

Clinton Urges Middle East to Create Energy-free Economy

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DUBAI — The Middle East can create a million more jobs if countries become energy-independent economies and former US president Bill Clinton believes the UAE is driving the change towards a balanced economy in the region.

During his fourth visit to the campus of American University of Dubai on Wednesday, he enlightened a packed auditorium about causes that he and the Clinton Foundation are championing across the globe: equality, stability and sustainability. He said the smartest thing the region could do was to invest in education opportunities for a new economy that would be independent of oil revenue.

For him, Masdar City in Abu Dhabi, the world's first carbon-neutral, zero-waste city, is the most encouraging initiative that the country has taken.

"The message that the UAE is sending to the rest of the world is: 'we don't deny the reality of climate change, we know we have made some contribution to it by making a fortune out of selling oil, we know oil will not last forever and we can build a diversified and more balanced economy'."

He said dependence on oil is required for some things but the UAE can reduce its greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by maximising the use of energy from the sun and wind and energy-efficient building materials. "There are thousands of things that you can do here," he said.

Creating an energy independent economy will in turn help democratise education as more children will need to attend schools and go to university to create a workforce. "You can't possibly achieve this unless you give people opportunities in education," he said.

With a month to go for the Copenhagen deal on climate change, Clinton recounted the achievements of four nations that turned their economy while reducing carbon emissions as laid down in the Kyoto protocol of 1997 and expressed his regret on the US's absence from the deal. The deal mandated that 44 industrialised countries reduce their greenhouse gas emissions by 2012.

"Only four will meet their target. But it is interesting what happened to those countries. Before the economy collapsed, they were outperforming all of the other rich countries in terms of jobs they created, the businesses they started and their success in reducing income inequality while it was exploding all over the world," said Clinton.

"What leads people to suicide bombing? They think they have more to gain in the next world than this one. They believe change is not possible through reason and efforts and believe tomorrow will be just like yesterday."

Clinton left the hall of awe-struck students with the parting remark: "You can make a difference... To make a difference, you need to answer the 'how' questions — How are you going to do it? They are at the centre of what the world will be like when you are at my age."

(Khaleej Times)