

Cairo, 13th of September 2015

CELEBRATING EQUALITY: Heliopolis University and SEKEM are launching an official Gender Strategy

The Heliopolis University (HU) and the SEKEM Initiative are going to launch a “Gender Strategy for a Balanced Society” on Friday, 13th of September in an official event. Ministries, partners and other known public persons will attend the event and support SEKEM by holding inspiring speeches about the meaning of gender equality: Among others *Dr. Ibrahim Abouleish* (SEKEM Founder and HU Chairman of the Board of Trustees), *Dr. Ghada Waly* (Minister of Social Solidarity), *Dr. Mervat El Talawi* (President of the National Council for Women), *Sebastian Lesch* (Head of Development Cooperation, German Embassy) or *Dr. Andreas Kuck* (Country Director of the German Development Foundation (GIZ).

“The Egyptian economy is in desperate need of qualified personnel”, Helmy Abouleish, vice chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Heliopolis University and CEO of the SEKEM Group says. “To compete in the global economy, we need to develop the best talents both male and female. If we continue to neglect the potential of our 49% female population, this means we miss out on 49% of our nation’s best people.”

Strengthen women for a balanced society goes hand in hand with economic growth

International studies show that integrating women in a country’s workforce is not only essential for economic growth, but also for the development of a balanced society. “Since women in Egypt are not supported to gain economic and social independence – especially in rural areas, where many of our employees come from, we developed a Gender Strategy with guidelines how to support women in education and at work and thereby secure their human rights and strengthen their societal role towards a gender balance in the Egyptian society”, it is stated in SEKEMs Gender Strategy.

SEKEM and the Heliopolis University are well aware about the challenges women are facing when it comes to finding a balance between working and family life. Equal treatment and opportunities are not only part of the holistic SEKEM concept which promotes sustainable development but also a human right. To empower women, which is supposed to lead to a balanced society, SEKEM and the HU organize different projects and activities to strengthen women’s self-confidence as well as the awareness on the side of men.

Supporting women in all HU and SEKEM entities

SEKEM and HU are supporting the participation of women in public life by promoting the concept of gender equality in all components of the initiative: Starting at the school where girls and boys alike are taught and introduced for instance to the same professions, going over to the University where they focus on organizing different workshops and discussions in regards to the role of women in society, until supporting employees with special benefits. Hence, SEKEM allows all female and male co-workers up to one consecutive month unpaid leave for marriage preparations and supports its employees by paying a part of the school fees for children attending the SEKEM schools. SEKEM and HU are offering diverse work arrangements for women by facilitating reduced or flexible working hours, home office, part-time work and job sharing to encourage them to keep their jobs while enabling them to meet the responsibilities for their families. As the father’s care and attention is of utmost importance for a child, SEKEM and HU allow fathers up to one month unpaid parental leave within the first year after the birth of a child.

SEKEM

SEKEM Head Office

3 Cairo Belbes Road
El Salam, Egypt

P.O.Box 2834
El Horreya
11361 Cairo
Egypt

Tel.: (+20) 2 265 64 124/5
Fax: (+20) 2 265 64 123

cs@SEKEM.com
www.SEKEM.com

Cooperation between the Heliopolis University for Sustainable Development and the other SEKEM enterprises is given high importance also in regards to gender equality: As students and university staff are coming from quite different backgrounds than the co-workers from the different companies, SEKEM sees the exchange of experiences and point of views as a great chance to create awareness and new ideas.

International Recognition

SEKEM aims to reach a portion of 50% female employees in the workforce in all SEKEM companies and the HU on the long run, by measures like including the commitment of managers to recruit a certain percentage of women as a condition for their annual bonuses.

Besides the current engagement, SEKEM signed already, as one of seven companies in Egypt, the Women's Empowerment Principles, which are developed by UN Women and the UN Global Compact to guide business on how to empower women in the workplace, marketplace and community. For SEKEMs efforts in supporting women, World Bank and UN Women granted the initiative with the "One Business Community, Equal Opportunity Seal".

Especially in regards to sustainable development SEKEMs sees a balanced society as a crucial fundament for the future of Egypt, not only for economic reasons but also for the social and cultural progress of the country.

Reprint free of charge, copy requested. Pictures will be provided by request.

Find the Gender Strategy and further information on our website:
<http://sekem.com/gender-strategy.html> and <http://sekem.com/empowering-women.html>

Please contact us anytime for any inquiries and further information:

SEKEM Group

3 Cairo Belbes Road
El Salam, Egypt
P.O.Box 2834
El Horreya
11361 Cairo

Tel.: (+20) 2 265 88 124/5

Fax: (+20) 2 265 88 123

pr@sekem.com

www.sekem.com

About **SEKEM**: The SEKEM initiative is a model for sustainable development in Egypt. Dr. Ibrahim Abouleish started at the end of the 1970th to reclaim desert land into vital soil to cultivate Organic agriculture and to build up SEKEM as a holistic initiative that is working in four dimensions: Economy, ecology, cultural and societal life. Besides its commitment to Organic agriculture SEKEM produces and processes food, health care products and textiles. Furthermore the initiative runs different educational institutions that are all focusing on a holistic and sustainable approach.

About **Heliopolis University for Sustainable Development**: Heliopolis University is a pioneer scientific establishment that strives for the sustainable development of individual consciousness, economic solidarity, social justice and environmental balance in Egypt and the world. HU empowers students to be the champions of sustainable development in different spheres of life. Our education combines teaching, research, and practice with a uniquely humanistic core program, developing curious and creative minds.

HU has three faculties: Pharmacy, Business & Economics, and Engineering