

Your Excellency Vice Chancellor  
Your Excellency Dr Abdulaziz Sager

Distinguished participants  
Ladies and Gentlemen!

It gives me great pleasure to thank the Gulf Research Centre at Cambridge for the kind invitation. I would like to convey a warm greeting from his Excellency Dr. Khalid Al angary, the Minister of Higher Education in Saudi Arabia, who could not attend due to a pre-scheduled commitment in Japan at this time.

First of all, let me share with you, the importance of the theme of this significant experts meeting which is timely important and relevant.

Today, with many challenges of depletion of natural resources, poverty, environmental changes and health-risk issues, yet, there are tremendous opportunities, offered by the advancement in education, research and innovation, the expansion in information and communication technology, and even a unique opportunity through globalization.

While many believe that globalization endangers cultural diversity, I think it could provide a unique opportunity for dialogue among cultures and civilizations on the basis of shared human values, mutual understanding and respect.

### **Dear Ladies and gentlemen**

On this occasion, I would like to share with you *briefly* an overview of Saudi Arabian Higher Education's vision with highlights on the recent activities.

Saudi Arabia has been witnessing rapid development in various fields. The higher educational sector is enjoying a great support from the

government of Saudi Arabia and its leadership. This is evident in variety of resources and forms, and can easily be recognized by the fact that this sector gets 26% of the country's budget.

As a result, higher education in Saudi Arabia has adopted a strategy for the next 20 years, with a clear vision and practical and dynamic initiatives.

We strongly believe that higher education must significantly contribute to the country transformation socially and economically.

The strategy focuses on the preparation of human capital, as a fundamental prerequisite to make the Saudi economy truly a knowledge-based economy. It aims to make the Saudi society achieve higher standards in intellectual productivity, knowledge creation and dissemination, as well as its utilization in various activities and services.

In accordance with this vision, two tracks were planned

**A Short-term track**, *focusing on admission capacity and employability of graduates, and*

**A Long-term track**, *continuing on the previous two key issues and in addition dealing with,*

Quality Assurance ◦

Funding ◦

Scientific Research ◦

Scholarship program ◦

International Cooperation and partnership ◦

Based on that, the Ministry of Higher Education has been working on several reforms and initiatives to fulfill the country's development needs and at the same time will be in harmony with global educational trends and advances.

One of the first major adopted initiatives is to provide wider access opportunities at university level, combined with efforts to ensure success, and to achieve both geographical and gender equity in providing access to higher education.

Today, the governmental universities (only) provide opportunities to almost 90% of high school graduates, we have almost one million students enrolled in higher education, 60% of them are female studying in 33 government and private universities, distributed all over the regions of the country. We were successful in raising the participation rate during the last 10 years from 18% to 34% of the target age group, heading to our next target, of more than 50% in year 2020.

In addition, we have recently launched a massive Scholarship Program. In the last 4 years, more than 88 thousand Saudi male and female students have been sent to study at some prestigious universities in more than 16 countries in all continents.

We believe this exposure will equip our students with different experiences and more understanding of cultural diversities, looking forward to building more and stronger bridges with other cultures and countries.

Along the same effort on expansion, several initiatives have been adopted on quality assurance of institutions as well as educational programs. In fact, by 2014, all programs and institutions have to complete full accreditation requirements, either by the national accreditation commission or by international accreditation Agencies.

On the research front, Saudi universities have made significant research contributions locally and internationally. Many of them are currently engaged in major partnership with well-known

international institutions and research centers, as well as with major national and international companies through science Parks and Techno-valley–industrial clusters.

*In summing up about our system, and with all reforms and initiatives that are under implementation, the ultimate goal is to have our university system evolve into a world class higher education system.*

In Saudi Arabia, we are highly committed to achieve this goal by the strong actions we have taken to date. We want Saudi Arabia to be truly ‘*globally connected*’ in its journey to a brighter future and its effective contribution in creating a better world.

## **Ladies and Gentlemen**

**We believe that, this new global concept of “a world class higher education university system”, deserves further discussion and thoughtfulness, from worldwide experts and institutions .** In fact, this is the topic that we have chosen to our second international conference on higher education to be held in Riyadh April 2011. I take this opportunity to invite you to attend this major event.

## **Finally,**

Let me take this opportunity to express my thanks and appreciation to the Gulf Research Centre and Cambridge university for making this truly a successful academic assembly , I wish this respected gathering every success and prosperity.

Thank you.