

Honorable Johann Schneider-Ammann, Federal Councilor of Switzerland and the Head of the Department of Economic Affairs, Education and Research

His Excellency Julien Thöni, the Representative of Switzerland in Palestine

Distinguished Dignitaries

Eminent faculty

Members of media and press,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Good morning!

It is indeed a pleasure and honor to welcome such a distinguished group of visitors to Birzeit University this morning. Thank you Mr. Schneider-Ammann and Mr. Thöni, for embracing and sponsoring what will undoubtedly be a stimulating and valuable program today.

It is a great privilege for us, at Birzeit University, to sit with our friends from Switzerland, and learn from their great experience that has kept their nation at the forefront of the world's most innovative countries.

Today, business innovators, policy makers, and university members are making connections between ideas and knowledge, for developing our economy, creating brand new possibilities and enriching our society.

Dear guests,

Innovation is about the application of new ideas, discoveries, and inventions, and we believe everyone has the capacity to be creative!

Birzeit University has built on methods to create learning experiences that help people unlock their creative potential and apply it to the world.

The foundation for innovation at Birzeit University is the steady supply of excellent ideas, of which there is abundance among our students, faculty and staff.

We are now required to offer programs and initiatives that inspire the attitudes and behaviors of others to engage in value based and purpose-critical efforts, in order to influence their communities and create change!

Without a doubt, higher education has a pivotal role in shaping the talent landscape. Universities can foster the skills of creativity; innovation and entrepreneurship that help people thrive in a changing world.

This calls for a real mindset change towards new, creative approaches of teaching and learning.

In order to prepare individuals to adapt to change, to take the initiative, to be creative, we must ensure that our systems of education become more responsive and relevant to the rapidly evolving society we live in.

We, at Birzeit University, have taken notice of this and we started to take action a few years ago. Our mission is clear: staying competitive in a rapidly changing world and to prepare the society of tomorrow, we must invest in our people and especially in our young people- in their skills, in their ability to adapt to change, and in their ability to innovate.

Building on Birzeit University's history of community service and earlier training programs, we started the students career management service (Masari) to connect students, graduates and alumni with the job market.

We have recently launched Birzeit Business Hub (B-Hub) to address the problems of small enterprises and student employability, with the generous support from the European Union. At the business-hub, students will develop their skills and competencies and small companies can build their capacities and get custom solutions to their specific problems or improve operations and grow.

And we are developing a maker-space for school and university's students where they can come together and implement their innovative ideas.

We are also involved in “Palestine-India Techno Park”, based in Birzeit University, which serves as an IT hub, and provides state-of-the-art technology. The Techno Park will help in creating work, business and other innovative opportunities for young Palestinians.

Our honorable guests,

If we are to turn our store of knowledge into employability and innovation, and develop a true knowledge economy, higher education must continue to evolve in order to bridge the gap between the worlds of education and work.

We know we cannot do it on our own. Let us build partnerships, open new opportunities, and seek to expand new fields and minds.

We do count on your support and experience- all of you as government officials, businessmen, civil society, professionals, professors, students and alumni...

Let us put all our hands and minds together and orchestrate our success!

I wish you all an inspiring, informative and successful day.