

Media Connected

Dr. Hessa Al-Jaber Remarks

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Al Sharq Village & Resort

Good morning. Welcome to ictQATAR's first Media Connected Forum for Journalists. Throughout today's session, we will explore the transformative power of technology on society and how technology is changing how news is covered and how it is received. This topic is important for all communicators, which is why I am happy to see that in addition to reporters, we are joined by communications professionals from government, industry, and foundations.

I am delighted to extend a special welcome to our keynote speakers Tom Standage from the Economist and Leonard Brody of Now Public. I also welcome our partner in this event, Dr. Richard Roth of the Northwestern University in Qatar Journalism Program. We are fortunate that Northwestern is here in Education City, preparing

young people from the region to thrive in the news industry of today and tomorrow.

The co-founder of the pioneering Al Jazeera Talk is here too, Ahmed Ashour. Since it was launched in 2006, Al Jazeera Talk has become an entirely new form of journalism. It is an interactive website where citizens are the journalists and readers respond, comment, and add even more information for the world to see. The effort to mobilize youth in the Arab world to build bridges of dialogue is the very definition of innovation.

Thank you Ahmed, and Dr. Roth, for the important work you and your colleagues do, and thank you also to our media partner in this event, Al-Arab newspaper. They are an important member of Qatar's vibrant media landscape.

All of us here today, from whatever part of the world we have come, are united by a passion to connect the world through open communication. We share the belief that transparency and dialogue

serve to promote and protect freedom. Time and again, history has proven us right.

In many ways, journalists are now facing a historic moment. Just as technology has transformed everything about how we live and work, the newsgathering and reporting field is changing forever.

Increasingly, news is about speaking, not being spoken to. Gone forever are the days when editors and producers alone control what we read and hear, and the news stops when the broadcast ends.

Today, news-breaking information is available around the clock, and everyone can participate in the dissemination of news through blogs, Twitter, You Tube, websites, and social media.

Today, every person in the world with a cell phone can be a news source. We all saw how we relied on first-hand visual and verbal accounts from ordinary people during the attacks in Mumbai, and the crisis in Gaza. Those witness reports were often more immediate and interesting than the coverage of mainstream media.

Later today, Leonard Brody will address this very issue. The citizen journalism company he founded, NowPublic, has more than 130,000 correspondents around the world.

This expansive media participation is good for society. It means greater interest and investment in events and issues. And it means greater power for those affected by those events and issues.

Look no farther than Al Jazeera Talk to see how well the model works. Every day, 90,000 people are empowered to share videos, news updates, photos, and ideas, about a film festival in Dubai, the suffering in Gaza, or education reform in Qatar. People have a place to express their hopes, fears, and feelings.

Just think how different that reality is from journalism only ten years ago.

Since ictQATAR opened its doors in 2005, I am proud to say we have been leading many important conversations...about how ICT empowers citizens, enriches lives, and drives economic development. We are spearheading the ICT strategy to advance

Qatar's ambitious National Vision for social, economic, and environmental reform. This is vital because the rapid progress that our leadership expects in education, healthcare, and business development is only possible with the integration of technology.

Already, in these short years, the strides are significant – all leading to a brighter, better future...what we call the Promise of e. We have launched exciting programs in e-government, education and healthcare, and I am particularly proud of our work with the government and industry to implement technologies to empower the disabled.

ictQATAR is working to foster a technology-friendly environment for small and large businesses alike...spurring a fresh, new ICT sector that will introduce innovative approaches to how we live and work.

The nation's goal of a diversified economy is part of the reason we at ictQATAR made liberalization of the telecoms sector a priority. The fixed line and mobile sectors are now open to competition, bringing

value to consumers and making Qatar an even better place to do business.

In the near future, we will explore ways to expand the market for broadband, a move that will benefit news outlets and the public alike.

We are looking at international best practices for another priority for us at ictQATAR – media broadcast satellite regulation. Ready access to some ideas and images broadcast into people’s living rooms can offend our social and cultural values. This is a challenging issue in our region because politics, religion, and culture are so intertwined here.

We do believe that government restrictions should serve as last resort. We want providers and families to self-regulate content, rather than censoring content...for at its heart, censorship is an enemy of freedom.

But one of freedom's dearest friends is an open press. Committed, courageous reporters, editors, bloggers, and producers who tell the truth safeguard democracy and protect us all.

As we look ahead, we do not know what the news industry of the future will look like, any more than five years ago anybody could imagine a concept called citizen journalism, or You Tube. But we do know that professionals and citizens who communicate through the media are motivated by a dedication to truth, transparency, and liberty.

I am excited to listen to today's panel discussion about new media, and how it is changing the journalism field. I do realize, though, that this is just the beginning of an ongoing conversation.

Thank you for your dedication, and again, welcome.