

Tunis Declaration

On “Building Knowledge Economies”

We the participants in the High Level International Conference on “**Building Knowledge Economies for Job Creation, Increased Competitiveness, and Balanced Development**”, which was held jointly by the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO) and the Tunisian Government, in cooperation with the World Bank, under the high patronage of His Excellency Mr Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, President of the Tunisian Republic, in Tunis, from 1 to 3 December 2009, to examine the ways and mechanisms for putting into action projects geared to building the Knowledge Economy (KE);

- Given the fact that countries which make strides toward building knowledge economy and have a solid education base, a dynamic information infrastructure, an effective innovation system, and a solid economic and institutional regime, are in general doing better than others in the competitive world economy;
- Whereas many countries in the Arab and Islamic world have already embraced the Knowledge Economy (KE) as a development strategy, while some other are making some progress in that direction;
- Considering that the youthful demographic profile in the Arab world calls for the creation of at least 5 million jobs per year in the region over the next twenty years, which poses growing risks of unemployment, especially among the youth;
- Since Arab and Islamic States, with few exceptions, have by and large remained isolated from the global economy, and must urgently develop more modern economies that are better at meeting the latter’s four key success factors of agility, international networking, constant learning and reliability;
- In view of the pressing need of States to start preparing for the post-petroleum and post-carbon future, as well as for major water, energy, food, and climate change in the decades to come;
- Given that the majority of States need to diversify their economies instead of over-dependency on petroleum revenues for some countries, or on the agricultural sector for others;

- Since it is necessary for some States in the long run – especially those with a large expatriate labor force juxtaposed to a native working population almost entirely occupied in the public sector – to have a clear long-term interest in promoting the emergence of a more private sector-savvy, sophisticated, and engaged native population.
- Recognizant of our duty, as individuals, organizations and representatives of the relevant States, to effectively contribute to making a quantum leap towards KE, within our scientific scope of competence and responsibilities;
- Being appreciative both of the patronage granted by His Excellency Tunisian President Mr Zine El Abidine Ben Ali to this Conference and his presiding over its opening ceremony; and of the Tunisian Government’s hosting of the Conference, thus greatly supporting the efforts of international community towards building knowledge economies;
- Commending the in-depth review offered by His Excellency in his speech at the opening ceremony of the conference concerning the current development issues and the close relation between building KE and the achievement of balanced and sustainable development; supporting the pertinent ideas and proposals made by His Excellency in his speech, which we consider as a reference framework and a keynote document for the Conference;
- Hailing the ample and fruitful deliberations which took place during the Conference’s sessions, as well as the presentations, studies and papers contributed therein;

Declare and stress the following:

- **The importance** of rethinking development strategies of the Arab and Islamic States, in order to take advantage of transformative policies, innovation projects and renovation plans, which have become associated with moving towards a KE, through the provision of technical support, preparation of reference documents and offering scientific advice to these States.
- **Development** of an initiative – both content–and process wise – that pays sufficient attention to the national context, culture and circumstances, especially with regard to the deepening and broadening of manufacturing to gradually build innovation capacity, increase the supply of higher order skills, as well as business services and logistics and develop several types of innovation whether it is product innovation, innovation in services and in business processes.
- **Exchanging** the best practices and drawing lessons from successful KEs which are important for the States which would want to launch a systematic KE initiative.
- **The need** that high-level officials display strong commitment to and bold vision for strengthening the four pillars of the KE (business environment, innovation, education, information and communication technologies and the economic and institutional framework), while linking all these components with trust- building and societal cohesion around the KE initiative, constantly reforming and improving the four KE pillars, and building cross-sectoral and intermediary bodies linking top KE policy-makers with the political, business, and science communities.

- **The need for** adopting a policy integrating the available natural resources of the Arab and Islamic States into the processes for transition from resources economy to knowledge economy, through an integrated infrastructure providing conditions for a strong knowledge- based economy.
- **Establishing** a coordination network of specialized experts and technical officials to share experiences and expertise, follow up the national efforts, encourage regional initiatives, publicize international orientations in the field of the KE, and participate, if need be, in the design, implementation and follow-up of relevant activities and projects;
- **Calling for** the organization of study and consultation visits to Arab and Islamic States to develop road maps specific to these States to help steer their economies to the KE.
- **The need for** recognizing the importance of scientific research and technological innovation in building KE in Arab and Islamic States; increasing the expenditure allocated to research and development; fostering partnership between the public and private sectors in that respect; and attending further to the equipping of highly-skilled competences able to bring in an added value.
- **Developing** the appropriate mechanisms for the promotion of cooperation and partnership, for the activation of the role of the private sector and civil society institutions, and for the coordination of the contributions of specialized regional and international organizations, in accordance with effective, harmonious and integrated visions that meet pressing priorities and take into consideration the specificities of the societies concerned.
- **Inviting for** the convening of a world summit on knowledge economy, to take appropriate resolutions and adopt plans likely to ensure transition to the KE.
- **Supporting** the leading proposal by His Excellency President Mr Zine El Abidine Ben Ali to establish a specific programme for the building of the KE, to be supervised by ISESCO and funded by the Member States, so as to enhance cooperation and complementarity among Arab and Islamic States in achieving development and growth; and **commending** the experience and achievements of the Tunisian Republic in building KE and fulfilling balanced and sustainable development.
- **Inviting** ISESCO and the Tunisian Government, in cooperation with the World Bank and relevant organizations, to follow up these recommendations and take the necessary steps and incentive measures to implement them.
- **Re-expressing** thanks and gratitude to His Excellency Mr Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, President of the Tunisian Republic, for patronage of this conference and for presiding over its opening ceremony, as well as to the Tunisian Government for playing host to the conference and providing the appropriate conditions for its success and the achievement of its sought objectives; also **thanking** ISESCO and the World Bank for convening this conference and **commending** its elaborate preparation, quality implementation and good organization.

Tunis, 3 December 2009