

Mr President,
Ambassador Prozor,
Mr. and Ms. Lanstein,
Distinguished guests,

It is an incredible honor for me to be here and thank you,
Your Excellency, for the warm welcoming.

I come here today as the Vice President and Dean for
Research and Development at the University of Haifa.

It is an historical appointment for an Arab woman, really,
against all odds. From a statistical point of view I don't exist.
Why? Because I am a minority within minorities. I am an
Arab, a Christian AND Catholic Maronite AND a woman.

I was born in an underprivileged family, my parents never
finished elementary school. But I was lucky, because they
both believed that their 4 daughters should get higher
education, and they did everything they could, to make it
happen.

Driving from my village to school, I passed every day by the
University, dreaming that one day I will be one of its
students. This came true, and I started my studies there.
Similar to many Arab students I barely knew the Hebrew
language as our education system is separate. But the
University provided us, the Arab students with academic
support that enabled me and many other Arabs not to drop
out, and to be able to continue our studies and succeed.

As graduate students coming from the Arab society, the University of Haifa implemented equal opportunity and sometimes did affirmative action that were designated to Arabs.

One particular program, provided a generous fellowship, and it is the one designed by the German friends association, chaired by Mrs. Sonja Lanshtien. The Otto Werner program. As a young researcher, the German friend association helped me. I received the Zeit Foundation award, that enabled me to establish my lab.

When I was a student, we were just a few, and even fewer were women. Now the German association awards each year excellent Arab women. That's their mission. In our Department of Neurobiology, third of our graduate students are Arabs, and this will be the new generation of neuroscience researchers.

Today in our campus 45% of the student body is Arab, and as our President, Prof. Robin envisioned, we are creating the new Israeli Middle class, empowering Arabs through excellence, enabling them to integrate into the Israeli market and society.

Mr. President,

Israel is facing difficult times these days, but the University of Haifa is an island of sanity. It demonstrates a real shared society with a beautiful mosaic of different ethnical groups, that represent Israeli society. This is the model we should all cherish and support.

This is the future we deserve as a society, as a country.

Thank you.