

Shaikh Mohammed bin Essa Al Khalifa, CE, Bahrain Economic Development Board

Your Excellencies, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen.

Intro:

- Thank you for joining us at the inaugural Education Project in Bahrain, the first of its kind in the region.
- With over 200 people attending from across the globe, the Education Project has been created so that we can learn from each other and further the state of education around the world.

Why are we here today?

- The Education Project was conceived, above all, to identify solutions to the widening gap found between our aspirations, expectations and the quality of global education today.
- We are all God's children. Our common vision is that we should all have access to a decent education. For education, in our world, is the passport to employment and income and personal independence.
- So our goal is to address the issue. Renowned educational experts, ranging in their focus from pre-school to higher education, have assembled here for the first time in Manama.
- We know that education is the single most important factor in helping to improve stability, productivity and prosperity in all societies.
- But we know too that the rate of return on educational investments, especially in developing nations, has been less than desirable. To make matters worse, conditions continue to deteriorate.
- Solutions must be found. And they must be scaled for the widest possible implementation at a global level.
- The Education Project seeks to foster a dialogue amongst the world's foremost

educational leaders and pioneers in order to work towards solutions. Solutions that are tangible, practical, and affordable.

So you may ask, why Bahrain?

- First I believe all countries are investing and working to improve education.
- Bahrain prides itself on being a regional pioneer in education.
 - Schooling is free and compulsory for all Bahrainis
 - The Kingdom boasts an 87% adult literacy rate - among the highest in the region
 - Almost 11% of all government spending is directed towards education.
- Bahrain is investing its substantial oil wealth in securing a sustainable and diversified future for our Kingdom.
- This involves investment in infrastructure, in new entrepreneurial activities and in encouragement to inward investment. But, not least, a sustainable future involves investment in education, at all levels
- Bahrain wants to expand its leadership in the field of education. We want to capitalize on our role as a moderate and tolerant regional voice, to foster a cooperative dialogue about improving the future of education.
- Bahrain has already been successful in transforming itself from a fledgling state into a successful and progressive nation.
- The Kingdom now faces the next stage in this transformation – although we aim to increase our reserves – to create continued prosperity, independent of oil wealth. This is how we will increase the size of our middle class, increase our competitiveness and give more and more of our people a real stake in the future.

Who are the EDB and why are we interested in education?

- You may wonder why the Economic Development Board is dabbling in education.

- The mission of the Bahrain Economic Development Board is to grow and diversify Bahrain's economy by four means:-
 - By developing a strategy that supports the advancement of a modern and liberalized business environment;
 - By encouraging inward investment;
 - By working in partnership with the public and private sectors;
 - And by being passionate, professional and innovative in everything that it does.
- This is how you compete in the global marketplace. This is how you raise living standards and create greater opportunities for your citizens. And this is how we will make Bahrain the Gulf's most welcoming, business-friendly location.
- EDB recognizes the importance of education in growing Bahrain's economy. We understand that when individuals have the chance to learn basic life and literacy skills, economies grow faster, prosperity rises and poverty rates fall. When people go to school and learn skills, they are able to eventually earn more money, better support their families and advance their interests as well as their country.
- But, in a global economy, the benefits of education don't stop at borders. Therefore, EDB is committed to fostering a productive dialogue on education, to implementing tangible results, and thus to be a good neighbour in helping to improve global education.

Closing

- I will stop here because we aim to listen more than to talk. We think that, together, we can make a difference. We think it matters a lot. And we think we'll see great results over the next couple of days.
- Thank you.