

*Speech of H.H. Sheikh Nahayan Mubarak Al-Nahayan
Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research, Chancellor of UAE University
at the opening ceremony of the first international conference on*

*“The State of the Gulf Ecosystems: Future & Threats”
March 5-7, 2006, Al-Ain Rotana Hotel, UAE*

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen:

I welcome each of you here today for this First International Conference on the State of the Gulf Ecosystem. I appreciate your participation in this conference that is organized jointly by the United Arab Emirates University and the Aquatic Ecosystem Health and Management Society of Canada. I am very pleased that the conference has attracted so many eminent participants from the region and beyond.

This conference focuses on a topic that is crucial to the continued quality of life, and to creation of a sustainable future for the Gulf Region. The United Arab Emirates, under the leadership of the President, His Highness Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al-Nahayan have always stressed environmental protection as the foundation for sustainable progress and prosperity. Under the leadership of the President, we are committed to the protection and enhancement of the Gulf Ecosystem. We strongly believe that environmental sustainability is essential for the well being of our country and the region.

The Gulf is an essential part of our life and of our history. Yet, the Gulf Ecosystem is fragile. Pollution, human activity, waste discharge, oil spills and continuing degradation of resources are taking a heavy toll on this ecosystem and threaten its ability to support future generations.

I totally agree with the premise of your conference—that the Gulf is critical to our future—that we have responsibility, indeed the duty, to be worthy custodians of this natural resource that was entrusted to us. This responsibility – this duty – must manifest itself in appropriate plans and actions:

First: A coordinated effort in all countries of the region is required. One of our important goals must be to promote and coordinate regional planning and programs for protecting and restoring the Gulf Ecosystem. Government agencies, local municipalities, industry, civil society organizations, and universities in the region must work together to share information and to help develop solutions to local and regional aspects of this environmental challenge.

Second: Success requires strong support at all levels of society. We must think of the environment in the same way we think of other important societal issues like education, health, and social services. Resources must be made available. Innovation and new ideas must be valued. Public policies, economic activities, and laws and regulations must be aligned with environmental concerns. And successful initiatives must be recognized and rewarded.

Third: the challenge of protecting the Gulf Ecosystems provides unprecedented opportunities for research and technological innovation. We must promote the use of research results to make sound decisions. We must learn from successful experiences around the world. We must use research and scientific data to monitor progress and measure success.

Fourth: an education and training system that supports the environment must exist. Academic programs must be relevant. They must establish strong partnerships with people and institutions in the field. They must build regional and global networks of students, faculty and institutions that will allow for sharing of knowledge, transfer of technology, and exchange of students and professors.

Fifth: an orientation program for the general public is essential. Media campaigns, public lectures and presentations, as well as initiatives—such as declaring a whole year as the year of the Gulf or having one week of each year designated as Gulf week—could be very useful in raising awareness and emphasizing the threats facing the Gulf Ecosystem.

And of course, peace and stability must prevail in the Gulf. Wars and conflicts cause environmental disasters of unimaginable dimensions.

Your Conference will help us to promote all these actions and plans. Throughout history, our region has been able to take responsible actions for securing its future. The environmental challenge we face is another situation in which I believe we will rise to meet our responsibilities. Our actions will make an important difference to the lives of our children and grandchildren.

I welcome you all, once again. I thank the organizers and the sponsors of this timely conference. I am confident that you will be successful in meeting all of our expectations and aspirations. I wish for you an enjoyable and productive conference.

Thank you.