**“The Future of Arab Societies: Changes and Challenges” Conference**

5–7 September 2016

**Introduction**

The Arab World has witnessed considerable political, military, and social changes in the past years. These changes have forecast a change in the Arab World’s current status quo and political and geostrategic position, which have set the foundation of the Arab regional regime throughout several stages since the era of national independence and the rise of the modern Arab states. The prevalent method of envisioning the future of Arab societies adapts the historical model Sykes–Picot as an inevitable future scenario, which will result in the current changes in Mashriq and Yemen through re-dividing current Arab countries into smaller and more homogenous religious or ethnic entities. However, such a scenario ignores the Arab societies’ wealth of various possibilities, which can contribute to producing alternative futures, and of several scenarios, which can set the basis for managing changes and avoiding the hazardous risk of a division that would only lead to prolonged conflicts.

These current changes may seem as a lapse and regression to the past, highlighted by the rise of Islamic extremism, the outbreak of sectarianism and secondary (sub) loyalties, and the collapse of national Arab states. Nonetheless, they reflect a liveliness of Arab societies, since these changes could be pictured as a struggle over the future between fanatic and authoritarian trends—religious or national ones—at one end, and those seeking a society based on justice and equality at the other end. We can thus reshape the different levels of the current changes in the Arab World by considering them stages of a larger process of breaking free from history. Accordingly, the present situation in the Arab World will no longer be defined as a struggle over geopolitical, economical or ideological resources; it will rather be defined as a conflict over the future as the vastest resource that transcends the limits of the current reality.

The conflicts succeeding social mobility in the Arab World unveiled a significant shortage in Arab academic and political circles of conflict management and resolution; circles that represent a gateway to drawing alternative futures for Arab societies. Even though the conflicts that led to open wars in Syria, Iraq, Yemen, and Libya have been approached with an intrigued sense of strategic analysis, there is evident negligence and dismissal of other, equally important issues pertaining to the fate and future of Arab countries. These issues include the future of young generations and of women, democratic transformation, development, sectarianism, technology and its role in the structures of Arab societies, as well as the development of the system of human values and to what extent Arab countries have responded to it.

The Arab elites are thus advised to revisit the constituent discussions regarding the structure of their societies and their struggles on a futures basis, which would on the one hand provide a much needed criticism to the proposed scenarios and viewpoints, and on the other hand offer alternative futures and scenarios.

In this context, the Bibliotheca Alexandrina (BA) Unit of Futuristic Studies invites researches, scholars, and experts to participate in “The Future of Arab Societies: Changes and Challenges” Conference in order to enrich discussions on the Arab societies’ crises, and to draw possible scenarios for developing and for resolving the crises on critical and futuristic basis.

**Conference Objectives:**

* Activating the field of futures studies as a theoretical approach to study the current status quo of Arab conflicts
* Sharing and exchanging the views of different critical schools and trends of Arab academic and political circles
* Sharing and exchanging the views and expertise of different generation of scholars and experts
* Providing a critical approach for analyzing Arab societies’ mechanisms and interactions through effective dialogue between different scholarly perspectives of conflict and the nature of Arab societies

**Conference Methodology**

The 3-day conference consists of 8 sessions that will include opening lectures by eminent speakers and experts. The sessions are planned to present and discuss the submitted research papers after dividing them into groups of worksheets.

**Application**

Interested researchers should submit a one-page abstract outlining their topic, its different aspects, and how it is related to the conference’s framework, along with their resume to Omneya.elgamil@bibalex.org and muhammad.musaad@bibalex.org no later than 15 July 2016.

Submitted research papers are expected to follow and apply the methodologies of futures studies, and they should be 3,000–5,000 words long. All submissions will be scientifically refereed.

Final research papers are to be submitted by 30 December 2016 in order to publish a book of all research papers presented in the conference.

The BA will provide transportation and accommodation to all conference speakers and presenters.