



Gulf Research Centre Cambridge
Knowledge for All

The 2010 Gulf Research Meeting

July 7 – 10, 2010
University of Cambridge

Welcome Remarks

Abdulaziz Sager
Chairman
Gulf Research Center

Expanding Gulf Studies and Gulf Scholarship: The 2010 Gulf Research Meeting

July 7, 2010
Fitzpatrick Hall, Queen's College
The University of Cambridge

It is my great pleasure to welcome you to the opening session of the first annual Gulf Research Meeting held here in the beautiful setting of the University of Cambridge.

We sincerely hope that the Gulf Research Meeting (GRM) is the start of joint efforts to advance and further cooperation on Gulf scholarship from around the world and specifically among scholars working with or interested

in the Gulf region – i.e., the countries of Bahrain, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen.

The Gulf Research Meeting seeks to identify issues of importance to the Gulf region and provide a basis for academic and empirical research into those fields. Particular emphasis is given to encourage young scholars, in particular from the GCC countries - including those studying abroad - to engage in the debate and take part in research collaboration. At a time when the Gulf region continues to gain in strategic relevance and importance, it is more urgent than ever to expand knowledge about the region through promoting scholarly and balanced research about the GCC states and the wider Gulf. The Gulf Research Meeting will address the existing shortcomings, to provide correct and insightful information about the region and to promote mutual understanding between the region and the rest of the world. With the GRM as a catalyst, we hope to identify the important issues facing the Gulf Region and lay the basis for academic and empirical research into these fields.

When we started developing the concept of the Gulf Research Meeting and to put together the first initial workshop outline, we were really not sure

what kind of response we would get or how the process itself would unfold. To our great surprise, the first call to establish workshops focusing on Gulf issues was met with an enthusiastic response from the GRC network and as a result, we were able to select 12 workshops as representing the core of the first annual Gulf Research Meeting. Starting tomorrow and continuing on for 2 and a half days, the following workshops will be conducted:

- Natural Resources, Accountability and Democracy
- Formal and Informal Mechanisms of Political Participation
- The Role of the Private Sector in Promoting Political and Economic Reform
- The GCC Banking and Financial Sector
- Population, Labour Markets and National Identity
- The Impact of Migration on Gulf Development and Stability
- Developing and Agenda for Security Studies in the Gulf
- The Governance of Higher Education in the Gulf Cooperation Region
- Environmental Policies in the Gulf Region
- EU-GCC Relations
- Gulf-China Relations
- Islamic Politics in the Gulf Region

What was even more surprising than the response to establish the workshops was the response elicited once the call for papers for those workshops was issued. We had given an initial deadline of December 15, 2009 and starting right about ten days prior to that deadline, the submissions just started rolling in. In the end we had over 300 applications from which selected 160 full participants who each have submitted us with a paper that will be discussed in the next coming days. This is a tremendous contribution to the field of Gulf studies and the value that such scholarly contributions make to the development of Gulf studies cannot be underestimated. I would like to sincerely thank everyone who responded to the call for papers for their effort and for contributing to make this first Gulf Research Meeting such a success.

Submissions for the workshop came in from throughout the world with the majority from Europe and the United States. Of particular importance was the strong number of the registrations received from the Gulf Region which represented about 25 percent of the total number. This is a strong signal of interest from the region and one which the organizers had hoped to encourage. Overall, with the strong response that was received, it can be said that the initial goal of the Gulf Research Meeting in terms of strengthening

Gulf studies and contributing to the literature in the field is being met. In addition, many applications were also received from as far away as China, Australia and South Asia.

In addition to the full participants, we have also received a tremendous interests from other who simply wanted to attend the one or the other workshop and who want to inform themselves about specific developments in the Gulf region. In fact, we have continued to receive requests for attendance until the very last minute. Allow me also to a warm welcome to all the listening participants who will be joining over the coming days as well.

All of this would of course not been possible with out the strong and sincere support from many quarters. For the first annual Gulf Research Meeting, I would thus like to express a very special thank you to our sponsors and supporters: The Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development Fund; the Kuwait Program at the Chair for Middle East and Mediterranean Studies (Chaire Moyen-Orient Méditerranée) at Sciences Po-Paris; Dallah Al-Barakah and KAB Holding. Without their support, such a gathering would not be possible and we highly appreciate their commitment. What you are

supporting here today is something that will have a long-term impact and that without a doubt will contribute positively to the development of the GCC states. A special thank you is extended to Prof. Gilles Kepel, the Chaire Moyen-Orient Méditerranée at Sciences Po, Paris for his continued encouragement of promoting quality research on the Gulf region. The GRC office in Dubai regularly hosts students from Sciences Po as interns and we are deeply impressed by their quality.

An equally important thank you needs to be given to the University of Cambridge not only for hosting this Meeting but also agreeing to extend their cooperation to the Gulf Research Center with the opening of a GRC office hosted by the Centre of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies. This is a tremendous opportunity to focus attention on studies of the Gulf region and we are immensely proud of our association with the CMEIS and the University. Prof. Yasir Suleiman, His Majesty Sultan Qaboos Bin Sa'id Professor of Modern Arabic Studies, has been one of driving forces in promoting the engagement between the University of Cambridge and the GRC and we are thankful for all of his effort.

While this is the first annual Gulf Research Meeting, we would like to already alert you to the Call for Proposals that have been issued for the 2011 Gulf Research Meeting, again scheduled for July 2011 at the University of Cambridge. We are looking forward to receiving a number of quality workshop proposals and encourage you also to pass this notice around to interested colleagues. A flyer is contained in this information package and further information is available on the event website.

For the opening session of the Gulf Research Meeting, we are very pleased to have some of the best representatives for the GCC and for education with us today. H.E. Abdul Rahman Bin Hamad Al-Attiyah, the Secretary-General of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) has very kindly agreed to be here with us today and to provide us with his insights about the development and importance and importance in the Gulf region. He will be followed later on by Professor Dame Alison Richard, the Vice Chancellor of the University of Cambridge, who we are deeply honored to have with us. Her participation is a strong signal for the importance that the university places on developing relations with the Gulf region and also the need to expand our knowledge and analysis of this critical part of the world. Finally, we also have H.E. Mohammad bin Abdulaziz Al Ohaili, the Undersecretary of the Ministry of

Higher Education of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, who will elaborate on the Kingdom's strategy in Higher Education. The commitment of all of the Saudi leadership to promote educational activities and to expand the opportunities for thousands of students to pursue their dreams is an inspiration for many and we cannot help but admire what is being accomplished. We are thus very thankful for H.E. and his effort to join us here today.

Allow me now to pass the floor to Prof. Yasir Suleiman to welcome you on behalf of the Centre of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies and the University of Cambridge. I am really looking forward to hearing about the discussion that are about to take place and I thank you again for joining us here for the first Gulf Research Meeting.