

CONVOCATION REMARKS

THEME: “International and Global Partnerships”

Thank you and good morning colleagues, ladies and gentlemen. It is indeed an honor to share the dais with our distinguished leaders—His Excellency Sheikh Nahayan, President of Zayed University, and our Vice President, Dr. Sulaiman Al Jassim. It is also a high honor to have our distinguished guest speaker for Convocation, Soraya Salti. We appreciate your being with us today and sharing your vision on the power of education, innovation, and entrepreneurship. We hope to see you again soon. I would like to take this occasion to formally invite you to be a participant in our international conference, Women as Global Leaders, scheduled for March, 2012. I sincerely hope you can join us for that important event.

It is also an honor to serve this unique institution of higher education, a university that is truly making history—in Dubai, Abu Dhabi, the U.A.E., the Gulf Region, and beyond. Zayed University is on a fast track to becoming what our President, Sheikh Nahayan, has envisioned...“the leading university in the region.”

As the 4th speaker, I promise you I will be brief but I do have three ideas I would like to share with you today.

First, it is important to remember, **ZU is a National public University**. Zayed University is here to serve the U.A.E. and its citizens. Likewise, each of us is here to serve this nation and its young people. We do that by developing, offering, and sustaining the highest quality education.

Offering **the highest** quality education is not easy. It means, first and foremost, assembling a superbly qualified and deeply committed faculty. It means developing a curriculum that is world-class, recruiting qualified students, and creating campuses where effective learning can take place. It also means developing policies and procedures built on high standards and, further, it means presenting our programs, policies, procedures, facilities, and faculties for independent, external review and evaluation. We have done that through Middle States Higher Education Commission. Middle States has recognized the quality and integrity of our institution by awarding Zayed University full accreditation in record time.

As a National public University, Zayed University is here and will be here—25, 50 150 years—as an essential and integral part of the future growth and development of this young nation. The United Arab Emirates can count on that. Zayed University is not going away as some universities have. Our base is not in the United States, France, the UK, or any other nation but **here** in the United Arab Emirates. The U.A.E. is Zayed University's home.

I believe that is important. ZU is **building the nation's capacity** to educate its young people; we—ZU's faculty and staff—are also building the nation's capacity to carry out important and relevant research; and, we are building a workforce of excellent quality that will fill future professional and leadership positions here in this country. The nation and the Emirates of Dubai and Abu Dhabi can be justifiably proud of what they have achieved in establishing and building a fine National public university. And each of us is honored to be a part of this grand national project.

On behalf of all of us assembled here today, I want to express to His Excellency Sheikh Nahayan, our appreciation for the confidence he has placed in us to carry out this important role for the new nation and its future leaders.

The second point I would like to make has to do with Quality. World-class higher education of the highest quality must be our standard. Today, in these increasingly complex times, marked by competitive economies and diverse societies, those people who excel will be in demand. High quality education gives them the power to excel and provide leadership. Our graduates must be in that position. We cannot not, we will not be satisfied with less.

To achieve that level of quality, universities **must be collaborative**... collaborative with government, collaborative with social services, collaborative with industry, business and the private sector, collaborative with K-12 education and health care institutions, and, yes, collaborative with other universities. No single institution can provide the breadth of learning opportunities that our students need if they are to be prepared and enlightened leaders in the occupations, professions, and communities they will serve. We must **collaborate** with others. **We need partners to achieve our mission and vision.**

We already have many strong partners in government, business, industry, social services and higher education. And we have **a philosophy of collaboration** that

has opened doors of opportunities for our students that will better prepare them for future service and the leadership challenges we know will come.

It is widely recognized that the key to economic development and innovation in increasingly knowledge-based societies lies in the interactions among universities, industry, and government, and the strength of these interactions. These interactions take place when there are strong relationships, continuing relationships and, indeed, genuine partnerships. We must ensure that our partnerships succeed.

When we have strong, on-going relationships with the various ministries of government and the agencies of the respective Emirates; **when** we have strong, on-going relationships with business and industry—banking, media, real estate, construction, commerce, and scores of others; **when** we have strong relationships with other outstanding universities...we will be on a higher platform and better positioned to lead as an institution of higher education not only here in the UAE but in the Gulf region and beyond.

Perhaps it goes without saying, the true beneficiaries of these relationships are, and must continue to be our students and the nation. This is true “capacity building.”

We are in the process of building these relationships. We are not there yet...we still have a way to go. But we have started and each day these partnerships, these relationships are a bit stronger.

I would like to acknowledge the excellent work being done by our Office of Development in building these relationships. Likewise, several of our colleges are in the forefront in this important partner-building enterprise. Our Institute for Community Engagement is also in the partner-building business. We must capitalize on those successes and do more. We have not arrived, but I can say, we are well on our way.

The third idea I would like to share with you today is this: World-class higher education today means being a **participant on the global stage** with the world’s best universities. It means being a part of the global web of major Universities, connected through **international and global partnerships**. It means that

international students come to ZU, and ZU students go to Universities in other nations, faculty members from outstanding universities in the U.K., Singapore, Canada, the United States, Korea and India and elsewhere come to ZU to lecture, to teach and do research with us, and, ZU faculty return the favor and spend time doing the same at those outstanding international universities.

We have many notable, high ranking international university partners and more are under consideration. Many seek us out each year and solicit partnerships and MOUs with Zayed University. The UAE is a very desirable location for international universities to have meaningful connections in the Middle East and ZU can be that connection. **But we are at a point in the growth and maturation of our university that requires that we become much more strategic in our selection of international partners.** It is time that we require more from our partners just as we should be contributing more to our partnerships. We must ensure that our partnerships are in the best interest of our students and the nation. That will be our objective moving forward...***strategic partnerships that serve the interests of our students and the nation.***

We also have a new institutional venue, namely, International College, by which to strengthen these partnerships and to broaden the scope of our international programs and activities. Approved last May by the ZU University Council and His Excellency, Sheikh Nahayan, International College will be a catalyst for helping Zayed University take its place among other important universities that are engaged in significant international programs.

In addition to sponsoring special lectures, symposia, and programs on critical global issues, International College will also provide a collegiate home for our new Confucius Institute and Sejong Institute to help foster the learning of Chinese and Korean culture and language. I am excited by the new opportunities that will be opened to our students, faculty, and the community through the addition of our new International College.

Among the opportunities will be an expanded program of international service-learning. For the past few years, ZU students have been engaged in international service-learning projects. For example, in Cambodia and India, ZU students have participated in building schools and homes for people in need. In the process of helping others in different nations with different cultures and different religions

our students have learned much about the world and, perhaps equally important, they have learned much about themselves. Our objective and plan, working through International College, is to expand opportunities for Zayed University students—male and female—to participate in international service-learning experiences.

Overall, I believe **we are on the right track**. Our principles are sound. We are committed to serving the U.A.E. by providing its young women and men a high-quality internationally accredited education. We are committed to building collaborative local and international partnerships that benefit our students and the nation. We are committed to expanding opportunities for our students to engage in international activities.

That we are on the right track is validated by several facts:

1. Our rapid enrollment growth that now includes males and international students. (We grew by 23% again this year!)
2. Our institutional accreditation and prospects for program accreditation candidacy in at least five areas;
3. The prestigious universities that want to partner with ZU;

4. The success of our graduates in the workplace and society; and
5. Our reputation as an excellent university with high standards.

But just being on the right track does not necessarily ensure that we will reach our destination, or hit our target, especially if we have a “moving target.” The fact is that the goal posts keep moving. Nearly all universities are striving to achieve higher quality, higher standards, and higher rankings. So the competition is tougher every year and our ever-rising goals are more difficult to achieve. But achieve them we must; achieve them we will.

We know that we have to pick up the pace. We have to work smarter, faster and more efficiently---and we are doing just that. Perhaps the best example of this is the current BOV summer planning project designed to help accelerate the development and expansion of programs for our new campus in Abu Dhabi.

I am confident that we will rise to the challenges we face. As a National public university, we are here to build capacity in higher education, in research, in an educated workforce. We are here to connect with business, industry, government, education and other universities. We are here to build linkages

with other nations and the international community that will, in turn, create valuable learning opportunities for our students.

The opportunities are here. It is our job to make sure we take full advantage of them for our students—all of them...our female students, our male students, and our international students.

Working together, with your help, and with the leadership of our deans, directors, and managers, we will succeed. The vision of Zayed University as the “leading university in the region” will be a reality.

It has been said, “All great cities need great universities.”

I truly believe, Zayed University is “***Destined To Lead***” and will be that great university for the great cities of the United Arab Emirates.

Thank you for the important role you play in making this vision a reality.