

In the name of God

Opening Speech at the Seminar on International Academic Cooperation between
Universities of Iran and Germany

A) Higher Education and the Emerging Futures

It was since the time William von Humboldt introduced the “Idea of the University” and founded University of Berlin that *university* started to be received as a comprehensive institute which bestows a definite scientific-cultural identity to students and professors, and integrates education and research to pave the way for the formation of university, in its modern sense, in the nineteenth century. However, in the end of the same century, Emmanuel Kant was worrying lest some sciences and faculties, including law, theology and medicine, turn into upper sciences or faculties, and others, like philosophy which was a highly important field of humanities, decrease to the lower sciences.

Today, at a time when universities have turned toward “future” and the idea of the university has changed, different sciences are so tightly weaving into each other that one can no longer consider one science to be superior or inferior to others. The 19th century idea of higher education cannot address the current and future needs of human and society. Therefore, university is undergoing a fundamental change, especially in its appreciation of human and social phenomena.

Higher education is today experiencing a new form of change in its **“structure”**, **“action”** and **“mission”**. The geography of universities in the society is no longer evident. In fact, we are gradually observing a new generation of higher education known as the “fourth generation” of universities. Beside preserving the missions of its previous generations, that is **“education”** (first generation), **“research”** (second generation), and **“entrepreneurship and wealth creation”** (third generation), the fourth generation of universities seeks a greater function; this generation of universities defines and pursues a **“new professional model”** for higher education system which brings about new opportunities for **local and regional development** through using regional and international cooperation and interactions. In such a space, although higher education is not limited and bound to certain spatial and geographical spaces, the main concern of universities is **global presence**, local economy, and their immediate environment through forming **knowledge society**. Therefore, the central mission of the fourth generation of universities is **managing the future change** and **leading its immediate ecosystem and region** using regional communication tools and international interaction and collaborations.

B) International Higher-Education Cooperation in Iran

During its forty years of age, the higher-education system of the Islamic Republic of Iran has obtained considerable achievements. Answering to the educational needs of the growing number of higher education applicants, equality in providing higher education to both men and women, development of postgraduate studies, and establishment of numerous academic disciplines are among the tangible achievements of the Iranian higher-education system in the last 38 years. The increase in the share of women provided with educational opportunities and resources, especially during the last decade, has been higher than all other developing countries. Growth in the number of female faculty members in the Iranian universities and higher-education institutes is one of the other achievements.

On the other hand, the international function and inter-university relations and exchanges has been one of the evident concerns of the Iranian higher-education policy-makers since the very beginning of the establishment of modern university in Iran. The history of Iranian higher-education system shows that some Iranian universities had signed memorandums of understanding with world prestigious universities, established cross-border cooperation, and exchanged faculty members and students even since six decades ago. At present, offices, or sometimes vice-presidencies, are actively involved in the act of developing international academic cooperation in most universities of Iran. Despite the various memorandums of understanding or memorandums of understanding and agreement signed between Iranian and World universities, we are still requiring practical and targeted policies in the field of international academic cooperation with World, especially European universities.

We are interested in enhancing our international and inter-university cooperation so as to improve the international status and credit of the Iranian higher-education system according to its different talents and capacities. The geo-cultural capacities (cultural diversity, linguistic diversity, religious diversity, climatic diversity, racial diversity), long experience in the field of higher education, the special geo-political (geographical and political) state, inexpensive higher education, and the large number and variety of academic programs and units are all among the factors influencing the success of Iran in achieving a valid international higher-education system. During recent years, internationalization of higher education has gradually attracted the attention of Iranian higher-education experts and university leaders. We believe that Iranian higher-education system enjoys the educational and institutional talents and capacities required for internationalization. Through capacity-building, creating dynamic and suitable socio cultural contexts, and refining and developing effective and constructive

attitudes we are willing to create objective and subjective situations more suitable for the development of international academic cooperation, especially in the fields of humanities and social sciences.

C) Humanities in Iran; Capacities and Orientations

Social policies and plans for achieving national development in various respects are all founded on investing on the development of humanities. The difference in the approaches of developed and developing countries is laid in the same point; in developed societies, *humanities* enjoy a “**capital credit**”, while in less developed societies or those trying to achieve development, this science is often described as a series of subjective and conceptual sciences having “**expenditure credit**”. As a result, the value and credit given to natural sciences, including for example basic science, medicine, technology and engineering, are not given to human sciences.

During recent years, *humanities* have gradually taken a considerable vitality. Currently, fifty percent of Iranian students are studying in various human-science programs. Lack of critical discussions is increasingly taken into attention within *humanities* and *social-science* departments; a great share of academic players is moving toward more critical and groundbreaking *humanities* and *social sciences*. In other words, a scientific belief is gradually forming which posits that social and human development of the society depends on the growth and development of “**critical humanities and social sciences**” in universities. Belief in the approach suggesting that cultural (human and social) sciences enjoy a **capital credit and civilization-making nature** seems to be the most important achievement of the last decade in the fields of humanities and social sciences in Iran.

Unlike natural sciences, humanities and Social Sciences may result in new hypotheses, civilization-making ideas, and leading and constructive questions, instead of leading to a series of objective responses and quantitative data. To put it another way, in the field of *humanities*, the more a scholar contemplates, performs research, and acquires knowledge, the more his doubts and questions would increase. In such a state, perhaps we can judge that plurality in hypothesizing, continuity in questioning, and thinking in idea-formation for the purpose of showing and choosing right orientations, and the final development and improvement of the society and the world are all “**consequences of the critical humanities and social sciences**”. Perhaps the secret to immortality of humanities and social sciences and the nature of their establishment is laid in the distinction existing between them. In other words, the plurality and complexity found in humanities is the result of the plurality and complexity of the ever-changing and leading hypotheses, ideas, and questions, not of those in decisive answers or persuasive and

quantitative achievements. This emphasizes the necessity and importance of investing on critical humanities and social sciences.

However, humanities and social sciences are facing a series of challenges in Iran. In fact, the problems on the way of developing humanities and social sciences are mostly of the same nature as those issues hindering national development programs. Therefore, there is a dialectical relationship between the level of development of “humanities and social sciences” and “national development”. The public value and credit of humanities depends on the functions it has in the society, culture and politics. Today, humanities cannot have a powerful social presence without concurrent social concerns at local, regional and global levels. The humanities actors should arrive at so high a level of capability and efficiency that social agents will not consider their investments as “consumption” or “expenditure”, but as fundamental capitals. Given the complexities of the age of communications, present societies need the critical humanities and social sciences and their achievements more than before. In other words, today’s societies depend, more than before, on the scientific approaches and findings in the critical fields of politics, literature, economics, sociology, psychology, and education.

We believe that development and investment in the field of education is the first and the most important solution to development and improvement of humanities. That is, the quality of humanities in Iran depends on the quality of academic programs and the outputs of the higher education system. The education sector is the most systematic solution for absorbing the elite secondary-school students with medium-to-high intelligence in the humanities programs. We also believe that the best way to accreditate the humanities programs are to create job opportunities for its graduates. In the second place, humanities researchers cannot have any concern about issues surrounding them. That is, apart from its attention to the basics of local thought, fundamental sciences and doing critical research, research in humanities should concentrate on current problems of personal and social lives to be effective in the society. In other word, research in humanities should pay attention to critical and fundamental issues, and deal with the concurrent local, regional and global affairs. Of course, escaping from a humanities merely imitating the thoughts of some western thinkers, and using the different intellectual foundations to be innovative are the main cornerstones of this development.

D) Allameh Tabataba’i University and the Visions Ahead

With more than 18.000 students studying in various Bachelors, Masters and PhD levels, benefiting from 530 full-time faculty members and above 1000 lecturers teaching in 11 different faculties, and being the **“largest Iranian university specialized in humanities and social sciences”**, Allameh Tabataba’i University (ATU) is seeking to **improve the level of humanities and social sciences in the scientific and educational system of Iran and create and propagate new “cultural models”**. Through **participating in the improvement of the planning and management system of various economic, social, political and cultural fields in the country**, ATU leadership considers itself responsible for the public society, politics, economy, and culture. As one of Iran’s Centers of Excellence in humanities and social sciences, ATU is a **“research-based”, “knowledge-creator” and “pragmatist”** university having concern for creating local and original intellectual and cultural products able to be exported to the region and the world.

ATU’s vision specified as becoming the **“centre for humanities and social sciences in the region and the world”** demonstrates its willingness to develop and strengthen the **“scientific, cultural, and social relations and interactions”** among various universities, nations, cultures, religions, schools of thought, and philosophies. Through **quantitative and qualitative improvement of education and research in the fields of humanities and social sciences**, one of the academic priorities of ATU is educating **“cultural, responsible, religious and productive citizens”** as well as propagating the **“local-global citizenship culture”**. Creating **“sustainable national development”** and flourishing the national and Islamic culture through **educating human resource specialized in humanities and social sciences** are ATU’s other visions. Most importantly, ATU’s most sublime and idealistic goal is to **create “equal quality education to all”** and to **“flourish human”** using the new capacity of **“bi-spatiality”** in the two **“virtual”** and **“real”** spaces.

To sum up, ATU’s vision as the **“A-Level Specialized University in Iran”**, is the **management of future change and turning into the centre of humanities and social sciences in the country and region** using cross-border communication tools and international cooperation and interactions. We believe that ATU’s philosophy, goals, and missions will certainly be attained through reliance on the local values, capacities and assets, and interaction and relation with the prestigious and outstanding universities of the world.