



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Region's youth eager to promote peace following successful EMPOWER summit

450 young people representing 23 countries get EMPOWERED to promote peace in the Middle East, Asia and Africa

Doha, Qatar, 28 March 2015: At the closing ceremony of the seventh annual EMPOWER youth conference in Doha on 14 March, hosted by Qatar-based NGO Reach Out To Asia (ROTA), young leaders from across the Middle East and Asia vowed to make a difference in their communities by pushing for peace in the midst of turbulent times across the region.

Organized from start to finish by young people for young people, EMPOWER 2015 gathered 450 youth leaders, ages 16-27, from Saudi Arabia, UAE, Oman, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, Turkey, Tunisia, Libya, Algeria, Egypt, Cambodia, Malaysia, Azerbaijan, UK, Netherlands, Greece, Ethiopia, Canada, US, Kirgizstan, Bolivia and Sri Lanka.

Now in its seventh year, the three-day conference aimed to give young people a voice and empower them with the skills, knowledge, values and ethics needed to move their communities toward realizing the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals related to peaceful societies and education. In February, EMPOWER's Youth Planning Committee unveiled that *Peaceful Societies* would be the theme of this year's summit. This theme pervaded each of the summit's three core segments: personal leadership, service learning and global citizenship.

During the conference, EMPOWER's official Twitter hashtag, #EMPOWER2015, became the number one trending topic in Qatar, with an online conversation generating around 12,000 tweets by young people from Qatar, the Middle East, North Africa, Europe, Asia and North America who came to Doha for the three-day event. The hashtag also ranked among top Twitter trends worldwide.

At the conclusion of the conference, youth delegates announced the formation of a special task force to give young people a more prominent voice in building "peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development" across the region. The task force of 20 youth leaders convened a special session to begin identifying a list of recommendations that support the Post-2015 Development Agenda of the United Nations – specifically those objectives related to youth, access to education and promoting peace. The recommendations of the task force will be the cornerstone of a Global Advocacy Campaign that will seek to create linkages with key youth forums, conferences and meetings around the world including the World Humanitarian Youth Summit, which Doha will host in September 2015, it was announced.

Youth delegate Lowjain Al Mubarak of Saudi Arabia said: "It is my first time taking part in the EMPOWER conference. I was a member of Saudi delegation who participated in this event. Over the past three days, I have learned a lot and am fully charged with energy and positive thinking that strongly



convinced me that we can make a difference and positive change. The conference introduced me to many young people from different nationalities and backgrounds. The thing that I liked the most is we integrated and got used to each other so fast - overcoming all geographical and cultural barriers."

Tariq bin Abdul Aziz Al Nuaimi from United Arab Emirates said: "It's my first time to take part in this conference. The conference is packed with insightful workshops that were conducted by international trainers and high-caliber professionals. Workshops covered a wide variety of topics from different areas. What I liked the most in this conference is that it raised various topics on the discussion table and gave young people the chance to choose based on their interests. The conference helped me to make new friends from different nationalities and learn more about various cultures and different opinions."

Tunisian participant Ahmed Alratibi stated: "I attended EMPOWER 2015 as head of the Tunisian delegation, representing Tunisia Charity Association. Personally, it is my first time to take part in this conference. However, it is not the first time for Tunisia, especially for Tunisia Charity Association which sends four young, active and ambitious participants on yearly basis to take part in this event. The three-day gathering discussed several topics through its workshops, meetings and activities that have enhanced our capabilities to build peaceful societies, which is the main theme of the year. I have benefited a lot from this event. It helped me to learn about various cultures, young people from different nationalities and backgrounds such as Oman, Egypt, Gulf States, United Kingdom, and Netherlands. I had the chance to get myself familiar with Qataris and Qatari culture." He added, "I wish from the bottom of my heart for EMPOWER to keep its resounding success. The conference was well-organized and well-planned. It is not only at the level of the conference, but it is at the level of state as well. Qatar is planning very well for the future and for hosting the World Cup 2022, which indicates that the country is planning for generations to come with a clear vision and aware youth."

Aisha Al Joudi, a Bahraini participant, said: "We have learned the principles of peaceful coexistence through our interaction and discussion with many young people who came from the East and the West. We may not have the same opinions, but we have learned here that disagreement does not damage amicability. We have also learned a lot from inspired speakers and workshops, especially Mr. Salah Al Yafei workshop which was very insightful for me. The conference was really a wonderful experience."

On the sidelines of her participation in Empower 2015, the British participant Beth Hat who came with a delegation from United Kingdom said: "Thanks to Empower conference, I have seen how the cooperation between East and West youth can make a difference and positive change globally. Our interaction and cooperation will not be only limited to Empower, we have already formed networking groups to share our projects with each other after Empower conference. I would like to thank Empower for giving us this amazing chance."

The strong presence of the Turkish delegation was in part a celebration of the Qatar-Turkey 2015 Year of Culture. **A member of the Turkish delegation, Suhad Touch commented:** "In my capacity as a Political Science assistant researcher, I can reiterate that Turkey has a strong and longstanding bilateral relationship with Qatar and we hope to develop this relationship to be more prosperous and stronger in the future. As part of celebrating the cultural year, Qatar-Turkey 2015, we received a special invitation from the youth of Reach Out to Asia to attend the EMPOWER conference, which was an extremely well-organized, efficient, and valuable event. On this occasion, I would like to extend my sincerest thanks to



Qatar Foundation for this great event. I have attended many international conferences but EMPOWER was so special and different from all similar conferences that I have attended."

Sudanese participant Farah Naz said: "EMPOWER gathered young people from around the world in one place. This gave me the chance to learn a lot about the world's youth, their power and capability to change the world. In addition, the conference was a great opportunity to learn more about human rights and the United Nations Millennium Development Goals. This will definitely help me to benefit my country Sudan. I hope to see more Sudanese youth at EMPOWER 2016."

Participant Muhannad Al Bahari from Libya said: "ROTA's conference is a fantastic experience that gathered young people from around the world. We have learned a lot from EMPOWER workshops aiming to enhance youth skills for achieving peaceful societies. The best thing I have learned from this conference is that we are dealing with a person as a human being and not based on his or her nationality. I hope I can benefit my country Libya and my people in the field of community development with what I have learned here."

"Current events around the world, especially in this region, have challenged our notions of peaceful societies and forced a rethink of what we can do to improve human security, prosperity and happiness," **said ROTA's own Executive Director Essa Al Mannai.** "EMPOWER is about walking the walk - providing the skills, knowledge and inspiration to tackle pressing issues like peace and encouraging youth to take a more active role in promoting peace within their societies. The enthusiasm, cross-border connections made, and discussions at this year's edition of EMPOWER took the event to new heights and I am excited to see EMPOWER continue to grow each year."

ROTA operates as a non-governmental organization (NGO) within the framework of Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development (QF). The event supports QF's commitment to unlocking human potential and building strong, sustainable communities in Qatar and the region. EMPOWER 2015 was held at the Hamad Bin Khalifa University Student Centre in Educational City from 12-14 March. It was held under the auspices of Her Excellency Sheikha Al Mayassa bint Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, Chairperson of ROTA.

ROTA is committed to providing high quality primary and secondary education by encouraging relationships among communities, creating safe learning environments and restoring education in crisis-affected areas across the Arab world and Asia. Furthermore, ROTA assumes a leading role in supporting low-income workers in Qatar and providing educational opportunities through innovative local and global projects.

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About ROTA

Reach Out To Asia is a non-profit organization launched in December 2005 in Doha, Qatar, by Her Excellency Sheikha Al Mayassa bint Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani. Operating under the auspices of the Qatar Foundation, ROTA is committed to providing high quality and relevant primary and secondary education, encouraging relationships among communities, creating safe learning environments and restoring education in crisis affected areas across Asia and around the world. ROTA envisions a world, where all young people have access to the education they need in order for them to realise their full potential and shape the development of their communities.

For more information about Reach Out To Asia, please visit: www.reachouttoasia.org

About Qatar Foundation

Qatar Foundation – Unlocking Human Potential

Qatar Foundation for Education, Science, and Community Development (QF) is a private, non-profit organisation that is supporting Qatar on its journey from carbon economy to knowledge economy by unlocking human potential, for the benefit of not only Qatar, but the world. Founded in 1995 by His Highness Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, the Father Amir, QF is chaired by Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser.

QF's work encompasses education, research and community development. World-class universities are brought to Qatar to help create an education sector in which young people can develop the attitudes and skills required for a knowledge economy. At the same time, QF builds Qatar's innovation and technology capacity by developing and commercialising solutions through key sciences. The Foundation also works to foster a progressive society while enhancing cultural life, protecting Qatar's heritage and addressing immediate social needs in the community.

For a complete list of QF's initiatives and projects, visit <http://www.qf.org.qa>