

23 April 2007

**Statement of H.E. Ms. Sheikha Haya Rashed Al Khalifa,
President of the 61st Session of the General Assembly,
at the Institute of International Education New Leaders Benefit**

Thank you, Tom, for your fine introduction.

I would like to commend you and the other members of the IIE New Leaders Group for organizing this wonderful evening.

I would also like to commend the corporate underwriter for this event - Lehman Brothers; and, the corporate sponsor - Sandell Asset Management - for their support.

May I also join Scott Freidheim, and thank the many distinguished guests that have come to this unique event tonight; including, friends from the United Nations, the Ambassadors of Finland, Iraq, Kenya, Lebanon, Rwanda and Vietnam.

Tonight, I am especially pleased to see young leaders taking positive steps to promote mutual understanding between the United States and other countries.

You see, at the beginning of the 21st century we face many challenges. Our fragile planet is shared by over 6 billion people. We are a global family that is becoming ever more interdependent.

In the past, 'the other' was an expression of the faraway, the ethnic. Nowadays, 'the other' has become an omnipresent social reality.

The 'the other' is someone with whom we must cohabit; the distance between us is no longer geographic, but cultural.

The challenge for us all now - especially the young leaders among us - is to develop a form of dialogue to better understand 'others'.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Education is a crucial part of this dialogue. It can create greater awareness of difference and strengthen our mutual understanding.

It was in this context that the Institute of International Education was founded in 1919; to build bridges between the American people and the rest of the world.

Since 1946 the IIE has also run the renowned Fulbright Program on behalf of the US Department of State. This program has enabled many talented students to study in the US, and given many American students the opportunity to learn abroad.

Tonight, we are here to honor a Fulbright student from Iraq - Hala Al-Saraf.

Hala came to the US two years ago to pursue a Master's degree in Public Health at Columbia University. During this time, she also managed to develop an innovative project called THINK.

This stands for:

TOWARDS A HEALTHIER INNOVATION AND NETWORKING KNOWLEDGE.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In Iraq, many professors have been killed or forced to flee, and Iraqi medical students lack access to basic medical research.

THINK has directly addressed this issue by providing an on-line forum to exchange information between Baghdad Medical College and some of the best universities in the United States.

This has enabled hundreds of Iraqi medical students to access educational recourses at universities such as, Columbia, MIT, John Hopkins and Georgetown.

I would also like to acknowledge Dr. Jarecki - IIE's Vice-Chairman; and, Dr. Goodman - IIE's President -- for bringing this issue to the attention of the United Nations and the world.

And, to recognize the work of the IIE through their Scholar Rescue Fund which is also helping to address this issue.

Hala's project - THINK - has built on this work to promote learning even when professors are not available.

Her innovation has become an important educational tool.

It has built friendships, changed perceptions and is helping to foster dialogue - between Iraqis and Americans.

May I warmly congratulate Hala for this important contribution, and also thank the IIE New Leaders Group for recognizing her achievement.

And now, it gives me great pleasure to present Hala Al-Saraf with the Second Annual New Leaders Group award.

Hala, would you like to step up to the stage please.

On behalf of the IIE New Leader Group, I am pleased to present you with;

- this commemorative globe; and,
- this cheque to advance your project.

I very much hope that you can use the award to draw attention to **THINK** when you return to Iraq next month.

May I also thank all of you, once again, for attending tonight.

Thank you very much.