

**Mr. Rateb Rabie, founder and chair of Know Thy Heritage**

**Mr. Nicola Kawas, Program Coordinator of KTH Delegation**

**Our distinguished guests and participants,**

It is a great pleasure to have you here between us in the Seventh Annual Diaspora Conference, held this year at Birzeit University, where Palestinians from all around the world can gather to promote peace and unity.

Since the Nakba, seventy years ago, Palestinians were forcibly uprooted from their native towns and villages because of the Israeli occupation. On that day, we started looking for a home away from home. Yet our hearts are still tied to our houses, lands and families in our Homeland; Palestine.

Although Nakba is largely regarded as a historic event, the Nakba is not solely a reflection on a contained period of cruelty from the past. It is ongoing!

We have seen how in the past few days our people living in area of Khan al-Ahmar, east of Jerusalem, are facing the threat of expulsion. Israel has been endeavoring to displace this community for settlement expansion, de facto annexation of the area and bisecting the West Bank, cutting it into two.

In the absence of the serious international intervention to end these colonial occupying acts, we need to take action. The occupation might have separated us geographically, but it has failed in getting Palestine out of our hearts.

There is a Palestine that dwells inside all of us, a Palestine that needs to be rescued and freed. That is why we need to be united, wherever we are in the world, to work together for the world to hear our voices.

Birzeit University recognizes that our culture and identity constitutes an important site of struggle against occupation. That is why we have made special programs to put this belief into practice. The Palestine and Arabic Studies (PAS) is just one example!

Few international study programs offer the combined experience of language and culture that PAS does. International students have the opportunity to study the Arabic language, and immerse themselves in Palestinian culture, and closely learn about what Palestinians go through every day.

We have also unveiled a new grant for students' in the Diaspora to come and learn Arabic in their homeland through the "Birzeit University President's Palestinian Diaspora Grant".

**Dear guests,**

Today, we gather in the Seventh Annual Diaspora Conference, to look into opportunities to cement the networks of diaspora Palestinians and revive the momentum among diaspora networks in preparation for the growth and strengthening of diaspora initiatives.

We especially hope that this initiative will create a long-term engagement with our brothers and sisters in diaspora. Palestinians need to gather to forge a unified diaspora; a diaspora of intellectuals, decision-makers, scientists and artists who will chart a path forward for Palestinians.

Thank you.