

Dr Amal Abdullah Al Qubaisi

By any standards, the career of H.E. Dr Amal Abdullah Al Qubaisi, President and Speaker of the Federal National Council of the United Arab Emirates, has been exceptional. It is impossible to summarise her achievements without reaching for superlatives, and constantly re-using words such as “first” and “only”. Dr Al Qubaisi has made history on several occasions, but more importantly, she has used her position not only to defend the rights of her fellow human beings, and to promote tolerance, respect and dialogue, but also to challenge other leaders to do likewise.

Dr Amal Al Qubaisi was born in 1969 and grew up in the newly independent United Arab Emirates. She completed her Bachelor's degree in architecture at the United Arab Emirates University, and went on to study at postgraduate level at the University of Sheffield. Here she was awarded a Ph.D. in Architectural Engineering in 2000, becoming the world's only holder of a doctoral degree on the conservation of the United Arab Emirates' architectural heritage.

In the same year, Dr Al Qubaisi was appointed as an assistant professor of architecture by the United Arab Emirates University, a post she held until 2006. During this time she served as President of the cultural heritage unit of Al Ain's Tourism and Economic Development Authority. She also worked with UNESCO to document and conserve more than 350 historical sites in the Emirates, including Al Ain, one of Abu Dhabi's most important historical cities, which was subsequently listed by UNESCO as a world heritage site.

Dr Al Qubaisi rose to political prominence in 2006, when she was elected as a member for the Emirate of Abu Dhabi to the Federal National Council of the United Arab Emirates, becoming the first Emirati woman ever to be elected to public office. She served as President of the Federal National Council's Education, Youth, Media and Culture committee, and as a Member of its Health, Labour and Social Affairs committee. After four years in office, she was described by national media as one of the most dedicated members of the Federal National Council, and as “a passionate advocate, in the FNC and elsewhere, for issues related to women, education, youth, children's health, scientific research and national identity

Her career since her election to the FNC has continued to be characterised by a series of firsts. In 2011 she was elected Deputy Speaker of the Federal National Council, becoming the first woman to reach such a high position in the legislative body of any state in the Gulf region. In 2014 she was appointed chairwoman of the Abu Dhabi Education Council.

But it was in 2015 that Dr Al Qubaisi leapt to world prominence, when she was elected President and Speaker of the Federal National Council of the United Arab Emirates, becoming the first, and still the only woman in the Arab world, to hold such office.

To say that Dr Al Qubaisi has blazed a trail for women parliamentarians in the Arab world is an understatement, but her influence extends well beyond the Arab world. In December 2016, she presided over the first Global Summit of Women Speakers of Parliament in Abu Dhabi. The Declaration issued at the end of the summit bears her hallmark, making strong commitments on causes that she had already worked tirelessly to promote through her work on the UAE's Federal

National Council. Such causes include the placing of democracy at the service of peace and sustainable development, addressing climate change, achieving gender equality, fighting against discrimination and violence against women and girls, and empowering young people.

Most notably, the values of tolerance, inclusiveness, diversity, equality and dialogue are promoted in the Declaration, as they are in all of Dr Al Qubaisi's work. In the words of the Declaration, “Regardless of gender, age, race, class, geography or religion, inclusive societies should empower their members”.

Dr Al Qubaisi takes personal responsibility for ensuring that the values she promotes are translated into action, and she challenges others to do so too. At the 2017 Legislators' Forum of the International Renewable Energy Agency, for example, Dr Al Qubaisi argued that “we, as parliamentarians, have a moral, ethical and practical responsibility, not only to support renewable energy, agreements and goals, but to ensure their full implementation through appropriate legislation and oversight. We must do so now, without any delay. And we must do so with actions and not just words.”

Dr Al Qubaisi believes in the strength of dialogue – whether inter-personal, inter-parliamentary or inter-religious. She stands firmly against the abuse of religion by violent extremists. She stands with victims of such extremism, turning up to bear witness to their suffering. And she stands with those whose faith is so abominably misappropriated by extremists. Again, she sees a strong role for parliaments in promoting religious tolerance and combating extremism. Yet again, she challenges her fellow legislators to use their power to promote tolerance. Speaking at the International Peace Conference in Cairo in 2017, she argued that peace must become “an essential pillar” of national law. In Dr Al Qubaisi's own words: “from my background in politics, I know it is our place to cultivate the culture of peace.”

H.E. Dr Al Qubaisi has been honoured on several occasions within the United Arab Emirates, by other Arab states, and further afield. Significant awards include: An Abu Dhabi Award in 2008; A Middle East Excellence Award for Women in Leadership in 2008; the Abu Dhabi Medal of Honour in 2009; An Emirati Pioneers Award in 2014; An Honorary Doctorate from the University of Sheffield in 2016, and a Parliamentarian Excellence Award for Presidents of Arab Parliaments, awarded by the Arab Inter-Parliamentary Union in 2017

Your Excellency Dr Amal Abdullah Al Qubaisi, you stand as a symbol of the increased participation of women in public life and the growth of parliamentary democracy. You have devoted much of your political career to working towards goals that are consistent with values held dearly by Dublin City University, values such as sustainability, equality, inclusiveness, diversity and tolerance, and you have done so with a compelling and powerful voice.

It is appropriate today that the University bestows its highest honour upon you.

A Uachtaráin, I ask you to confer on Her Excellency Dr Amal Abdullah Al Qubaisi the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (*honoris causa*).