

Terje Rød-Larsen's opening remarks for:

A reception to celebrate the opening of the IPI's
Middle East Regional Office

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Distinguished guests and friends:

Good evening,

Thank you for joining us this evening. I am honored and delighted that so many of you have joined us for the official opening of the International Peace Institute's Middle East Regional Office – based here in Manama.

I would, in particular, like to recognize Sheikh Hisham Al Khalifa, governor of the capital Governorate, and my good friend Samira Rajab, the Minister of Information.

I am also grateful to the Formula 1 organizers for holding the Bahrain Grand Prix to correspond with our grand opening.

But seriously, tonight is an important occasion – for the region, for the Kingdom of Bahrain, and for IPI.

IPI has been following and impacting on events in the Middle East for many years. Therefore, we felt that after having an international headquarters in New York (right across the street from the United Nations) since 1970, and opening an office in Vienna four years ago, it was high time for IPI to be present in the Middle East.

Why? Like no other region of the world, the Middle East has an impact on international peace and security. If a conflict were to break out in this region, it would have an impact on the whole world – for economic, geo-strategic, and religious reasons. Conversely, if there is peace within and between states in the Middle East the whole world will profit – in terms of stability and development.

Therefore, the quest for peace and stability in the Middle East is at the heart of global peace, security and development.

I want to stress in this context that this new IPI office here in Bahrain is a Middle East regional office.

This region faces many challenges.

Libya, Tunisia, Egypt, Syria, Sudan, and Yemen, have witnessed rapid political changes that have resulted in short- and long-term challenges for the countries and their peoples – and with implications for the whole region.

The Middle East peace process is, once again, at a critical juncture, to say the least.

Alliances and partnerships in the region are in flux.

At a time when there are so many significant changes taking place, and so many shifting variables, it is vital to have information, analysis, and constructive dialogue. This is where IPI has an important role to play.

We feel that this role can be played most effectively in Manama.

Bahrain is an open society, with a high degree of gender equality, moderation, freedom of religion, and it is an open society.

In this respect I'm very pleased that a woman from the region is the head of IPI's regional office. As is also the case for our regional office in Vienna.

I would also like to point to His Majesty's manifold reform initiatives, which have contributed significantly to preserving and developing the open nature of Bahrain's society.

Of course there have been challenges, here as in other countries. But when violence erupted here a few years ago, the Government had the foresight and courage to appoint the Bassiouni Independent Commission of Inquiry, which gave an independent and fair assessment of what had gone wrong and how to rectify it.

The government has openly admitted shortcomings and has energetically worked towards rectifying them through an inclusive dialogue, and a reform process that addresses the aspirations of the Bahraini people.

This evolutionary process, and the precedent it sets is important. Especially in light of the levels of violence that have accompanied change across the region; it shows that violent conflict will not lead to the reforms, improvements and stability that is to the benefit of all peoples.

We also analyze social dynamics within societies, and try to make sense of drivers of change, and factors affecting stability. Sometimes negatively through outside forces meddling illegitimately into the domestic affairs of neighbours.

We have seen in many parts of the world – in Europe, Asia, and the Americas – that popular unrest can lead to instability, both domestically and regionally. This is a phenomenon that we believe deserves further study. That is why one of our first events here in Bahrain will be a seminar with a global perspective on “Protest, Unrest and State-Society Relations”. It will look, for example, at the boundaries between legitimate, peaceful protest and illegitimate action (riots, violence and terrorism) – and what can be done to defuse such situations

Another up-coming event will look at what lessons can be learned from the lead up to the First World War to prevent conflict today. Since World War One had such an impact on shaping the modern Middle East, we will look, for example, at how the Sykes-Picot agreement and the San Remo Conference drew lines in the sand that still have an impact on international relations today.

As you can see, we are not only keen to open our doors, but we are eager to begin substantive work that can facilitate dialogue, generate fresh ideas, and contribute to peace, security, and stability in this region.

This is consistent with the type of work that has been IPI’s hallmark over the past four decades: facilitation; research; and providing advice to strengthen international peace and security, particularly through multi-lateral institutions.

We do not, of course, have solutions to all of the world’s problems. But we can provide a space to think about them, ideas on how to implement them, and partnerships to make them happen.

I therefore appeal to all interested parties – in governments, ministries, civil society, the media, and the private sector – to see IPI, and this wonderful facility, as a meeting place, a venue for exchanging views, and a regional hub for the promotion of peace. IPI avails its resources to the region’s efforts to promote the culture of peace. Initiatives and requests from all of you are welcome!

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The opening of this beautiful office would not have been possible without the steadfast support of His Majesty the King, their Royal Highnesses the Crown Prince, the Prime Minister, the Foreign Minister, and other senior officials here in Bahrain. Thank you so much for welcoming IPI so warmly to your country. I feel confident that the trust that you have placed in us and the foresight that you have demonstrated through opening an IPI office here in Manama will reap rewards in the very near future.

I would also like to thank the director of the office, Maha Bahamdoun and the IPI staff who have helped to put together this event in record time.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, dear friends, please join me in a toast to the Kingdom of Bahrain, and for peace, security, and stability in this whole region.

We hope to see you back here often and look forward to working together!

Cheers

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