

Remarks by
Samia Farid Shihata
at the Dedication of the former Board Room
in honor of
Ibrahim F.I. Shihata

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First of all, I want to thank the World Bank and specifically of course, Yvonne Tsikata and Sandie Okoro who are graciously hosting this beautiful event. I also want to thank Dominique Bichara, who worked with my husband in the legal department for several years. I know she played a huge part in making today a reality.

I speak not only for myself but for all our family, Sharif, Yasmine, and Nadia in saying to Bank management and staff that we are really very touched and honored by this gesture of appreciation, especially since it's been over 18 years since Ibrahim left us. This really came as a wonderful surprise to us.

I also want to thank everyone here for taking the time to share this occasion with us. I would like in particular to thank James Wolfensohn for his beautiful message and wish him a speedy recovery. Ibrahim worked closely for so many years with Jim Wolfensohn and they had a very special bond of friendship, respect and admiration for one another. And, of course, my deep thanks to the many personal friends and Ibrahim's colleagues who came to share this special moment with us.

Today's dedication of this boardroom to Ibrahim Shihata expresses so poignantly the institution's acknowledgement of the huge contribution that Ibrahim Shihata made during his tenure in the World Bank. Here in this boardroom, Ibrahim Shihata spent endless hours over the course of 17 years, advancing the work of the bank in helping the peoples of its member countries, particularly the poor among them, to improve their lives.

After all that's already been said about his contributions at the Bank, I find it hard to say much more.

Frankly when I read the paper compiled by the Bank on Ibrahim's history at the bank, and today's presentations highlighting all the areas where he made groundbreaking contributions, I found myself in awe, as though I didn't already know all that. But of course, I not only knew that, but had actually lived through all that, if not in the details of the work involved, of course.

What I feel I can add here, is something I'm not sure many people at the bank knew then, or know today; and that is that as Ibrahim Shihata worked so hard doing all these amazing things at the World Bank, for practically all his years at the Bank, he was also relentlessly fighting his own personal battle with cancer. When I look back today, I am reminded again of what an incredibly strong man my husband was.

Ibrahim was a fighter, but he never wanted to be defined by his illness. He wanted to live his life to the fullest till the very end.

I can't help recalling that as he kept doing his job at the bank with such distinction; as he kept writing one seminal book after another; as he wrote and gave his excellent speeches, and as he attended an endless array of conferences all over the world, unbeknownst to most, he was also undergoing one experimental cancer treatment after another, and enduring their agonizing side effects in silence. I have to admit in the same breath here, that, unsurprisingly, as any wife would do in such circumstances, I would often, or maybe always actually, complain that he was pushing himself too hard and that he should slow down. Needless to say, he never did. He was a man on a mission, both on a global scale, and for his own country, Egypt.

As I said, Ibrahim spent long hours at home writing. He didn't only write for the bank, but he also spent much time and energy writing about his beloved Egypt and how to solve its problems. As some of you know, among many essays and books he wrote on Egypt, his final one is a seminal book he called *Waseyeti li Biladi*, which means *My Will or My Testament to My Country*. Ibrahim had so much hope for his country and he desperately wanted to help Egypt achieve its full potential. But he knew he was running out of time.

This book contained his parting advice to Egypt. In it he distilled his vision of how Egypt should reform. It covered practically everything, from political, economic and constitutional reform, to the importance of the rule of law and the separation of religion and state. It also included his vision of educational reform and also described in detail how the daunting task of administrative reform could be achieved. In my view, the book was really so comprehensive that it could serve as a readymade platform for a liberal political party, if they were indeed serious. He had done all the work they should have been doing. All they needed was to adopt this vision, seek the support of the Egyptian people for it and fight to implement it.

I must say here also, that when Egyptians rose up in 2011, and we were all in Tahrir square demanding change, I would think, with sadness, if only Ibrahim had been alive he would have been the perfect leader to guide the protesters demanding change. He would have been able to translate the calls for change into a program for action. After all, he already had it all written down, in detail... He could have led Egypt to the bright future it deserved.

My consolation, however, was that even though he was gone, his book lived on, and it indirectly did play a part in the change that began after 2011. When the protests started, I decided that we needed to quickly republish his book, *Waseyeti Li Biladi*, and to make it as widely available as possible. I knew that was something he would want me to do. In fact, many people were asking for his book, which unfortunately was out of print at the time.

So, we republished the book. We distributed it to students at universities and we restocked the bookshops, which kept asking for more and more copies. And as part of the rich public discourse taking place at the time, we published the excerpts from the book on constitutional reform in Egypt's most widely read newspaper at the time, *Al Masry el Youm*.

And when a new Constitutional Assembly made up of 50 persons was tasked with writing a new constitution in 2013, I sent them some copies of the book as a reference for the important work they were undertaking. I was so happy and gratified when they got back to me asking for fifty more copies so that every member could have one. Of course, the process of writing the constitution was hard and involved a lot of negotiations, as it should, but at the end Egyptians were proud of it and they voted overwhelmingly to adopt it.

I'm not claiming that the resultant constitution was just as Ibrahim would have liked it to be, but I am proud that his vision played a big part in the process and that the document that the constitutional assembly produced, included much of what he was advocating for. I'll only mention here its unprecedented guarantees for human and political rights, which formed such an important part of Ibrahim Shihata's vision for a new Egypt.

Before concluding, I have to say a few words about Ibrahim Shihata as a person. He was a kind and gentle man. He was serious, but also joyful. He appreciated music and art, especially Iranian carpets! He loved travelling to new places, and he loved people. He loved to help people and he never held a grudge against anyone. And of course, he loved his family. He adored his children; so much so, that he insisted on shielding them from the burden of knowing the seriousness of his illness for as long as he could, almost till the end. I could go on and on of course. But, I think I will end here by reading a few of his own words from a poem he wrote. Yes, I forgot to say, he was also a poet.

The poem was not written in sadness, but rather in contentment, with a hint of humour. Here is how he felt, in his own words:

Let me in the earth vanish, with no ceremony attending
Let me add to its fertility
And suffice the earth its share
Of the living before me.

Do not write me an epitaph
Like "He lived for principles"
Or "Died for peace"
Or "Eternal be his soul...
Immortal be his name."
Don't write that nor other things
Let it pass
With no comment to spoil it.

Say only
(if deemed necessary):
He left to a place unknown
With no forwarding address
(and...unusual as it is!),
He took no luggage with him,
He left,
On a one way ticket,
Free of charge,
Exempt from passport and visa.
Say he will live there happily
As happily as he had lived here
Despite all the little things
Which never really mattered.