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We must solve the generational gridlock in the Middle East - Queen Rania



Her Majesty Queen Rania takes part in a panel discussion during the Clinton Global Initiative meeting in New York on Thursday (Photo by Nasser Ayoub)

AMMAN (JT) - Global development challenges such as inequity in education, youth unemployment and women's empowerment were at the core of Her Majesty Queen Rania's remarks during one of the sessions of the Fifth Annual Clinton Global Initiative (CGI) meeting in New York on Thursday.

Participating in a panel discussion on what it takes to meet the 2015 Education for All deadline, Queen Rania and other panellists put forth a number of solutions aimed at encouraging countries, donors and partners to fulfil their aid pledges.

"Education is a lifeline, so when we deny the children of the developing world the chance to go to school, we're weighing them down when they're struggling to stay afloat in a sea of poverty, ignorance and sickness," Queen Rania emphasised.

Her Majesty, who is a tireless advocate of children's welfare, warned that at current rates of progress, at least 29 million children will still be out of school by 2015.

The Queen noted that it takes \$11 billion a year to get all boys and girls into primary school, the same amount Americans spend on their pets in three months and less than 1 per cent of global military spending. Other participants in Thursday's panel, moderated by The New York Times columnist and author of "Half The Sky", Nicholas D. Kristoff, included Marilyn Carlson Nelson, chairwoman of Carlson Companies, US Secretary of Labour Hilda Solis, Mexican businessman and philanthropist Carlos Slim Helu and Dow Chemical Company President, Chairman and CEO Andrew Liveris.

Her Majesty also highlighted that solutions to such challenges are not inaccessible, emphasising that both the resources and know-how are available, with the financial crisis not to be blamed for the shortfall in funding.

She then suggested a number of bold steps required to achieve the education goals, which include

abolishing school fees, encouraging a safe and child-friendly environment by refurbishing dilapidated schools, incentivising parents through targeted initiatives such as school feeding programmes and investing in teachers to ensure excellence in education.

Queen Rania also reflected on the alarming social implications brought about by high unemployment rates across the Arab world which, she said, “are creating a growing generational gridlock in the Middle East”. On the contrary, addressing the unemployment challenge and finding sustainable solutions to the region’s challenges, which include wide-ranging reforms in the educational sphere, would bring enormous potential for peace, profit and prosperity to the region, she noted.

“Only then can we move the region up the global value chain, where human capital is king,” said Her Majesty.

Tackling the third Millennium Development Goal which promotes gender equality and women’s empowerment, Queen Rania underscored the importance of girls’ education in building stronger, healthier and safer communities.

Her Majesty cited encouraging developments and progress in the Arab region, noting that “20 years ago only a handful of Arab countries had female government ministers and now, nearly all of them do.”

A multifaceted approach that requires patience to implement is needed to understand the subtleties characterising the Arab world, while bottom-up grassroots initiatives and top-down political action are the best way to root women more firmly in the political, social and economic landscape, she said.

During the panel, the Queen also announced four commitments to the IGOAL: Education for All initiative that will help alleviate global inequity in education and break paths for others to follow.

The signatories include Kjerstin Erickson, founder and executive director of FORGE; Jacob Lief, founder of the Ubuntu Education Fund; Beatriz Cardoso, president of the Centre for Education and Documentation for Community Action; and Coumba Dieng, founder of ANFE (Bringing Our Girls to School).