

**Speech of Nader Fergany, lead author of the Report and Director of the
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It is indeed a pleasure being here tonight on behalf of the team of the first Arab Human Development Report and in celebration of the cause of human development.

A. A debt of gratitude

It somehow feels grossly unfair that one person should be receiving this award here tonight. So, let me start by an expression of gratitude to the entire AHDR1 team.

More than one hundred persons, women and men of almost all the 22 countries covered by the report, of different generations, varying intellectual, political and professional persuasions contributed to AHDR1. So, a well-earned word of thanks goes to each and every one of these women and men who made AHDR1 possible. They all deserve to be honoured here tonight.

However, I would like to single out two persons who played an instrumental role in producing the first Arab Human Development Report.

The first is a brilliant Arab lady who unfortunately is not with us here tonight. It is my firm conviction that if it were not for Rima Khalaf-Hunaidi being in charge of the Regional Bureau for the Arab States of UNDP, the AHDR1 would not have seen the light of day. It was her sharp mind, courage, and devotion and, not least, unflinching slave driving, that resulted in what is being celebrated here tonight.

In addition, Jerzy Szeremeta, at the time head of the regional programme of RBAS, initiated the process that resulted in the AHDR1 and brought to it a keen intellect and exemplary efficiency, not to mention heart charming wit.

II. A word about the content of the AHDR1

Arab countries have surely made significant strides in more than one area of human development in the last three decades. Nevertheless, these achievements are marred by deeply rooted shortcomings that represent serious obstacle to building human development in the Arab countries. We summarised them in the three deficits of freedom, empowerment of women and knowledge. As such, the challenge of building human development remains a very serious one for the vast majority of Arabs.

From a positive perspective, the realisation of human development in the Arab region requires transcending current shortcomings, and even transforming them into their opposites, i.e. assets enjoyed by all Arabs

Specifically, the AHDR1 concludes that Arab countries need to embark on rebuilding their societies on the basis of:

1. *Full respect for human rights and freedoms as the cornerstone of good governance leading to human development.*
2. *Empowerment of Arab women by availing all opportunities, and especially those enabling the building of human capabilities, to girls and women on the basis of equality with their male “brothers”.*
3. *The consolidation of knowledge-acquisition and its effective utilisation in building human development striving towards the maximisation of human welfare in the region.*

This is *the essence of the necessary transcendence* needed to overcome the crisis of human development in the Arab region. It is by no means, however, our ultimate target. Full reform of the Arab institutional context, in the service of human

development, requires, in addition *to reforming the governance regime at the national and pan-Arab levels on a solid foundation of freedoms, strengthening of Arab co-operation, as well as maximising benefits from globalisation and avoiding its perils.*

III. A word about the impact of the report

It is important to realize that the AHDR1 was *not* directed *at* Arab governments only; indeed it aimed to address all active societal forces in the Arab region.

One of the most prominent Arab writers likened the AHDR1 to a bullet that shot through the barrel of a gun, left it with a bang sufficient to make it heard throughout the land, cannot be sent back, and hit its target as well.

The target that was hit is igniting a lively debate on the human development issues raised, and the *strategic vision* for building human development in the Arab countries presented. That debate has extended beyond official and policy-making circles to academia, the media, civil society and even ordinary Arabs in the street.

It is hoped that this lively debate will lead to a process of *social innovation* in fostering human development in every Arab society.

Since the crux of human development is the liberation of human capabilities, it can be said that the impact of the AHDR1 was true to the spirit of human development.
