Gala Dinner
Welcome Remarks

Sharjah, UAE

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Mrs Haifa Fahoum Al Kaylani
Chairman, Arab International Women’s Forum

Welcome Remarks & Acknowledgements
Your Excellencies, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is indeed a great honour and pleasure for me, both personally and as Chairman of the Arab International Women’s Forum, to welcome you all this evening to the official conference dinner in the magnificent surroundings of the Sharjah Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

I wish at the outset to extend on all our behalf our warmest thanks and appreciation to Mr Ahmed Mohammed Al - Midfa Chairman of the Chamber, for so generously hosting our dinner this evening and for his warm welcome.

Our dinner tonight marks the first day of a very successful conference and we take this opportunity to reiterate our thanks and appreciation to all our distinguished guest speakers who have addressed us today and who will be addressing us tomorrow. I also take this opportunity to reiterate our thanks and appreciation to all the global and regional corporate partners who have supported us for this important event and throughout the years on all our initiatives and programmes.
AIWF is delighted to be co-hosting our conference this year with the American University of Sharjah, enhancing the cooperation that has existed between AIWF and AUS for a number of years.

The theme of our conference this year highlights the importance that we all place on economic and social development and the important role of women as engines of economic growth and of youth as a powerful force for change in the region. Tonight's event is an important opportunity for AIWF and AUS members and guests to network and help further a greater understanding of the challenges and opportunities for achieving sustainable growth and economic empowerment for women and youth.

This is why our dinner tonight at the Sharjah Chamber of Commerce is so pertinent for the theme of the conference and we applaud HE Mr Al Mahmoudi and the Sharjah Chamber of Commerce and Industry for the extraordinary leadership shown, for widening its activities and making Sharjah a real hub for business and trade in the Emirates, the region and globally, and we wish you continued success.
The thriving economic development of Sharjah can be attributed to the very positive incentives and policies promoted by the Government of Sharjah to encourage businesses to invest in the Emirate. Sharjah must be commended for being one of the first in the region to realise the importance of growing the private sector and welcoming foreign investment in the manufacturing, trade and service sectors in order to sustain a strong and sustainable economy.

In keeping with the government’s commitment to promoting business-friendly policies to greatly ease market entry for foreign entrepreneurs and investors, Sharjah has successfully expanded its private sector using the Free Zone model.

Despite the global recession, the Emirate of Sharjah experienced 7.1% growth in new and renewed licences issued in 2010 (compared to number of licenses issued in 2009), according to a report by the Sharjah Economic Development Department released in February 2011.

Consequently, the city’s private sector is booming, attracting talent, foreign investment and international recognition as one of the best
places to do business in the GCC, always with an emphasis on creating sustainable economic development and new opportunities for young Arab talent.

In AIWF, and following the commemoration of our tenth anniversary last year, we are now pursuing more vigorously our work and our efforts to support the greater role for Arab women in all sectors but especially in business, but always within an Arab and international framework.

Distinguished guests,

We are all meeting at a very critical time for the Arab region and also a time of great economic and financial concern for the world economy at large.

The Arab Spring has no doubt created many new opportunities but also many challenges. These challenges spur us all to double our efforts to keep the channels of trade and investment open between the Arab region and the international community.
We must ensure that Arab businesswomen are fully engaged in this process, and are encouraged to set up successful SMEs that will create jobs.

I believe we all agree that a thriving and dynamic Arab private sector of men and women as we see here in Sharjah, open for business, and engaged in trade, will generate the growth and prosperity that the region needs and that the region truly deserves to have.

Thank you for your kind attention.