

Dr. Mohamed Saber Arab, Chairman of the National Library and Archives of Egypt,
Dr. David Leitch, Secretary General of the International Council on Archives,
Dr. Abdel Wahed Al-Nabawy, Director of the National Archives of Egypt, conference
Coordinator

Colleagues and Presidents of Arab Archives,
Distinguished Guests,

I take great honor in welcoming you here with us in Cairo, and I would like to avail myself of this opportunity to wish you all a happy new Hijri and Gregorian year.

Please also allow me to convey to you the warm greetings of Mr. Abdelmadjid Chikhi, President of the Arab Regional Branch of the International Council on Archives (ARBICA), who was unfortunately held back from being with us today during this annual scientific meeting due to unforeseen circumstances. Nevertheless, with your kind permission, I will read to you Mr. Chikhi's address on his behalf....

Now back to my speech

The ARBICA board has assumed its responsibilities ever since its election in 2006. Since then, ARBICA has held three major conferences with the participation of all member archives as well as major international counterparts. The first conference was held in Egypt, in 2007, under the theme "Arab Documents in Foreign Archives", in which the Ottoman and Mediterranean Basin archives participated. The conference effectively culminated in bilateral agreements by virtue of which Arab archives managed to get hold of relevant significant facsimiles. In 2008, the second international conference was held in Algeria under the theme "Securing the Archive and Emergency Plans". The studies and discussions presented during the conference yielded fruits; Arab archives revised their security plans and set their emergency plans in line with set international standards.

As for today's conference held under the theme "Archives and the Modern Civil State," it is considered to be the third of its kind in a series of major activities adopted by ARBICA.

On the professional arena, ARBICA has offered over 15 training courses with the participation of colleague Arab archives. The courses covered exigent professional issues including: indexing, classification, specificity, e-archive, digitization, restoration and others.

On the level of the International Council on Archives (ICA), two board members, namely the President and Treasurer of ARBICA, occupied high level executive positions in ICA's higher administrative committees. It is needless to say of course how such representation will significantly reflect upon ARBICA and its relevant archives. The new occupants were able to shed due light on the issue of the "displaced archive," a vital matter to many Arab countries that may now be taken up by the various ICA committees.

My dear colleagues,

On the sidelines of the eighth international ICA conference held in Kuala Lumpur, a meeting was convened for ARBICA members, in which the majority of the board and other branch members attended. During the meeting, some members strongly criticized the board for failing to undertake necessary quantitative and qualitative activities. In this context, I would like to point out that no activity may be carried out without primarily having relevant sources of funding; a matter very much lacking at ARBICA. All ARBICA members have since long stopped making membership payments. Thanks to the genuine efforts of Dr. Bahaa Ibrahemi, he was able to once again reopen the ARBICA account and to call upon all members to expedite their membership payments; nevertheless, his call was met with very poor response. All aforementioned activities have technically and financially been borne by Arab archives; as such, increasing those activities to meet the aspirations of some is a matter far fetched.

Dear brothers,

The coming decade will increasingly witness the transformation of our Arab countries into what is known as a knowledge-based society; for knowledge is the cornerstone of development and good governance. An archive is considered a haven of knowledge and a primary source of historic information; to this effect, archives are expected to become a center of attention. In order to be up to par with such transformation, we must equip ourselves with contemporary tools and techniques; we must adopt concepts such as digitization, freedom of access, circulation of information and others.

It is my dogmatic perception that added strength and effectiveness to our regional and international ties will enhance our position and situation locally. The status quo of submerging ourselves into a state of localization stands only as a stumbling stone in the face of enhancing our professionalism and of utilizing the expertise of the ICA and other international bodies.

Dear colleagues,

I belong to a generation that embraces pan Arabism and still thrives on the hope of joint Arab actions. I believe that culture is the first true step on the road of success and achievement.

It is in our attempt to hold a general assembly meeting for ARBICA members on the sidelines of our current meeting. The aim of the meeting will solely be to extend the tenure of the current board for an additional three-month period so that we may be presented with more time to elect new board members during another general assembly meeting.

Once again, I welcome you all in Cairo and wish you a pleasant and successful stay.

Dr. Rifaat Hasan Hilal
First Vice-President of ARBICA