

Remarks of John P. Holdren
Keck Building of the National Academies
Tuesday, June 8, 2010

Thank you, Ralph, and thank you all for being here this morning. Let me add a special thanks to the National Academies for providing the venue for today's anniversary event.

You know, all too often in the world of government affairs, anniversaries are things to be forgotten or shirked. All too often, anniversaries are reminders that promises were made but not kept. But in this case, almost a year to the day after President Obama made his historic commitment in Cairo to embark on a voyage of renewed engagement with the Muslim world, there is much progress to be proud of to celebrate.

So I am very happy to help launch this half-day event, to focus on the many impressive accomplishments to date; to highlight some of the additional activities poised for implementation in the coming year; and to hear from you—members of the US Government, non-governmental, and international and diplomatic communities—in a session to be led by Harold Varmus, one of my co-chairs on the President's Council of Advisors on Science and Technology, to get your perspectives on how the Administration's efforts could be made even more effective.

I want to note at the outset that the work of fleshing out and coordinating the Initiative on Science and Technology Engagement with the Muslim World that President Obama launched in Cairo, a year and four days ago, was a joint effort of the Department of State and, at the White House, the Office of Science Technology Policy and the National Security Council. I'm grateful for the terrific cooperation we at OSTP have had with NSC and State on this project, and you'll hear from top officials from both of those entities later in the program.

When President Obama made his remarks in Cairo last June 4, he noted he was speaking at what he called "a time of tension" between the United States and Muslims around the world. He had come to Cairo to seek what he called "a new beginning between the United States and Muslims around the world; one based upon mutual interest and mutual respect."

A major part of the President's plan revolved around economic development, opportunity, education, and innovation, with a focus on the role that science and technology could play as a catalyst for collaboration between the United States and Muslim countries and communities around the world. The decision to call upon the science and technology community in this diplomatic effort made sense. Scientists and engineers have long been pioneers in international collaboration. One need look no

further than the array of authors' names in virtually any scientific journal article today to appreciate just how trans-national science and technology research is today.

At the same time, no human endeavor has proven more essential to achieving the important goal of global economic development than the pursuits of science and engineering. Recognizing the important role that international science and technology can play in achieving his goal of launching a new beginning with the Muslim world, the President:

- promised a new fund to support technological development in Muslim-majority countries, and to help transfer ideas to the marketplace so they can create jobs,
- announced that the United States would open centers of scientific excellence in Africa, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia,
- committed to appointing a cadre of science envoys to collaborate on programs aimed at developing new sources of energy, creating green jobs, digitizing records, cleaning up water, and growing new crops, and
- called for expanded partnerships with Muslim communities to promote child and maternal health.
- He also announced a new global effort with the Organization of the Islamic Conference to help eradicate polio.

This would be a challenging set of commitments even if America were not in the midst of a difficult economic downturn; even if America were not heavily occupied with tempering political tensions on several continents; even if America were not struggling with environmental and energy concerns of its own—not just the emergency in the Gulf right now but also the larger concerns about climate change and the need to shift the way we fuel—literally—American innovation in the 21st century.

And yet, as I mentioned earlier, I am pleased to say there is a remarkable record of real action on these and other commitments that the President made a year ago.

As promised, this Administration convened a global entrepreneurship summit, which brought together business and social entrepreneurs, venture capitalists, development bankers, and experts in innovation from around the world to focus on boosting Muslim community development.

As promised, this Administration launched a science envoy program, selecting the first three envoys and deploying them to more than ten nations in the Middle East, North Africa, and Asia. These envoys, all three of whom are with us here today to recount their experiences and talk about the year ahead, are among the most prestigious members of the American scientific community and have already proven to be spectacular

ambassadors for the United States and for the benefits of scientific and technological engagement.

As promised, the OPIC Global Technology and Innovation Fund began accepting proposals last year for technological development projects to be concentrated in Muslim-majority communities and countries, and the fund has already attracted close to \$2 billion in private investment to support some of those proposals.

And as promised, following extensive consultations with experts in the Middle East and Asia, plans are now well underway toward the creation of two centers of excellence to be supported by the State Department and USAID—one focused on water in the Middle East and one focused on climate change in Asia with an emphasis on impacts on water availability.

But the list of accomplishments does not stop there.

- The Department of State, the Department of Energy, the Emirates Nuclear Energy Corporation, Sandia National Laboratory, the Texas A&M University Nuclear Security Science and Policy Institute, the UAE Federal Authority for Nuclear Regulation and the Khalifa University of Science, Technology, and Research have all combined forces—and really, is that not an impressive scale of international collaboration?—to create a Gulf Nuclear Energy Infrastructure Institute, which will work with Gulf States through regional workshops and follow-up bilateral training exercises to assist those states that decide to pursue nuclear energy so they can do so in a safe, secure, and safeguarded manner.
- Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has committed to expanding the number of Environment, Science, Technology, and Health officers at embassies with some new positions already being filled in the Middle East and North Africa.
- A new science and technology agreement was concluded with Indonesia and the United States has doubled its financial support for S&T agreements with Egypt and Pakistan.
- The U.S. National Academy of Science expanded its Frontiers of Science Program to support linkages among young scientists in the United States and Southeast Asia, with planned expansion to additional regions.

Looking ahead, an exciting array of ventures is also on the horizon.

- The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's research vessel Okeanos Explorer and the Indonesian research vessel Baruna Jaya will make a pioneering joint mission to the "Coral Triangle" in the Indo-Pacific region in the summer of 2011.
- S&T collaboration is now an important part of the \$100M New Global Engagement Fund submitted to congress for FY2011.

- Plans are underway to celebrate US-Egypt Science Year 2011, to honor the history of science collaboration between those two nations and to launch new initiatives.
- The White House Office of Science and Technology Policy will host a major international event bringing together information and communication technology leaders from public and private foundations that are involved in electronic knowledge sharing, education, and development—along with other experts—to devise practical means of increasing on-line knowledge-sharing in science and technology.
- And we anticipate soon naming three new science envoys for deployment to Central Asia, East and West Africa, and Southeast Asia.

All this is just a sampling of the total activity underway. For a fuller accounting, please pick up a copy of the Fact Sheet available at the back of the room at the end of this program, or click on the Global Science Diplomacy button easily found on my office's home page – OSTP.gov.

Now I find all this activity very exciting, and I hope you do as well. But this being Washington, there are, of course, a few who will disagree. I read something by a TIME magazine pundit the other day suggesting that the vision expressed by the President in Cairo last year has proven to be a failure. The evidence? A recent poll suggesting that the needle hasn't moved much in the past year on Muslim attitudes towards the United States.

As a scientist, I don't know whether to laugh or cry when presented with this supposed metric of success. Anyone who knows anything about the complexities of the challenges this Nation faces as it seeks to redefine its relationship with the Muslim world recognizes that the accomplishments and newly launched goals I've discussed this morning—innovative and ambitious as they are—cannot instantly or by themselves dial down the political and cultural sensitivities that have simmered for many years.

President Obama appreciated that reality when he spoke in Cairo last year. "Change cannot happen overnight," the President acknowledged. "No single speech can eradicate years of mistrust. ... But I am convinced," he said, "that in order to move forward ... there must be a sustained effort to listen to each other; to learn from each other; to respect one another; and to seek common ground."

The progress I have touched on this morning represents a powerful contribution to what I am confident will be a sustained effort by our Nation to find and nurture this common

ground. The path will have some twists and turns and we cannot expect attitudes to wholly reverse themselves in a year or even two. But they can shift. And they must—both here and abroad. The important thing is to keep going.

I am very proud to be part of these new beginnings and I thank all of you for doing your part as well. Together we can change people's lives, and perhaps even the course of history.