



The Cabinet
Information and Decision Support Center

Third Advanced International Colloquium on Building the Scientific Mind

Opening Statement

10th of May, 2009

**Honorable Guests,
Ladies and gentlemen,**

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you at the opening ceremony of the third advanced international colloquium on building the scientific mind.

When I knew about the idea of this colloquium, I was pleased to hear that the current colloquium will be the first of its kind in North Africa, the Middle East and the Mediterranean basin at large.

I am also pleased to collaborate with distinguished organizations such as the Learning Development Institute, Friends of Environment and Development Association (FEDA), and UNESCO.

On this occasion, allow me to share with you some concerns and remarks on the issue at hand.

First: Why the Scientific Mind?

The era we are living nowadays and the wake of globalization poses a wide range of challenges; a financial crisis, piracy, an avian flu, and recently a swine (pigs') flu.

These challenges proved that they require cross border cooperation. More importantly, such challenges necessitate the presence and the advancement of the scientific mind.

More than ever, the presence and the adoption of the scientific mind are considered prerequisites for dealing with complex policy issues. In a broader context, the scientific mind is a true manifestation of the knowledge era that we are witnessing nowadays and a cornerstone in attaining sustainable development for nations.

Over the past years, the crises that we faced proved that decisions should not be only derived by interests and ideologies, but more importantly by science and evidence. Decisions to go to wars, cease fire, invest money, fight terrorism, and others, all require scientific thinking.

Another significant fact is that building the scientific mind is considered an important aspect of the nations' human capital development which is the main driver for nations' advancement and progress.

Development was, until recently, centered around solid numbers; GDP growth rates; inflation rates; or macroeconomic indicators in general. Lately, emphases have been placed on the human side of development. Moreover, the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) requires commitment to scientific – oriented developmental approaches.

To this end, every person became responsible for building and developing his own scientific mindset through skills development, capacity building and long life learning.

Second: Why would IDSC be interested in organizing and promoting for the scientific mind?

IDSC is the think tank for the Egyptian cabinet of Ministers. The rationale of our existence is to bridge the existing advocacy gap between evidence based research and policy making. In this context, allow me to describe our institution as the "scientific mind for the Egyptian government". We try to provide the government with policy options and scenarios on complex policy issues.

This leads us to the question: how can we grow and nurture the scientific mind?

In my point of view, the scientific mind needs some prerequisites to grow and nurture.

I believe that nurturing the scientific mind requires:

- Creating and developing an environment that stimulates innovation and creativity. This may take place through establishing innovation incubators.

- Building societal consensus on the necessity of applying scientific thinking and processes in dealing with our complex problems.
- Developing incentive systems that preserve scientists and brilliant scholars.
- Learning from best practices and replicating success stories.

If these and others are the pre-requisites for the advancement of the scientific mind, one must say that there are also some **challenges** that might impede its existence.

These challenges might include the following:

- Lack of sustainable funding for scientific research
- The evident divorce between science and policy making which might result in irrational and sometimes catastrophic results.
- An environment that is hostile to critical thinking and questioning from the young generations.
- A society that is based on superstitions and supernatural beliefs rather than science and evidence.
- Absence of an attractive research environment that might end up with human capital flight and brain drain.

These challenges might hinder the advancement of a true scientific mind and require that countries exert all efforts on paving the necessary way for eliminating them.

In order to reach a scientifically oriented society, it is very crucial to have a free thinking environment. To achieve this we need to understand how science and other disciplines can learn from each other and today is a unique opportunity to discuss this issue.

A related point that I would also like to raise, is that despite the fact that the scientific mind was originally advocated in the developed countries and the western civilization context, it is important to reconsider the premise that developed countries are scientific by nature and that third or developing countries are unscientific. The fact is that the "scientific mind" should be perceived as a global and transnational concept.

In light of that, I would like to refer to **IDSC efforts in promoting scientific and innovative thinking within the organization.**

As a progressive and forward thinking organization, IDSC committed itself to promoting the scientific and innovative thinking as a daily routine in its processes and operations. The idea is to break stereotypes and discuss premises that were considered as "taboos". In our endeavor to promote the scientific thinking environment, IDSC asserts the following:

- Encouraging initiatives and creative ideas by our employees whether senior or junior staff. In this context we called for an "innovation initiative". This initiative encourages employees to propose ideas and innovative projects that are applicable either within the institution or at the national basis. In the meantime the initiative is an opportunity of providing insightful advice and consultations on how to put these ideas into action.
- In our weekly staff meetings, ideas and initiatives are presented in an open and encouraging environment to stimulate discussion and engagement of employees.
- In line with these efforts, and to promote for the notion of knowledge sharing and accumulation, a special department was recently established. This department aims at identifying knowledge gaps within the institution and suggesting innovative techniques to bridge these gaps while focusing on how to increase team spirit and encourage communities of practice.
- As a broader umbrella for these efforts, our human resources policy aims at pooling and bringing together a wide range of intellectual minds into the institution, hiring employees based on scientific and creativity merits and providing state-of the art capacity building programs.
- As the scientific mind is also based on a high level of moral conscience; we at IDSC perform our mission of bridging the gap between evidence based research and policy making in an unbiased scientific and moral manner. The scientific tools we possess at IDSC

– whether quantitative or qualitative - are employed for the welfare of the Egyptian society.

**Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and gentlemen,**

It is true that the circumstances are challenging... but we have a responsibility toward future generations. We need to work jointly to form a united front armed with its aspiration for a better future and determined with a strong commitment to face courageously the current and future challenges.

It is not weird that Napoleon Bonaparte once asserted that "***There are but two powers in the World, the sword and the mind. In the long run, the sword is always beaten by the mind.***"

Honorable Guests,

Our minds entail enormous potential for our countries and they are collectively worthy of special protection and care...

I see in front of me an impressive agenda that reflects the diversifications and multi facets of the scientific mind concept. It also reflects that we are before a distinguished and highly caliber scientists and scholars.

At the end, I wish you an insightful and rewarding exchange, a fruitful conference and a pleasant stay in Egypt...

Thank you for your attention....