2000

Karim Kawar

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// **Takes risks & utilizes failure as an integral component of future ICT success** //

An entrepreneur by profession, Kawar started his first business at the age of 20. Kawar said applying for an Eisenhower Fellowship was a "true dilemma, since taking two months off from the many positions I held seemed next to impossible, while the opportunity was overwhelmingly appealing." By the time he applied for his Eisenhower Fellowship, he contributed to the formation of 12 businesses, most in information technology and communication.

For Kawar, the opening seminar in Philadelphia "took the debate on leadership to a higher level". In addition to meeting with exceptional thought leaders and trustees during the seminar, Fellows took every opportunity to hear the perspective of the rising leaders that comprised the Fellows of the 2000 MNP, representing every continent.

During his time in the U.S., Kawar focused on information technology as he was building an ICT industry in Jordan. Of his program, he notes, "My fellowship opened my eyes to the many opportunities granted to entrepreneurs when a whole ecosystem functions coherently that not simply allows those startups to survive but gives them the opportunity to thrive." This was at the peak of the Internet bubble when some companies simply vanished. Companies such as Netscape, AltaVista and Lycos were overtaken by newer and younger competitors. Google and Facebook were yet to be conceived. For Kawar, "thinking outside the box took on a different level of intensity! My EF program opened my eyes to the possibilities, and in the back of my mind I was always considering what we could do in Jordan and in Arabic. Today Jordan hosts about 75% of all Arabic content on the Internet."

At the EP Annual Dinner in May 2000, Kawar had the good fortune to be seated between then-EF Chair Dr. Henry Kissinger and EF trustee Nemir Kirdar, and was also asked to speak on behalf of the Fellows. Of this occasion, Kawar notes, "What a conversation that was! Taking risk is at the heart of any startup and my brief remarks, to the surprise of the audience, focused on failure and how it was an integral component of future success. I come from a culture that is intolerant of failure and as such restricts risk-taking, innovation and creativity. We've certainly come a long way during the past decade."

Immediately after completing his fellowship, having received exposure to IT leaders and organizations in the U.S., Kawar launched REACH 2.0, building on the Eisenhower Fellowship experiences. With a highly educated population of over six million today and with an absence of natural resources, building a knowledge economy in Jordan was one of the highest priorities for H.M. King Abdullah's agenda for Jordan. Of this huge challenge, Kawar notes, "I found myself responsible for leading the effort to realize that goal."

Reflecting upon the past 13 years as an alumnus Fellow, Kawar notes that "each one of us feels indebted to this great organization. Regardless of age, gender, education, profession, nationality, race or faith, we are all connected by an amazing bond that brings us all together. We contribute by collaborating and taking on big challenges. Some have succeeded and others have not. But failure does not hold us back from trying again, albeit with an improved approach and higher expectations."

Kawar summarizes his Eisenhower Fellowship experience as "life-changing" which he felt he "was fortunate to participate in the spring of 2000! I never dreamt that I would serve as Jordan's Ambassador to the United States where I had the honor to do so from 2002-2007. I guess my two-month stint out of Philadelphia tipped the scale in my diplomatic favor."