive development of the Knowledge City in Doha. I might disagree with some of the methods going on. I might disagree with some of the priorities she is doing, but I have to admit that what she is doing is strengthening the social educational infrastructure of her country and hopefully the GCC as well. Right now there are a lot of sources, new sources of income, there is increasing economic maturation and there is progress in governmental transfers in oversight. Not enough, but there is progress. And it has contributed to a lot of money that is given to charity, not only that but the money is actually being used in a sophisticated and complex way. And there are key trends that are happening right now in the Arab world. But before I go into the trends I'll just discuss the past trends.

In the 70s and 90s there was this put out the fire kind of aid, a lot of us for the first time in our lives saw televised for the first time young children having flies over their eyes with distended bellies and villages devastated and wars as they were occurring, that shocked us and it made us Arabs and non-Arabs everywhere in the world dig dip into our pockets and as a result we all felt very good, we were helping the world.

The problem is that today these orphans still stare at us from our televisions sets and the same devastated villages, the same devastated villages are going through wars again, and the 20th generation of flies are still on the eyes on these young children. We haven't seen much change.

There are three million people leaving on \$2 a day or less. Vast nations that are so underdeveloped that it's heartbreaking and many more joining the ranks or on the brink of collapse because of Aids, intestinal worms, poverty, famine malaria. The leading cause of death for children under six are the last four -- all simple medical causes that been eradicated in the West. They are still terrorizing the rest of the world.

Around 1990 a change started to occur. The newest wave of giving was born out of the desire to see real change occur, and out of many business people who are now giving, are now giving during their lifetime rather, after they pass on, so that they can see how their money is being used.

Now there is an intense desire to support intellectual inquiry and academic, culture and social reform through structured and strategic giving. This is a major change that has occurred I think beginning from California and spread all over the world.

The core aim has switched to finding long-term solutions and as a result we're growing, there's a growing awareness of the underlying cause of the worlds core conflicts. But the vastness of these problems is overwhelming. This is the idea, this is why the idea of redistributing wealth, redistributing wealth from the inside the system is much better than much better than trying to fix it once it occurs.

The trends that I was talking about, the trends we are seeing today in the Arab world are as follows. Zakat giving is slowly being revolutionized. There is a breakthrough in how zakat is handled and directed, but it needs to happen a little bit faster. The idea is not to stop helping those we know, not to stop those individual people giving to individuals, but that we realized that we are not leveraging the benefits by utilizing those donations in the most effective way. So a change of method needs to be looked at. Also what to do with ones, I only have two more minutes and I have like five pages, so I'll..

[ANTHONY] That was a Valentine's Day card.

[SULAYMAN] A lot of love in two minutes, what I'll do is.. ..Zakat giving needs to be revolutionized, we need to look at how to, sorry, I just need to reorient myself.. ..need to look at how to do strategic giving, and we need to look at global partnerships.

Global partnerships are perhaps the most important point, because a lot of changes are occurring in the Arab world, but there is a lot of fear. There was a conference in Amman that discussed how the USA, which is the pioneer in philanthropy in today world is actually terrorizing the rest of the world.

People are afraid to give outside their local area. They are afraid to reach out. They are afraid to be labeled twenty-five years later as a terrorist. And today we have to realize in the world of philanthropy we are complacent and guilty until proven innocent through a lot of those great philanthropy and great charities. And we need to look at our own methods of vetting people. We shouldn't let our weird last names be the verdict of who we are. And I think for too long we have stood silently because of a few people's actions. And we were afraid to speak up but that is actually coming to an end.

The persistence of human good will cannot be suppressed for long, and that's one of the challenges that we have to face. How do we work with the United States, because it is the pioneer. It does a lot of great stuff, a lot of great incentives to come out of the US and they do help the rest of the world. But if people are afraid to take US money, and if people are afraid to reach out to the US then people are losing out.

We're seeing a campaign that might succeed based on pennies that are given every day almost to the tune of 150 million in one month. So just imagine if actually harnessed the power of individual givers, the philanthropists, the foundations, the corporate social responsibility units of corporations to actually work together with the U.S. How many of today's world problems can really be eradicated?

I think I'm going to end by saying that there is a faulty concept of a clash of civilizations and I think people like us in today's conference have to think about how to strive for a collaboration of civilizations.

It's a new paradigm to move U.S.-Arab relations forward, and I think we are the people to take it on. I hope you agree. Thank you.

[ANTHONY] Thank you, Miss Abu Sulayman.

On each persons table is a little pad like this and there are pencils for you as well, or pens, on which to write your questions. I have several which were presented to me before. I'll read these all to you so that you can begin to think of the response, and then I will come back to them. These are quite interesting here.

How many proposals do you receive in the course of a given year and what do you base your decisions on for the ones that you decide to fund?

To what extent if any is there collaboration between your foundation and others such as Bill Gates and many others that are philanthropic as well?

How can one prevent "donor fatigue" and increase giving when the needs of the world seem so overwhelming and the restrictions that you alluded in terms of people's fears of getting on a list if they transfer out of their country say to the U.S. and the last name of the donor is spelled similarly to that of someone that the law enforcement authorities are looking for, and anyone passing through an airport with a name similar is detained from four to six hours? I mean all of us in this room have heard more stories than we can count or countenance of that for the last seven years.

Another one is, after Katrina far few Americans are aware that the top three donors to the victims the homeless the devastated the destitute produced by the hurricane and its aftermath, the top three were all Arab countries, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar -- four really, the United Arab Emirates. How can one circulate this kind of message?

Another one is what lessons have been learned if any that are applicable from the fact that after 9-11, within days, His Royal Highness Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Bin Abdul Aziz al Saud, presented a check to Mayor Rudy Guiliani of New York for the victims' families and the survivors and he added a phrase or two that focused on some of the "why" dimensions of 9-11 that seemed to be taboo, even to the 9-11 commission to address, in terms of making reference to the prolongation of the Israeli Palestinian problem and either the Mayor himself or pressures upon him by his advisors said, "Give that check back, we will not accept such a check." Had it been offered by someone other than an Arab and a Muslim, might it have been accepted? And how can one better publicize that for thirty years now, almost annually, the top three of the most generous countries in the world in terms of the percentage of their GDP as well as a percentage of the per capita income of their citizens have been Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the United Arab Emirates? And while the United States is the number one aid giver in terms of the aggregate in terms charity per capita internationally the U.S. is 17th and the first three spots are Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates. Year after year, after year after year.

These are questions and if you want me to read them again I can, but you can choose which ones you may like to answer.

[SULAYMAN] I can answer all of them actually.

[ANTHONY] Okay.

[SULAYMAN] The number of proposals we get? Thousands. And that does lead to donor fatigue. Sometimes it gets overwhelming because you get so many good requests. I mean we get the funny requests. I was just telling a friend yesterday, that we got a proposal for, I think, ten universities, to build peace universities for \$3 billion. He wanted Al Waleed to fund all of it. I'm like yes.. 10% of Al Waleed's money to fund somebody else's university. I don't think so. But it seems obvious to me that we wouldn't fund the whole university, but it didn't seem so obvious to the proposal maker.

So the way that we do our funding or grant making is that we have four areas that we work with. We work with Islam-West dialogue, which is one of the biggest areas. Four departments in the foundation and that's to help bridge between Islam and the West through academic institutions. It is to bring objective intellectual academic work to the arena, to bring common sense and logic to the discussion, as we have seen that these two were lacking in the last eight years.

We also fund a lot of initiatives like this conference and the organization of the National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations. We fund the rabbi's and imam's conferences, some leadership initiatives between Muslims and Western leaders so they can come to the table. Some of it is publicized, not publicized.

We also do a lot of rapid aid, which means if there was a disaster in the world we already have international partners such as the United Nations or other organizations that have also local groups and we go in and we help out.

We did not actually donate to Katrina, one because Saudi Arabia donated such a large amount of money. The other one is that out of the idea is that the U.S. should be able to take care of itself.

There was a huge problem, there was a reason Katrina happened and we thought that there was too much aid pouring in and one that will make the U.S. a laughingstock when people are also donating to the U.S. but it also will help mask the problems of why Katrina occurred and why it was not fixed so quickly. So Katrina was an exception, but we usually go in very quickly to any place there is a problem, a natural disaster.

Then we have women development in the Arab world, and Saudi Arabia, where we work on developing women with the understanding that there is a cultural and religious context. It doesn't have to always be Islamic, because we also have large Christian minorities and Jewish minorities in some of those countries. And how do you work with all these variables to make sure that development of women occurs as women need it and want it rather than to impose it on them, or impose models that we think work? So that's another thing.

The fourth area is poverty alleviation. We do a lot of work in Africa and we do some work in Saudi Arabia because they also have a poverty problem in Saudi Arabia.

In decision making its very important that you actually know what your mission is, because your mission if it is well crafted, if it is well done, it actually influences every single decision on the proposal that you make. It helps you to avoid something called mission creep, which means you start diluting the effect of your giving.

It also depends on how much you are giving if you're a donor who gives about \$10 thousand a year or someone who give \$10 million a year. What is it that you really believe in, what is it you really want to see, and you work toward that.

You have to be ruthless. You know. Sometimes there's going to be this great person who is going to this great university but they don't have the money from Bangladesh, and they got into Harvard and they need like \$50,000 a year or \$70,000 a year and you know that this person is going to be great, but you are going to say no, because you can't let your heart always lead you. Otherwise the work that you are supposed to be doing will be diluted.

We do keep something called ash cash. The Prince is wealthy enough that we actually have a little bit of mission creep. Most people can't afford this but we can. Ash cash is a medical term for money that doctors get when somebody dies. So they never know how much money they have because they keep it on the side. And this ash cash that we have is for sometimes things that are not really within our core mission, which we are very ruthless about, but we know that we nobody else is going to help out. We know no other foundation is going to help out. Therefore, we will give them money thinking that, and we will tell them that we don't give money, this is just something from outside so that they know not to ask the next year.

Donor fatigue is really a big problem, not just in our foundation, but everywhere we go because so many people ask you and keep on asking you and that is why again you have to have your mission. So that you can tell them, I'm sorry this is not in my core area of interest. This is not a focus of this foundation. And you know you are very professional about it. What we do is we also help them network. We say we know this foundation does this or these people actually can help you. And we have a data base that we allow people to use.

Restrictions. Oh yes, the restrictions about giving money. I think this is one of the biggest problems facing the world right now. How do you give money without fear especially if you have a weird sounding last name, again. And if you might want to visit anywhere outside of your home country you don't want to be arrested by Interpol or something.

Here this institutions need to come together. We need to have lawyers and we need to have government officials from all over the world actually setting up regulations. But working together, not one place imposing regulations on the rest of the world. Working together. And I think we can err on the positive rather than the negative. For example, some money might be given to people that are not so good, but that means billions of dollars are being given to the right organizations. We can't stop most people giving, just because we are afraid of a few thousand dollars here and there. So the mechanism where there is lawyers where there is institutions, governments coming together, to work on regulations. Also I think people need to fund those great organizations that actually fight for people who are put in these positions, sort of like lawyers for the constitution, the people who work for pro bono on these issues, not many people

actually fund organizations that work with the legislation so this is something else that needs to be funded.

Arabic giving. As I said Arabic giving stemmed from I think a real need a long time ago where we come from. And the idea of giving, a lot of people don't even advertise what they give. It is so inherent in the Arabic personality. I'm not surprised to hear that Saudi Arabia is one of the major givers to the world. I live in Saudi Arabia and I hear about it. But I know a lot of people are because they think that we're insulated, that we only give to Madrassas, or we give to our own. So I'm happy that this information gets out a little bit more and more. But stereotypes are very hard to overcome.

Alwaleed gave \$10 million dollars to New York City and asked some very hard questions. It's a very delicate situation. I think timing, it was right after 9-11. A lot of people were still afraid. There was this fear of this happening again. It was a major cultural shock. It was a major humanitarian shock to Americans. It was not as big to the Arab world, and I know the American people get upset about this but we have 3000 people dying every day somewhere. You know it's, we're used to it, so I guess the questioning came from the Alwaleed about what are the core reasons this happened. Lets discuss core issues. Lets work on making sure this doesn't happen again. And people were not willing to listen to it. And it was used against him and now eight years later this is exactly where we are at. We are actually now starting to ask the questions. The press is not afraid to ask the questions. Arabs are not afraid to ask questions, Americans are not afraid to ask questions. And I think if people listened eight years ago perhaps we wouldn't have gone through what we are going through. Again timing is sometimes important.

[ANTHONY] We have gone through all the questions there. Please join me in thanking Muna Abu Sulayman.

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