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TIME OUT

By Afshin Molavi

"I'm not exaggerating when I say that I don't think anyone in the world does more on a daily basis to promote U.S.-Arab understanding than Dr. Anthony," a high-level Saudi official recently told me at a luncheon, "and he does it very well," he added.

The Saudi official was referring to Dr. John Duke Anthony, President of the National Council on U.S.-Arab relations, astute scholar, prolific writer, networker par excellence, and tireless builder of bridges between the Arab world and the United States. My own introduction to the Arab world — a world I have come to know and love — was mainly due to Dr. Anthony and his dynamic organization which sent me to Jeddah as an eager, albeit naive, young journalist to report, write, edit, re-write, proofread, and, most importantly, to learn. To learn in an environment where your daily experience becomes your textbook and Saudi Arabia, your classroom.

Other young journalists over the years, owing to Dr. Anthony, have "attended class" in Cairo, Amman, Dubai, Kuwait, and Abu Dhabi, learning by crucial first-

hand experience what life is like in the Middle East. So perhaps when these young reporters return to the American media, they will have a basic understanding, a sympathy, a sober, unbiased view of the region free of some of the stereotypes and Hollywood half-truths that tend to permeate American consciousness about the Arab world.

Of course, it is not only journalists whom Dr. Anthony introduces to the Arab world. It is also students, teachers, academics, government officials, even American scholars of the Middle East whom Anthony recently brought to Saudi Arabia.

These first-hand, people-to-people contacts do much more than any textbook can do in creating understanding and the responses of the participants are usually the same: "Enlightening" "It changed my life" "It shattered many myths" "I'm ready to go back." Simply put, no other organization takes as many American leaders, educators, and students on visits to the Arab world for firsthand experiences than the National Council on U.S.-Arab relations.

And it's not only the visits to the Arab world that makes the National Council such a valuable organization. At home, the National Council organizes lectures, administers a Model Arab League for students, educates the U.S. Congress, and organizes state committees on U.S.-Arab

relations, hoping to reach millions of Americans with their simple philosophy of understanding through education.

An interesting aspect of the Council is its close affiliation with GCC countries and its early realization of the importance of the GCC nations in intra-Arab affairs.

Dr. Anthony is one of the foremost experts on the GCC in the United States and is the only American scholar to be invited to every GCC meeting since 1981.

Dr. Anthony recently left Saudi Arabia after bringing a group of academics from Kentucky here. Quietly, with little fanfare, he boarded the plane, headed back to Washington D.C., to get back to his work on the home front, certain to be back in the region very soon with another group of Americans, seeking to educate yet another group with his experiences, erudition, and contacts. The work of the National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations has already shown tangible results in the United States and will continue to be a critical link between the two regions of the world that are so often characterized by misunderstanding on both sides.

While Dr. Anthony will probably never arrive to cheering crowds in Cairo or become a household name among the average Arab on the street, the entire Arab world owes this dedicated, international visionary a debt of thanks.