



**Speech by
Her Majesty Queen Rania Al-Abdullah,
Queen of the Hashemite
Kingdom of Jordan,
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Life Stories

Thank you, Sheikh Nahayan, for those kind words – and, more importantly, for your commitment to women’s education.

I am delighted to be here with all of you... to be a part of this conference... and especially, to share the program with such inspiring women leaders.

I am sure everyone here, throughout our lives, has learned a great deal from the women around us – our mothers, grandmothers, sisters and friends.

But, as we have just seen, one of the benefits of the global age is the way it has allowed us to make connections across boundaries of distance and culture. The more we appreciate others’ perspectives, the more dimension we add to our own. And this is something Zayed University has understood from the start.

Your program draws not only on the talents of your faculty, but also the experience of institutions around the world. Likewise, your students are encouraged to reach beyond familiar horizons – whether serving as interns with local firms... or volunteering in the community... or videoconferencing with Japanese peers... or studying in Scotland.

So I have not come here to deliver a lecture on the importance of women’s engagement... or tell you there is a big wide world out there. As astute and dynamic twenty-first century women, you understand the challenges of translating your education, experience and energy into an active role in the global marketplace. And more than, what it takes to *balance* that role with your role in your families and communities.

So, instead, I want to share some stories I have learned through my own journey – stories of bright young women like you, who saw a problem and tried to help solve it. Because as we talk about communities in transition, and women making a difference, stories like these remind us that we all have something to give.

Let me begin with Sadiqa Basiri, a 25-year old from Afghanistan, who is opening the doors of education to a new generation of girls.

Sadiqa's family fled as refugees when she was only 6, rebuilding their lives in Pakistan, where Sadiqa went to school. -But during a visit back to her homeland in 1994, Sadiqa was shocked to realize the education she took for granted was something the women and girls in her hometown could only imagine.

When Sadiqa graduated, she went to work for the Afghan Women's Educational Center. Then, in 2002, armed with her savings and experience, she returned to her rural village to found a girls' school in her home.

Today, that one school has grown to four, reaching more than 1,000 young girls. And Sadiqa's students are showing the same commitment she shows them: When two of the tents that serve as classrooms were torched by arsonists last year, the girls refused to give up – and held their classes on open ground.

I am also inspired by Jyoti Mohapatra, a community leader in India – of whom I heard a great deal during my visit to India last week

Growing up, Jyoti saw how women around her lacked a voice in the community. So when she was 19, she canvassed her village door-to-door, inviting women and girls to meet and talk about shared concerns.

The first day, only five women showed up – but their conversation flowed. The second day, five *dozen* women came – and a grassroots movement was born. With help from a local NGO, Jyoti formalized the initiative, calling the discussion groups “Meena Clubs” after the heroine of a popular movie. Club members started organizing themselves on behalf of local issues – devising solutions to challenges like sanitation, education and health. And today, more than 11,000 “Meena girls” are serving their communities – even as they support each other, and develop leadership skills.

So often, the problems we face seem so huge, and the means at hand so few. Yet Sadiqa and Jyoti remind us that, often, what we have will be *enough*.

Sadiqa used her own savings and skill to open a school in her living-room. Jyoti launched a state-wide network by knocking on neighbors' doors. Sometimes, the best way to make a big difference is adding up lots of small ones. Likewise, often, the smartest advice is also the most basic: Look for others who share your interests. Do not be afraid to ask for what you want. Be persistent. Keep a record of all your efforts. Say thank you to all your supporters.

And, crucially, know that the greatest leaders are not the ones with spines of steel – they are the ones who know how to adapt to change... and bounce back from frustration or failure. Because life inevitably brings surprises that knock us off our feet.

And for women, who are juggling multiple roles as daughters, mothers, wives and professionals, getting knocked off our feet can be a daunting proposition.

As one of those women “jugglers”, this is something about which I am often asked. And I can tell you that I never feel particularly “sure-footed.” With four young children, each of whom has their own interests and activities, my days generally comprise of a lot of organization followed by a lot of re-organization followed by nagging feelings of guilt!

The trick to keeping our feet firmly on the ground, is to prioritize... and be open to compromise.

Some days we will not know whether to laugh or cry. But trying to be everything to everyone, all the time, is a recipe for disaster. And endlessly striving for perfect balance only turns our lives into a tightrope – upon which we never dare to dance, for fear of a terrible fall.

So remember: The pages of your life belong to you. Write a story that makes *you* happy and proud. And someday, somewhere, a wonderful little girl will read it and say, “I want to be just like her.”

