

Casablanca declaration

Fifth International Platform on Integrating Arab e-Infrastructure in a Global Environment

Seventh Annual Conference of the Arab Organization for Quality Assurance in Education

Casablanca --- December 8, 2015 ---- Under the high patronage of his Majesty of King Mohamed IV of Morocco and Chaired by His Excellency Dr. Talal Abu-Ghazaleh (Chairman of ASREN & AROQA), the 5th “International Platform on Integrating Arab e-infrastructure in a Global Environment, e-AGE 2015” and the 7th Annual Conference of AROQA entitled “Impact of Quality and Accreditation in Education” concluded with a wide high level participation and delegates from over 40 countries.

The meetings were attended by leaders and experts from Europe including HE Rupert Joy, Head of EU delegation to Morocco and leaders of European Organizations including GÉANT and CERN as well as many Arab universities. The opening session was addressed by the representatives of the League of Arab States, the European partners, and the Moroccan national center for research, science, and technology, and the Minister of Education and Higher Education to Palestine.

In his opening speech, Abu Ghazaleh reminded distinguished delegates from the Arab countries as well as delegates of the league of Arab States agencies that we are now in our 5th year of existence since we were launched as a result of partnership between European agencies and Talal Abu-Ghazaleh organization. He saluted the European Union their generous support financially, technically and humanly. We could not have made it without our great partners north of us linked to us by history, geographically, culturally and morally.

We have accomplished, he said, our first stage objectives and we take pride announcing were we standing today which can be summarized as follows:

- Supporting Arab national research and education networks
- Developing an advanced pan-Arab eInfrastructure and strengthening research connectivity to make it available for use on a regional scale
- Developing regional points of exchange, one of them currently operational in London for peering with GÉANT, and two other being established in Fujairah, and Alexandria

- Deploying services for science and education at the national and regional levels including science gateway, eduroam, and edugain activities

Chairman Abu-Ghazaleh proposed that we agree together on a road map for the next stages of this important initiative. As a result of a process of consultation the conference declares that it shall endeavor to achieve the following objectives.

- 1- Developing a master plan for awareness of the importance of research in the Arab world for economic and social development such that we may be able to engage decision makers, researchers and the civil society at large towards making scientific research a priority.
- 2- To develop an action plan explaining the usefulness of the scientific research infrastructure developed by us for all development purposes and engaging research centers at universities and other research institutions to make use of this infrastructure research facility.
- 3- To define the management model for this facility in such a way that it becomes a constructive tool for creativity, especially by our young generations.
- 4- To ensure that the network will be strictly used for productive useful research in the fields of educational economic and social development away from counter productive use and strictly for research objectives.
- 5- Noting that the future wealth creation will be exponentially knowledge based, our guidance should be in the direction of ICT based innovation and creativity.

Our targets for the next five years should be:

- 1- Enhancing research in the Arab world to the international levels and
- 2- Bringing our national research and education networks and their international connections up to European levels, working in collaboration with our Arab and European partners, thus enabling every Arab researcher to access the wealth of research available at our European partner's network and be on it to all the wealth of research globally.

In addition, it is our objective that a suitable medium for dialogue is created to facilitate investments needed for regional links and capacity for research and education through preparation and execution of national and regional e-Infrastructure projects. It is important that this dialogue and debate are based on objective grounds motivated by the long-term strategies and interests of our countries in the Arab region.

We deem it inspiring that e-AGE was attended by esteemed speakers, policy makers, experts, and scientists representing all the Arab countries, Europe, the US, Africa, Latin America, Canada, Asia, and international organizations and companies in a larger audience scale, representing over 40 countries. We see this as a manifestation of the

sound basis and the respectable sustainability of the dialogue environment towards developing Arab research and education networks.

It is of the utmost importance that we build on the success of e-AGE and take necessary steps towards developing Arab e-Infrastructure and linking to the world research and education communities on a global scale.

It is also of great importance that we make use of the support of the League of Arab States, the European commission, and the international donors to initiate cooperation and develop sustainable projects towards connectivity and ensurance of a sense of self dependence.

This year e-AGE has witnessed the launch of the Africa Connect 2 project with 26 Million Euros of funding as well as the international link of Lebanon and Palestenian for research and education.

Furthermore, AROQA has developed quite well to ensure quality in education among its priorities as well as the development of accreditation in coordination with the national quality and accreditation agencies in the Arab countries. It is important that cooperation is enhanced with international quality assurance and accreditation organizations. In specific, AROQA 2015 concluded with the following recommendations:

- 1- There is an urgent need to promote a culture of quality and accreditation to improve the quality of education in the Arab educational institutions.
- 2- A plan of action is needed to spread the culture of quality and awareness of scientific research, quality and work introductory document to raise awareness on the issue of quality in education.
- 3- Organize training courses for administrators in the Arab educational institutions to raise awareness of the culture of quality and to continue dialogue and cooperation between education institutions and accreditation bodies and organizations in the quality of education in order to consolidate the concepts of quality at the Arab regional level
- 4- There is a need for ongoing dialogue and continuous dissemination of best practices related to quality in education
- 5- Preparation of the Charter of the Arab Organization for Quality Assurance in Education practices and quality assurance.
- 6- Prepare a terminology booklet for accreditation and quality assurance in education.
- 7- Development of criteria and indicators of quality assurance and accreditation of universities following the accreditation approach developed for schools. A letter would then be formulated to all members of AROQA and Arab universities.
- 8- Setup a Higher Education accreditation board

9- Launch an Annual Talal Abu-Ghazaleh Excellence Award.

On behalf of the Research Council, the League of Arab States, the shareholders of ASREN, members of AROQA, the partners of EUMEDCONNECT3, AFRICACONNECT2, and MAGIC, and the participating organizations, we thank all those who have contributed to e-AGE and AROQA. We hope that both have successfully served as effective medium in attaining a convincing environment towards achieving our goals in developing stronger research and education communities in the Arab region and beyond.

With all respect and appreciation,

Dr. Talal Abu-Ghazaleh
Chairman of ASREN