

**AIEA Conference
February 14-17, 2010
Washington, DC**

**Remarks by Larry N. Vanderhoef
Chancellor Emeritus, University of California Davis
Presidential Plenary Session – February 16, 2010**

Let me begin by thanking the sponsors of this section of the program, CIES and IIE. We all know the financial difficulties in the economy and for our universities, and so we are very grateful for their support.

Second, I would like to thank all of the people that have come to this meeting to work the halls and enjoy these talks. It is probably more important now than in the past that we better understand the lay of the land because of the financial pressures on all of us.

I come from the University of California, Davis, a university that is on the other side of the country and perhaps not well known to many here on the east coast. Just to give you a sense of our international activity, however, I wanted to mention that if one ranks universities according to the number of international scholars that they welcome to their campuses every year, UC Davis is fourth in the country, just behind Harvard, Columbia, and UC Berkeley.

My first interests in international programs and education go back to a time at the University of Illinois, the middle 1970s, when I was going through the ranks and teaching lots of undergraduates in biology. I was struck early on by the large number of students from Iran who we had at the University of Illinois. In fact, during those years this country was receiving more students from Iran than from any other country in the world. Beginning in about 1976, however, there were the beginnings of a revolution in Iran. That revolution finally happened in 1979, with the Ayatollah Khomeini very much in a leadership role. The revolution presented a dilemma for the many, many students in this country. Some felt that they had to go home immediately because of the difficulties their families they might be facing. Others felt that they would be safer staying in the United States.

In any event, two things resulted from those 15-20 years. First, the number of alumni of U.S. universities was very large in Iran, a country of about 55 million at the time. Second, the number of Iranian students plummeted in the U.S. shortly after the revolution. This latter problem was mainly one of visas: traveler between Iran and the U.S. faced the double whammy of Iran refusing to grant the visas, and/or the United States refusing to accept them.

I had the very curious feeling at the time that I had lost a “friend.” I had begun to meet quite regularly on Friday afternoon with a group of Iranian students in an end-of-the-week discussion. During the years that I met with them the conversation revolved almost entirely around the coming revolution in Iran.

With Iranian students no longer coming to the United States, the new “numbers” leader was Taiwan. It was especially true that Taiwan education officials had decided that until they were able to do graduate education well, they were going to be sending their students to the U.S. for graduate study. In addition, though, the majority of their undergraduate students were going out of country and most of those to the United States. (As a side note, the Mainland followed Taiwan’s track, namely sending all of their students abroad for graduate study. I went to the mainland for the first time in 1981, and the universities were just in the process of re-opening following the final cultural revolution. There were broken windows in most of the university buildings. Students were building their own equipment and it was not uncommon to find their own particular brands of knock-off equipment in the classroom).

Fast forward now to approximately the year 2000. By this time I had been the Chancellor at UC Davis for six years and the Provost for ten years before that. I traveled lots around the world, and had gotten into the habit of always finding time to visit with University of California students who were studying abroad. As everyone in this room has heard before, I quickly realized that all of these students had their particular way of saying, “it changed my life.” I felt then and feel even more strongly now that “it changed my life” underestimates the totality of the effect of study abroad on these students. The more important positive effect on study abroad students is that they begin to understand that one can put the same facts on the table and people reared in different cultures are very likely to come to different conclusions about those facts. It gave all of these students a healthy skepticism about the headlines they were reading in the local newspapers back home. Supporting that intellectual conclusion, study abroad teaches students that on the ground, people to people, there are good relations in all countries, almost without exception.

In August of 2009, I stepped down as the Chancellor, and among my activities, I am continuing to try to pursue university-to-university relationships with Iran and Taiwan.

Regarding Iran, the President of Tehran wanted to come to the U.S. in the year 2001 with the intention to open doors between the University of Tehran and UC Davis. Of course, we happily invited him to come, but he had successive difficulties with getting a visa, so I somewhat naively said, “Not a problem. We’ll come to Iran.” I hadn’t realized at the time that up until then there had been no formal university delegation admitted to Iran since the revolution. But we had a few things working for us. An influential Californian Iranian, Moe Mohanna, and a professor at Catholic University, the Ayatollah Iravani, were going to be working behind the scenes to try to get our small group into Iran. Long story short, I traveled to Iran in 2004 with not only Moe Mohanna, but two of our deans and two additional people from our international programs office. We had a very successful trip, and it is relevant to point out that the President of Iran at the time,

Khatami, was very supportive of opening the door to these kinds of interactions. This was an attitude that was somewhat surprising given the fact that President Bush was not behaving at all with the same attitude toward Iran.

But we went, and there have been very positive follow-ups, not the least of which was six students a year coming to our Graduate School of Management.

We went again to Iran in 2008, this time with five other AAU presidents, as well as the President of the AAU. President Khatami was no longer in office, and his brother, a member of the legislature in 2004 was no longer in his position either.

Iran's version of a theocracy is one that looks very much like a democracy – with one important difference. If the Supreme Council of 11 ayatollahs believes that somebody is not likely to follow the Quran closely, or if they believe that somebody who was elected did not follow the Quran sufficiently well, those people were not allowed to run for election or re-election. So while they operated as a democracy, it was also true that there was a harsh evaluation of those who would run for the first time, or for re-election.

There was a different feel and attitude in the air in 2008. Machmud Amahdinagad was the President now, and there were difficulties that we had not experienced in 2004. For example, we learned that 39 of the 40 presidents of the top universities had been replaced. The so-called “make up vans” were in evidence. Election riots were stirring. As well, on a more personal level, it was winter and a good part of our group of eight or so came down with the flu. So we just did not have the same experience in 2008 that we had in 2004. Again, in 2004 everyone welcomed us everywhere, and wanted us to fill all of our moments with visits to new parts of Iran, new departments and universities, etc.

What's next in Iran?

As in most countries it is important to pay attention to how the young people are feeling. I mentioned the election riots. Those were mostly young people from the educated classes. They are very anxious to be communicating better with the world. They constitute a united Persian community. It is very important to read the headlines with this reality in mind. Things are likely to be changing in Iran during the next five to ten years. What one reads in the newspapers is very likely not going to tell the story of what is happening in Iran. That Iran is developing nuclear power could be described as environmentally responsible. If they happen as well to be developing nuclear weapons, I must admit that it would be hard for me to find that shocking given that Pakistan a close neighbor with nuclear weapons in hand.

In the final analysis, I believe that the best chance for healing country to country relationships is through the universities and their academic studies and study abroad program. That means that the responsibility on all of us in this room continues to grow. We must understand that governments are not going to be able to take new steps toward the kind of peace in the world that seems possible. Nor are businesses that

have much interest in the petro-chemical activities. Rather, it is the universities that try to look at matters as challenges that require good questions. And good questions require reasonable answers. Universities are the answer.