

**Keynote Speech**

Ministerial Meeting on Education  
in the Broader MENA and G8

*by*

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Excellency Bundesministerin Dr Schavan

Excellency Minister Yehia Al-Sulaimy

Excellencies

Esteemed Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for me today to address such distinguished guests as gathered here with us at this Ministerial Meeting on Education in the Broader MENA and G8.

It seems that I have the lucky task to represent the business side today. And honestly I was keen to invest the time and participate in this ministerial meeting to underline the importance of education also from a business perspective. We at Siemens consider education a crucial driving force for growth and progress of societies.

The importance of education as the most effective element in the development of nations and human kind in general is beyond any doubt. Over the past decades the reach of education was one of the major challenges. Today, and due to the efforts of the concerned ministries, enrollment and accessibility of education in Broader MENA may still be an issue but are not the most pressing any more.

Proof hereto has been provided for example by UNESCO data confirming that school enrolment has drastically increased and that illiteracy among youth has remarkably fallen.

But today we are faced with a new challenge which is even more demanding. It is not anymore the quantitative expansion and reach of educational and training opportunities that matter most but the qualitative and relevance aspects which are of major importance and concern and make or break country strategies intended to drive countries forward.

**Relevance** and **quality** of the education provided have a significant and direct impact on the **development** of nations from a social and cultural development. We have heard yesterday BM Schawan clearly stating that education is development and development leads to peace. Furthermore, the achievable **economic growth** of countries is directly impacted by the education. Education is thereby **the** area for investment of efforts and funds with the highest potential for return.

Please allow me to shed some light on this statement from three different perspectives:

**First** from a Siemens perspective: Siemens is a growing organization with over 450 thousand employees in 190 countries. In many countries, Siemens is an integral part of the local economy and society for many decades. Such set-up requires frequent strategic decisions on where in the world we place new investments. Decisions on locations that mean countries and cities for our investments were in the past predominantly based on market attractiveness versus political and economical risks. In recent years one factor kept moving up on the scale of importance and is now effectively at the forefront of the parameters which drive our decisions. This factor is the availability of qualified and skilled employees.

**Second:** The innovation perspective. We all know about the importance of innovation. Innovations are not only big breakthroughs but also the small improvements which have profound effect in development of administrations, governmental structures and economies. Without innovation we would face in many areas a standstill which – due to the fact that other countries do move ahead is effectively a move backward. The effect on businesses and the related employment market is even more dramatic. Let me therefore refer to a survey conducted exactly a year ago by INSEAD, Moutamarat and PwC which surveyed executives in the Braoder MNEA region about their view on innovation. In this survey executives mentioned that the lack of qualified personnel by far is the most pressing challenge they are facing. Lack of finance, market opportunities and many other risks where seen as much less of importance. Lack of qualified personnel was a very clear number 1.

**Third:** a relevant historical perspective. The Arab region was prospering centuries ago. At that time it was not natural resources like oil which were the source of wealth and prosperity but the mastering of sciences and culture through a then well established and focused education system. Prosperity was a result of a wealth in human resources.

Out of these **three** perspectives it is obvious that the availability of the right education environment and thereby the right workforce is a decisive key for the success or failure of nations – especially if we take a long term view.

So since we seem to agree that today education is even much more important than in the past, what are the most pressing requirements in

terms of relevance? From a business point of view any future entrant to the employment market has to have:

- **First:** A broad and high quality foundation of basic skills. These skills shall not only concentrate on acquiring current skill sets but has to serve as a foundation for life long learning – that means to learn how to learn or in other terms to have a learning competency.
- **Second:** Good IT skills. IT has the potential to enable innovation and is a cornerstone for advancing the broader development agenda of countries. IT is an underlying skill which shall be seen similar to reading and writing.
- **Third:** Strong communication and well developed interpersonal and social skills, in combination with language skills – preferably starting from a very early age. These skills are fundamental for teamwork and collaboration with others.
- **Fourth:** The right values and attitudes. Only then do the above mentioned skills combine to strength and guarantee long term success.
- **Fifth:** Flexibility to be able to adapt to the ever changing work market requirements.

In my home country – Egypt – education has been flagged as top priority and as a national project and societal mission that put it on top of the Egyptian national projects. Education is witnessing attention not experienced before. Improvements are being witnessed in both primary, secondary and university levels. Public and private Investments are rising. The launching of several private universities like the German University in

Cairo as well as many new private schools in Egypt are a proof of growing engagement of the private sector in education. Greater efforts are being exerted to broaden the scope of private funding of education and to relieve the Government budgets.

With respect to the engagement of the private sector, I would like to mention some projects which are being tackled through dedicated initiatives organized between Governments and the private sector.

For example:

The Jordanian Education Initiative and the Egyptian Education Initiative are two prominent initiatives with the aim of broadening and fostering the use of IT in schools and universities. Through the cooperation between Government and Businesses, specific projects are being rolled out to support a faster implementation of IT and communications centric infrastructures and skills. The Egyptian Education Initiative involves four key programs addressing Pre-University education, higher education, lifelong learning and local industry development for e-learning and e-content. But in effect these initiatives go further than IT. These initiatives act as a catalyst to innovate the educational system. Thereby IT is acting as a vehicle for acceleration of required developments.

Siemens – as a strong local player – is participating in Egyptian Education Initiative. Siemens established an electronic learning system within the Egyptian University Network for the Ministry of Higher Education which included also a learning management system and virtual class rooms. We have also establishing an e-Learning platform for life long learning within

the e-Learning competence center of the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology.

We strongly believe that achieving excellence in business is impossible without well-educated and constantly trained workforce. Therefore, we interacting with education through additional initiatives leading to this end; I would like to highlight the following:

From a global perspective, Siemens provides vocational training in more than 30 countries. We are thereby helping to export Germany's proven dual training system, which combines theory and practice, to some of the countries we are in after adaptation to country-specific conditions. These programs enable us to maintain an outstanding workforce and in parallel to contribute to the society.

And specifically in Egypt, Siemens has launched several initiatives with the aim to provide challenging opportunities for the youth to develop and prove themselves through well-organized programs.

For example together with the AIESEC, we have launched a contest for Social Responsibility and Environmental Awareness among students of four different universities in Egypt. The aim is to develop among students skills of working outside their boxes, tackling new subjects and promoting project and teamwork and the use of modern work techniques.

Another example is our **Siemens Generation 21** program. This program includes different projects that foster the practical utilization of what is being taught in pre-school, schools and universities. Examples hereto

include experiment kits for children, math and science competitions for school students and competition and subject matter projects for students.

Businesses have also the obligation to demonstrate to the youth – as early as possible – what they are to expect when entering the labor market. Therefore, we take a high number of pupils and students into summer training sessions into our company. Only if they see and feel how companies work and what counts, they are able to derive the right conclusions for their running education.

Another example for us in Egypt is the cooperation with the Industrial Training Council, a unit of the Ministry of Trade and Industry. Within a Public-Private-Partnership which was concluded last February during the visit of Chancellor Merkel to Egypt, Siemens has committed itself to promote quality assurance and system training for specific industrial sectors. In a demand driven process technical requests to upgrade the industrial sector labor skills are being addressed with the aim of boosting the Egyptian industrial competitiveness. It is also within this initiative to upgrade 50 vocational training centers and technical/engineering schools and to run competitions among them to promote innovation. Thereby, we help improve the quality of vocational training, support the continuous development of labor skills and link business with education.

So as you can see, there is indeed an active role which can be played by the business side to further the education and to ensure the relevance and quality of education.

Now I would like to express two recommendations:

- **First:** If progress is to be achieved, governments have to allocate considerable resources – not necessarily financial – and focus on the real priorities. I would like to reiterate, we have to focus if we would like to leave an impact.
- **Second:** Implementation is the key. We have sufficient recommendations and initiative. We need to allocate more time and resources for proper implementation and execution. And this means a lot of hard work.

At the end of my speech, I would like to extend my thanks to the G8 for its opportunity that provide a necessary platform for best practice sharing.

Also I would like to express my warm thanks to the German Government, which is – through many initiatives – a great supporter of the education environment in Egypt. Let me mention here the Mubarak-Kohl vocational initiative. Mubarak-Kohl is a successful model and now a trademark for Germany vocational training in Egypt established in 1996.

And the DAAD, which is playing a very active role in fostering postgraduate exchange and education in Egypt with long lasting effects.

As well as the German Egyptian Year of Science and Technology coordinated by the DAAD - Promoting German-Egyptian research projects in six different technology and science areas. This is really a highly welcome initiative.

And last but not least the 3 well established German schools in Egypt which serve as landmarks within the school landscape in Egypt.

Thank you very much for your kind attention.