

Statement by Professor Abdulali Al-Oudrhiri

Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman bin Abdul Aziz

Your Royal Highnesses, Excellencies, Eminences,

Ladies & Gentlemen,

Peace, mercy and blessings of Allah be upon you.

The selection by King Faisal Prize of this year's theme in the category of "Arabic Language and Literature" has been "Arabic Language & Contemporary Challenges". This is quite a relevant theme for a host of reasons. Among these reasons is the fact that Arabic, the language with which Allah honored the Ummah [*i.e. nation, community*] of Islam and not the Arabs alone, is indeed facing more than ever before myriad challenges. Despite Arabic's high standing among other languages, it is being subjected to competition within the very countries, societies, and environments where it is dominantly spoken. The competition emanates from foreign languages that have waded their way in various forms into our daily lives. Worse, Arabic is sometimes ignored or even denigrated by some of its native speakers, not to speak of the wide criticism leveled by its enemies and opponents. At times, Arabic is unfairly accused of backwardness and deficiency, as well as inadequacy to teach the sciences, and the failure to keep pace with contemporary developments. At other times, Arabic is under the threat of local dialects as potential substitutes for its classical version.

The choice of the theme of this year's Prize actually draws the attention of everybody, including governments, individuals, and institutions, at this particular time, to the significance of what our language needs. Arabic is in fact the language of the Ummah, the symbol of sovereignty, history, identity, civilization and being. Our language is indispensable for comprehensive development, edification, unity, and the reinforcement of our social fabric in terms of moral and material support at all levels. It is the source of our pride and rehabilitation in all domains. We need to conceive plans to promote our language and promulgate laws to protect and develop it.

This year's theme is a message of recognition and appreciation for the efforts of scholars, researchers, and thinkers, urging and encouraging them to produce more intellectual achievements and to deploy further theoretical and practical efforts. Such efforts need to be slated to serve our language by devising initiatives likely to offer the most effective solutions to the problems it faces, proposing feasible projects that would overcome existing obstacles, and facilitating its learning and dissemination. We need to strive to enhance our language's methods and support its existence and its continuity.

On a concluding note, I should say that I have been given the opportunity to join this great international prize, which I consider as nothing else but a strong incentive to continue serving the language of the Ummah, praying to Allah to grant me success in my efforts for the better and the more constructive.

Praise being first and foremost to Almighty Allah, I would like to thank you, Ô Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, for your generous patronage of this grand edifice, for your gracious honoring of this joyous celebration, and for your much-needed support for the Arabic language. My gratitude also goes to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the people overseeing the prize, especially His Royal Highness Prince Khalid Al-Faisal, the adjudication and selection committee, and the Foundation for Scientific Research and Studies in Fez, which nominated me for the prize. May Allah bestow mercy and forgiveness on the soul of King Faisal whose name is borne by this prestigious Foundation. I thank my dear country, Morocco, and I pray to Allah to grant mercy and forgiveness to my late father and to anyone who has ever stood by me.

Peace and blessings be upon you all.