



EDITORIAL

SIGNALS OF HOPE FROM ARAB SCIENCE



▲ Mohamed H.A. Hassan, TWAS executive director [interim]

In early 2017, the government of Lebanon approved an ambitious renewable energy plan: It would generate enough power from solar, wind and other sources by 2020 to meet 12% of its need, triple the current capacity. Morocco is going even further, projecting 42% of its power from renewables by 2020 – and 52% by 2030.

We live in anxious times, and hopeful stories like these are often overtaken by bad news. Perhaps that's understandable: the current turbulence in the Arab Region has global implications for security, and for science.

And yet, Morocco and Lebanon are sending vitally important signals: even in a time of challenge and uncertainty, scientists, engineers and policymakers are advancing development through innovation. Today, such signals are rising from throughout the Arab Region.

This special issue of the TWAS Newsletter captures a number of them:

The region is synonymous with oil, but from Saudi Arabia to Algeria, governments and utilities are turning to green energy.

SESAME – the Synchrotron-Light for Experimental Science and Applications in the Middle East – opened in Jordan in 2017, and will be a major centre for regional research and cooperation.

A new generation of science leadership includes some remarkable women – Princess Sumaya bint El Hassan, president of the Royal Scientific Society in Jordan; Hayat Sindi of Saudi Arabia, the science adviser to the Islamic Development Bank and member of the UN Secretary General's Scientific Advisory Board; and Samira Omar Asem, director general of the Kuwait Institute of Scientific Research and treasurer of TWAS.

The 2017 World Science Forum was set for Jordan, chaired by Princess Sumaya, an event that embodies the region's growing commitment to scientific leadership.

Of course we need to see the world clearly: this remains a time of acute challenge.

In countries such as Syria, Iraq and Yemen, conflict has damaged labs, closed universities and driven thousands of scientists, engineers, medical professionals and students to flee. Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey, to their credit, have taken in millions of refugees, including scientists and students.

If we take the long view, the Arab region must respond to the broad challenges by investing more in research, development and education. Sustained commitment is required to drive economic growth, create jobs and address climate change, water shortages and other challenges.

From its earliest days, TWAS has been committed to the Arab region, and today the Academy and its affiliates are expanding the effort. A TWAS science diplomacy workshop in Trieste, Italy, focused on refugee scientists. The Organization for Women in Science for the Developing World [OWSD] held a workshop on research publication in Khartoum, Sudan. The InterAcademy Partnership [IAP] works with national and regional Arab science academies.

Indeed, we have many vital partnerships in the region. The Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences has long provided valued support for TWAS communication and other programmes. The Bibliotheca Alexandrina provides robust support for our Arab Regional Office. With COMSTECH, we provide research grants in Organization of Islamic Cooperation countries.

In these times, TWAS and its partners see the potential for positive impact. Working together, we can continue to build the advances, opportunities – and hope – that are essential for peace.

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