

THORAYA AHMED OBAID
JEDDAH, SAUDI ARABIA



AREAS OF EXPERIENCE

- Unique multi-cultural perspective gained through 35 years with different organizations – UN, international non-profits — at global, regional and national levels, and working with various sectors and partners including private sector, civil society, bilateral organizations, large and small foundations and private donors in a variety of national, regional and international context.
- Represented the UN at the highest level of policy dialogue at international and multilateral forums and in key high level multi-sectoral meetings.
- Accomplished communicator with excellent writing and oratorical skills with extensive experience in communicating with divergent audiences from heads of State to lay audiences.
- Strong people skills and recognized ability to build relationships at all levels.
- More specifically, 35 years of experience at the United Nations in areas of international cooperation and assistance, policy formulation, organizational leadership and management, mentoring, empowerment of women, and gender-culture and human rights linkages, population and development.

EDUCATION

- 1974 Ph.D. Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan, USA, June 1974, English Literature, with minor in Cultural Anthropology.
- 1968 M.A. Wayne State University, Michigan, USA English Literature, with minor in Cultural Anthropology.
- 1966 B.A. Mills College, Oakland, California, USA, English Literature, with minor in Sociology.
- 1962 Pre-university education at American College for Girls, Cairo, Egypt.

WORK EXPERIENCE AND SPECIAL ASSIGNMENTS

Special Assignments since 2011

- September 2020 – May 2021 – Member, Independent Panel for Pandemic Preparedness and Response, established by the World Health Organization (WHO) Director-General in response to the World Health Assembly Resolution 73.1.
- May – June 2020 – Consultant with Boston Consulting Group to provide support to the Ministry of Economy and Planning on the National Population Strategy.
- July 2019 – October 2020 – Chair, Women 20 Engagement Group during the Saudi Arabia Presidency, reporting to G20 Summit held virtually in November 2020.

- 2018 – present Member, Delegation of Saudi Arabia to the Consultative Commission of the Supreme Council, Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).
- 2017 – 2018 Member, Board of Directors, Center for Strategic Development, Ministry of Economy and Planning, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.
- 2017 – 2018 Member, Board of National Population Council, Ministry of Economy and Planning, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.
- 2017 Advisor to the UN project, “Gender-Balance in the Ministry of Civil Service”, for the Ministry of Civil Service, Saudi Arabia.
- 2017 Consultant, input into the Consolidated Response of UNCT to the list of issues raised by the CEDAW Report of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia dated 23 August 2016.
- 2013 - 2016 Member, Majlis As-Shura (Consultative Council or Shura Council), Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.
- Among the first group of 30 women appointed to the Majlis by King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz in a Royal Decree that determined that women are equal in responsibilities and privileges as the male membership, and that female membership should be at least 20%.
- Majlis Shura was responsible for: 1) reviewing the annual reports of government entities and adopting recommendations to the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques for improving the results; 2) amending existing legislations to meet existing needs, and 3) recommending new legislations to meet emerging conditions. I performed with other members in all these three functions of Shura.
- Member, Human Rights and Oversight Committee, 2013 – 2016 at Majlis As-Shura.
 - Vice-Chair, Human Rights and Oversight Committee, 2014.
 - Chair, Human Rights and Oversight Committee, 2015 – 2016.

Employment History

2001– 2010 Executive Director/Under-Secretary General, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), New York, 2001- 2010.

- Directing UNFPA which provides funding and programme assistance to developing countries, as members of the United Nations, in the areas of demographic policies, census and data collection, operational programmes in gender empowerment, and reproductive health, in other words, being engaged in international funding and cooperation to support national and regional efforts.
- Ensuring good governance of the Fund’s programme and resources, negotiating with member States issues related to UNFPA programmes, mobilizing resources for funding programmes, ensuring up-to-date management of the Fund, which included undertaking a change management process.
- Introduced a special programme on Gender, Culture, and Human Rights which focused on the role of culture, including religion, in development, with special reference to both the conflict and the resonance among the three development areas: gender, culture and human rights.

1998 – 2000 Director, Division for Arab States and Europe, UNFPA, New York.

Responsible for directing and managing UNFPA programmes in Arab States and Eastern Europe.

1993 - 1998 Deputy Executive Secretary, Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), Amman, Jordan and Beirut, Lebanon.

1992 – 1993 Chief, Social Development and Population Division, ESCWA, Amman, Jordan.

1986 – 1992 Senior Social Affairs Officer/Women and Development Programme Manager, ESCWA, Baghdad, Iraq, and Amman, Jordan.

1981– 1986 Social Affairs Officer/Programme Manager for Women and Development, ESCWA, Baghdad, Iraq.

1975 – 1980 Assistant/Associate Social Affairs Officer, Women and Development, ESCWA, Beirut, Lebanon.

VOLUNTEERING RESPONSIBILITIES AT CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS INTERNATIONALLY AND NATIONALLY

- 2020 – present Member, Honorary Board, Effat University, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia
- 2019 – present Member, Executive Board, Alnahda Association, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia
- 2016 – 2018 Member, Board of Trustees, **Dar Al Hekma University**, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.
- 2013 – Present Chair, Committee for Partners in Development Award, **King Khalid Foundation** , Riyadh.
- 2015 – Present Member, **Tomouh** (a network of young professionals from the GCC countries to support each other, provide exposure, recognition and mentoring and identify career opportunities). Also member of the Advisory Board for Tomouh, 2020.
- 2012 – 2019 Member of the Board of the **Kofi Annan Foundation**, Geneva, Switzerland.
- 2012 – 2017 Chair, Board of **Women Learning Partnership**, Maryland, USA.
- 1990 – 2019 Member, **Alnahda Women Association**, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

OTHER PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES AT INTERNATIONAL LEVEL

- 2020 Member, High Level Committee to Evaluate and Select Candidates for “Qiyadat Global Georgetown” Women’s’ Leadership Program.
- 2016 – 2018 Member, The Kofi Annan Foundation.
- 2017 – 2018 Member, Steering Committee for the publication, “*Long Walk of Peace: Towards a Culture of Prevention*”, by UNESCO and Abat Oliba University CEU.
- 2012 – 2018 Leadership mentor, **United Nations System Staff College**, Turin, Italy.
- 2006 – 2008 Chair of the **High-level Committee on Management of the United Nations System**, Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB). The Committee is the principal United Nations inter-agency body for coordinating administrative and management matters, especially in relation to financial, human resources, information and communications technology.
- 1996 – 1998 Represented Secretary-General in **United Nations Relief Works Agency Provident Fund** (For Palestinian staff at UNRWA).
- 1997 Member, **United Nations Strategic Framework Mission to Afghanistan**.

- 1996 Member, **United Nations Inter-Agency Gender Mission to Afghanistan.**
- 1996 Chair, **Inter-agency Task Force on Gender**, Amman, Jordan.
- 1989 – 1990 **Coordinator, ESCWA Group on Women.**
- 1984 – 1990 Member, **Editorial Board** of *Journal of Arab Women*.
- 1984 - 1985 Member, **Working Group for Formulating the Arab Strategy for Social Development**, League of Arab States.

AWARDS AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- **2015 UN Population Award**, United Nations Headquarters, New York, USA, 24 June 2015.
- **2013 Medal of King Abdul Aziz of the First Degree**, granted by King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud, the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, for her international work.
- **2013 Women of the Year at Janadriya** Heritage and Cultural Festival.
- **2011 Grand Cordon of the Order of the Rising Sun**, the highest honour bestowed by the Emperor of Japan to non-nationals, for service to humanity and promoting the Saudi Arabia - Japan relations.
- **2011 Union Medal by the Union Theological Seminary**, the highest honour bestowed by the institution and the first Muslim to receive this award.
- **2011 and 2014 Rated among 50 most powerful Arab Women by Forbes Magazine.**
- **2010 Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) Award** for Lifetime Achievement in Women's Empowerment.
- **2009 Louis B. Sohn Human Rights Award**, United Nations Association of the National Capital Area (UNA-NCA), Washington D.C.
- **2009 Recognition Award**, International Federation of Gynecology & Obstetrics.
- **2008 Distinguished Alumni Award**; Wayne State University, in recognition of outstanding achievement and service.
- **2006 Profiled as one of 100 Muslim Builders of World Civilization and Culture in Notable Muslims**, an Oxford-published book by Natana DeLong-Bas, Deputy Editor for The Encyclopedia of the Islamic World and editor for The Oxford Dictionary of Islam.
- **2005 Order of Dionisio de Herrera for Service to Humanity**, for supporting the integration of a course on the protection of women victims of domestic violence in the curriculum of all police training institutions in Honduras.
- **2004 Honorary Doctor of Laws degree, Kwansai Gakuin University, Kobe, Japan**, for contributions to the advancement of culture.
- **2003 Second Century Award for Excellence in Health Care**, Columbia University, New York. Granted for leadership in advancing health care for women around the world and dedication to empowering women and furthering their reproductive rights to improve their health.
- **2003 Pedro Joaquin Chamorro Award**, highest honour by Nicaragua's Parliament or President.

- **2003 Medal and Key to the City of Managua, Nicaragua**, given by the Mayor of the City of Santiago of Managua, for notable work on behalf of peace and development and her very important work to help extremely poor populations.
- **May 2002 Honorary Doctor of Laws Degree, Mills College, Oakland, California**, for commitment to serving people in developing countries to achieve basic education, health and economic opportunities.
- **March 2002 Global Philanthropy Forum: Borderless Giving**, in recognition of her contribution to the Forum.
- **May 2002 George P. Younger Award by the Committee of Religious Non-Governmental Organizations at the United Nations**, for courage in bringing culture and religion into United Nations dialogue.
- **July 2001 Award from Wagner School of Public Health, New York University**, for outstanding commitment to global public service.

PUBLICATIONS, LECTURES, MEETINGS AND INTERVIEWS

- Over the 35 years of career with the United Nations, I presented many papers for conferences, governmental and non-governmental meetings, workshops and related events at the regional and international levels. They were part of my responsibilities during my tenure as UN official and thus I have not included them in the list below.
- However, what I consider to be the most important contribution was my initiative on the relationship between gender, culture and human rights, where the latter two clash over issues related to gender and the empowerment of women. I presented a number of papers and lectures on the subject. UNFPA introduced the cultural perspective in its development programme, under a special programme: Gender Culture and Human Rights. It was greatly appreciated by developing countries and was funded by some of the European member States.
- Since my retirement from the United Nations as of 1 January 2011, I have returned to Saudi Arabia, where I devoted my personal time to mentoring young women through what I called “inter-generational dialogue”. It is a learning experience for both generations, as I discover the young people in my country and learn from their own personal and professional experiences the social changes that are taking place in the country and they dialogue with me on lessons learned from my long experience. As well, I am active in various conferences, interviews, and discussion groups related to development within the country. More often I spoke out of notes rather than fully written text. Below are some examples of these varied speeches, lectures and interviews.
- “Pathways into Politics,” Dialogue with Young Muslim Politicians in the UK, organized by Looking Forward on behalf of The Helsinki Policy Forum, 11 February 2021.
- “Inclusion in Power: key factors for a worldwide sustainable economic growth,” Seminar organized by the Embassy of Saudi Arabia, Italy, 18 November 2020.
- “Dialogue with Lia G. Betrami, Producer of film ‘Wells of Hope’ on fate of Syrian female refugees,” Women, Faith and Diplomacy Dialogue, organized by Religions for Peace, 12 November 2020.
- “the Role of Women in Building Saudi Society,” Seminar organized by the Embassy of Saudi Arabia, Australia, 26 October 2020.

- “Statement to the First G20 Anti-Corruption Ministerial Meeting on Women and Corruption,” 22 October 2020.
- W20 Presidency Opening Remarks for the Women 20 Summit, 21 October 2020.
- “Change can only come from Inside” Comments at the Panel on “Disaster Risk Reduction, at Interfaith Forum convened by King Abdallah bin Abdulaziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue (KAICIID) and the UN Alliance of Civilization, 13 – 17 October 2020.
- “Statement to the Youth 20 Panel: Building Bridges and Breaking Barriers- Youth and the G20,” 15 October 2020.
- “Closing Remarks” IE University and UNWOMEN Forum on Innovative Financing and Women’s Empowerment, 8 October 2020.
- Panelist, The Good Trade Summit, Panel on Gender and Trade: Women and Trade at the Heart of the Pandemic Recovery, 7 October 2020.
- Panelist, The Elders: In Conversation on Women in Mediation, Session 14 on Going Forward, 7 October 2020.
- Panelist, Accenture and B20 Designing The Future of Work and Education Forum, Panel on Building a Future Workplace that our sons and daughters can thrive”, 5 October 2020.
- Panelist, Panel on Gender and International Public Policy, convened virtually by BRICS countries, Moscow, 24 September 2020.
- Opening Statement, “The Economic Implications of COVID-19 on Women,” convened by the Helsinki Policy Forum: Women Parliamentarian Network, 27 July 2020.
- Lead Discussant, Building Back Better: the ongoing fight for gender equality, convened by Organization for Economic and Development (OECD), 26 June 2020.
- Welcoming Remarks, Gender and Crisis Recovery: building back better, convened by European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), 25 June 2020.
- Remarks, Arab States Regional Dialogue on Women’s Complimentary Leadership during Covid-19 Pandemic in the Arab State’s Region, convened by UN Women, 25 June 2020.
- Keynote Speech, Global Solutions Summit, 7 May 2020.
- Keynote Speaker, Implications of the COVID-19 Pandemic for Humanitarian Crises and Vulnerable Communities, convened by the Helsinki Policy Forum, 27 March 2020.
- Asbar, Population Policies of Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: the International, Gulf and National Dimensions, *Multaqa Asbar* (Journal), 5 January 2020.
<http://multaqaasbar.com/issue-weeks/%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%b3%d9%8a%d8%a7%d8%b3%d8%a7%d8%aa-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%b3%d9%83%d8%a7%d9%86%d9%8a%d8%a9-%d9%84%d9%84%d9%85%d9%85%d9%84%d9%83%d8%a9-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%b9%d8%b1%d8%a8%d9%8a%d8%a9-%d8%a7%d9%84/>
- Statement “Empowering People to Change Themselves” , Kofi Annan Faith Briefings, convened by the Multi-Faith Advisory Council of the UN Interagency Taskforce on Religion and Development, 15 July 2019.
- Commission on Human Rights Celebration of International Women’s Year, Riyadh, 7 March 2019.

- ARAMCO Celebration of International Women’s Day, “Inspiring Generations Panel” with Shura Council Member Mrs. Hoda Alhelaissi, 5 March 2019.
- King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Centre, Workshop on Child Soldiers, Riyadh, 6 March 2019.
- ARAMCO Celebration of International Women’s Year, Dhahran, 5 March 2019.
- “Women in International Conventions”, Conference on Empowerment of Women within the Context of Saudi Arabia 2030 Vision, 11 – 13 February 2019.
- Panel on Women Empowerment and Gender Equality, World Tolerance Summit, Dubai, 16 November 2018.
- United Nations System Staff College (UNSSC), “Women Leadership in the UN: reflections and observations.” Cairo, 11 – 15 November 2018
- King Abdallah Petroleum Studies and Research Center (KAPSARC), moderated interview, Riyadh, 29 April 2018.
- Ministry of Civil Service and United Nations in Saudi Arabia Project on “Gender Balance in Civil Service”, Member of Technical Team, August 2017 – April 2018.
- “Challenges for Women in Civil Service in Saudi Arabia,” Opening Workshop of the Ministry of Civil Service and United Nations in Saudi Arabia Project on “Gender Balance in Civil Service”, 24 September, 2017.
- Saudi Arabian British Bank (SABB), Springboard Women’s Development Programme, Riyadh, 8 November 2017.
- “Inter-generational dialogue with the Female Students of King Abdul Aziz University, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, 13 October 2016.
- “Fourth Industrial Revolution,” Closing Statement of National Initiative for Creativity, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, 29 May 2016.
- “In Memory: Prince Saud Alfaisal,” Commemoration of Prince Saud Alfaisal, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, 24 April 2016.
- “Peace and Security, British Dutch School, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, 1 December 2015.
- “Globalization and ‘The Other’”, UN Population Award Speech, United Nations Headquarters, New York, USA, 24 June 2015.
- “Thoraya Obaid: Member of Shura,” Interview by Entrepreneurs Magazine, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, 31May 2015.
- ARAMCO Women in Leadership 2014 Programme, Dhahran, 7 December 2014.
- “Women: Celebration and Challenges”, International Women’s Day, Diplomatic Women’s Club, Organization of Islamic Cooperation, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, March 2014.
- “Sharing My Experience”, The Sunday Meeting (of professional women), Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, 29 September 2013.
- “Acceptance Speech for the King Abdul Aziz Medal of the First Degree,” 18 May 2013.
- “Interview of the Month: With her long experience at the UN, she worried about the future of women,” Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, Almohtawa, September 2011.

- “Non-Profit Institutions Support to Development: examples from different countries,” Development Dialogue 2010, King Khalid Foundation, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, posted 2 May 2011. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6N3SNI1eKFY&list=TLB0fTNldf9Tc>.
- “Acceptance Remarks, Distinguished Alumni Award”, Wayne State University, 22 May 2008.
- “Culture and Development: It is the ‘how’ and not the ‘why’ and ‘what’, Swiss Center for Development Cooperation, 13 December 2005.
- “Population and Reproductive Health: Culture and Religion Matter”, Indonesia, 12 November 2005. <http://www.unfpa.org/news/population-and-reproductive-health-culture-and-religion-matter>.
- Discussant, “Meeting of Faith & Development Leaders,” Hosted by James D. Wolfensohn, President of The World Bank, Lord George Carey, former Archbishop of Canterbury and Archbishop Diarmuid Martin, 31 January – 1 February 2005.
- “Education and Leadership”, Graduation Speaker, Mills College, 11 May 2002.