



NATIONAL U.S.-ARAB CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

غرفة التجارة الأمريكية العربية الوطنية

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## ARAB LEAGUE CELEBRATES SEVENTH ANNUAL “ARAB AMERICAN DAY”

*“Enhancing Arab-American Partnership Through Youth Empowerment”*

*Opening New Horizons for Future Generations*

**Washington, DC** – This past week, the League of Arab States celebrated its seventh annual “Arab American Day,” held at the Organization of American States.

“The National U.S. – Arab Chamber of Commerce (NUSACC) has been a sponsor and a partner with us in organizing Arab American Day since the beginning,” said H.E. Ambassador Salah Sarhan, Chief Representative of the Arab League in the United States. “I would like to extend our sincerest gratitude and earnest appreciation for NUSACC’s generous contributions. The Chamber’s presence was indeed of great value to our event and guests, and we believe that the event turned out to be a resounding success, thanks in large part to NUSACC’s participation.”

“Our Chamber is once again proud to support Ambassador Sarhan and Arab American Day,” stated David Hamod, President & CEO of NUSACC. “This annual event is an excellent vehicle for building cultural bridges between the United States and the Arab world, and our Chamber is honored to serve as a key partner and Lead Sponsor.”



H.E. Ambassador Salah Sarhan, Chief Representative of the Arab League in the United States.

## “Partnership Through Youth Empowerment”



Ms. Marwa Alkhairo, Manager of MENA Business Development at the International Youth Foundation.

Each year, Arab American Day concentrates on a theme for this event, one which gathers business and government leaders and members of the Arab-American community. It is a celebration of Arab-American heritage, as well as an opportunity to strengthen ties between Arab and American cultures. This year’s theme was: “Enhancing Arab American Partnership through Youth Empowerment.”

“We chose this theme because youth are the future in any society, and those empowered will have a better chance to succeed in moving their societies forward,” said Sarhan. “Empowerment of youth can be achieved through a number of ways; some are sponsored by governmental bodies, others by non-governmental entities.”

He went on to say, “Whatever the ways, support for youth empowerment is critical to all countries and cultures. It’s needed in any society that aims to move ahead in this fast-moving world.”

Sarhan pointed out that the Arab League – based in Cairo, Egypt – is dedicating an entire department to youth empowerment. Among other objectives, he said, the program aims to open new horizons for partnerships among Arab youths and their counterparts around the world.

“The Arab League has launched a yearly internship program for university students from across the Arab world, to train them and to develop their skills on the road to serving their societies,” said Sarhan. “There are so many examples of how youth in this era are making a positive impact on the world and achieving greatness through empowerment.”

## Cross-Cultural Exchange and Study Abroad: A USG Perspective

Ambassador Jennifer Zimdahl Galt, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, spoke of the shared interests between the United States and throughout the Arab League to “nurture, educate, and develop” its youth.



Ambassador Jennifer Zimdahl Galt, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State in the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs.



“Today’s young people are tomorrow’s leaders, and we recognize that they will continue to face a number of challenges, many of which we may not even be able to imagine today,” said Galt. “Across the Arab world, the United States is working with countries to address shared global problems. We all want to provide better opportunities for youth, including education, employment, and social inclusion. We are working to foster healthy, educated populations, and to counter violent extremism.”

The Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, which administers the U.S. Government’s exchange programs with 180 countries, has a number of scholarship programs that help thousands of American and Arab youths every year, said Galt.



H.E. Ambassador Salah Sarhan (left), with Ms. Susan Reichle, President & COO of the International Youth Foundation.

“I want to take a moment to talk about the rich tradition of young American students, scholars, and other experts traveling to the Middle East and having an enriching experience as they study language, engage with local culture, and bring the best of the United States to the families, institutions, and societies they call home for the time they are abroad,” said Galt. “That is why the State Department conducts exchange programs worldwide; to educate, share best practices, and foster networks that bind nations and build a safer and more prosperous world.”

In the 2017 - 2018 academic year, more than 77,000 students from the Arab world studied at a range of institutions across the United States, from community colleges to research institutions, noted Galt.

“These students return to their home countries to succeed professionally and contribute significantly to their countries’ development, economies, and a better life for all,” said Galt. “We should not underestimate those networks and the importance of mutual understanding that results from study abroad. When Americans better understand Arabs, and Arabs better understand Americans, the ties between our nations will be stronger, and all of us will live in a stronger, peaceful, and more prosperous world.”

## Paying it Forward



H.E. Wafa Bughaighis, Libya's Ambassador to the United States.

H.E. Wafa Bughaighis, Libya's Ambassador to the United States, represented the Arab Ambassadors Council that evening. She highlighted the opportunities and responsibilities of Americans of Arab descent.

"As 2018 ends, many of the Arab countries' challenges loom large: armed conflicts, refugee crises, and economic and political stagnation," said Bughaighis. "Yet, the bright spots that we see in innovation, civic action, and enlightened leadership are often led by the youth, who must be supported."

The diplomat continued, "On this side of the Atlantic, Americans of Arab descent have a special role to play: They are one of most upwardly mobile communities in the United States and can play a unique role in forming greater partnerships between the United States and Arab world."

Americans of Arab descent offer a path to peace and prosperity to further strengthen the ties between the peoples of the United States and the Arab world, suggested Bughaighis.

"We must all consolidate efforts on an unprecedented cultural exchange and developing educational systems and democratic ideals," she concluded. "Supporting such initiatives is a moral duty that we owe to our youth, one that will ultimately pave the path toward peace and stability."



Libyan researcher and inventor, Mr. Ziad Al-Hajjaji (left), was included among the night's honorees. He was recognized by Ambassador Sarhan for his scientific efforts in the field of Information Technology.



More than 300 government and business leaders attended the annual Arab American Day gathering held at the Organization of American States. NUSACC served as Lead Sponsor.  
*(All photos courtesy of Samia Abdelwahed.)*

## **“Empowerment Revolves Around Innovation, and Innovation Revolves Around Technology”**

David Hamod, NUSACC’s President & CEO, provided a business perspective on empowerment. In his keynote remarks, he drew parallels between a young American inventor and the aspiring entrepreneurs of the Arab world.



Ambassador Sarhan greets David Hamod,  
NUSACC President & CEO.

“Over 150 years ago, the outlook for one young man in Ohio was looking pretty bleak,” Hamod said. “His teachers had given up on him as a student and, upon entering the workforce, he lost one job after another.”

But this young man persevered and, in the end, he became one of America’s greatest inventors. His name was Thomas Alva Edison.

“Edison was empowered – literally,” Hamod pointed out. “And over time, through his groundbreaking experiments in electricity, he helped to empower billions of people around the world.”

That American innovator once said, “I have not failed. I’ve just found 10,000 ways that won’t work.”



“For Edison,” Hamod suggested, these were not failures. “Instead, they were *learning opportunities*, and this is the way that today’s innovators in the MENA region should look upon their start-up ventures.”

“Empowerment takes many forms,” Hamod noted. “In the business community, more often than not, empowerment revolves around *innovation*, and innovation revolves around *technology*.” After all, he suggested, where would some of America’s greatest companies be today without pathbreaking technology?

But a company does not have to be a giant to create empowerment, Hamod stated. “Some of the most successful companies got where they are by acquiring start-up companies, which serve as the backbone of the U.S. economy.”

This has implications for the Arab world, Hamod said, because it is a region that needs the kind of economic growth that comes from innovative, productive jobs . . . the ones that empower the region’s citizens.

(Speaking of jobs, Hamod said, “You don’t have to be *Steve Jobs* to know that in the Arab world, entrepreneurship courses through our veins and is part of our DNA.”)

“Productive jobs help us to feel invested in the economy,” Hamod noted, “and to take pride in our communities.” Without such jobs, he said, “people may become recruits and vulnerable targets for the bad guys.”



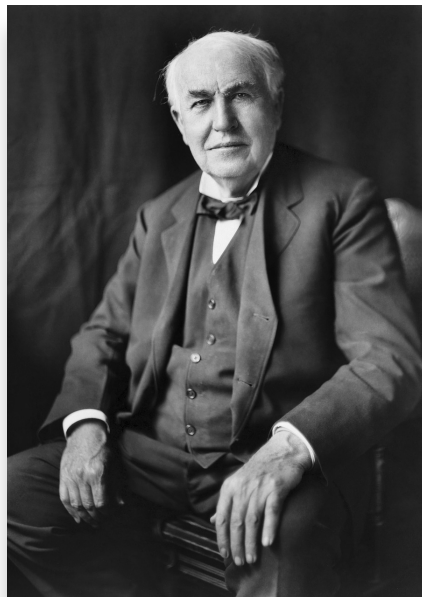
**From left to right:** Mr. Ferid Belhaj, Vice President for Middle East and North Africa at the World Bank Group; H.E. Ambassador Salah Sarhan, Chief Representative of the Arab League in the United States; Ms. Anna Mary Portz, Management Officer at the U.S. Department of State; H.E. Faycal Gouia, Tunisia’s Ambassador to the United States.

“If Edison were alive today,” Hamod opined, “I believe that he would say: ‘Be prepared to make sacrifices.’ After all, Edison failed more than 1,000 times in his experiments to create the light bulb! I believe that he would also say: ‘Empowerment is not an entitlement; it does not come easily.’”

“So, for the young innovators of the United States and the Arab world,” Hamod concluded, “I say: Dare to dream. In time, empowerment through innovation may enable your dreams to come true, *InShaAllah*.”



**From right to left:** Mr. David Hamod, NUSACC President & CEO; Mr. Mohammad El-Rashed, Executive Vice President of Comet International Corporation; Mr. Rajai El-Rashed, Contracts Manager at Comet; Mr. Omar El-Rashed, Account Executive at Comet.



Thomas Alva Edison, one of America’s greatest inventors.

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To learn more about the benefits of membership in NUSACC, please click [HERE](#).

*The National U.S.-Arab Chamber of Commerce, widely regarded as the voice of American business in the Arab world, is in touch with business communities across the United States and serves as the U.S. point of contact for the national chambers of commerce in the 22 Arab nations. On a daily basis, NUSACC works closely with leaders throughout the Arab world, as well as high-level decision makers in the U.S. business community, public policy research centers, multilateral institutions, nongovernmental organizations, media, and the U.S. Government.*