

Jean-Robert Pitte, President of Paris Sorbonne (Paris IV) – President of Paris Sorbonne Abu Dhabi

Honorable Ministers, Excellencies, Rector, dear Friends,

It gives me very great pleasure to address you before Deputy Dassault's speech to honor Pascal Renouard de Vallière in this forum which does not usually welcome in this fashion someone who is neither of the university world or a *honoris causa* doctor. But our friend, Pascal, has a rightful place here for a reason known to some of you, but which I would like to briefly describe.

I met Pascal Renouard de Vallière in this very place in 2004, if I remember correctly, in the Sorbonne's courtyard, when Pascal was accompanying Their Excellencies, I believe on the occasion of an important visit by Mrs. Moubarak, Suzanne Moubarak, who came to give a lecture in our Paris Sorbonne University.

Our friend Pascal found the Sorbonne beautiful, a great institution, and he said, "Wouldn't you like to export the Sorbonne to one of the countries I know in the Middle East?" This proposal surprised me somewhat, as you can imagine. We then met a number of times and the story unfolded, in Pascal's fashion, at many times unexpectedly and not at all according to academic traditions, as you can imagine if you know him even slightly. But it happened, and the results are historic. There is someone in the room I would like to acknowledge, who played a major role at the time and still does, our benefactor and guardian angel, His Excellency Ambassador Al Aryani, Ambassador for the United Arab Emirates. In 2005, we signed for our University Paris Sorbonne in Abu Dhabi, a university celebrating its 750th birthday this year, culminating in a great ceremony to be held on December 14th.

Our university now has a branch in the United Arab Emirates, in Abu Dhabi, and its instigator, alongside His Excellency Ambassador Al Aryani, is Pascal Renouard de Vallière.

Today, Paris-Sorbonne-Abu Dhabi is starting its second university year with 250 students from 39 countries, a good third of whom are students from the United Arab Emirates. We teach the humanities, as we do here; the same teaching, the same professors who travel to Abu Dhabi, the same programs, the same diplomas, a non-religious, gender-blind university, where the liberty to think reigns and the library is open to all.

The Sorbonne in the Latin Quarter is the same as the Sorbonne in the Middle East, with ideal working conditions. And I believe it is a place that illustrates rather well the personality of Pascal Renouard de Vallière whose business card reads, if I am correct; "Consultant in International Relations". On the front of the building in which we currently operate, we have inscribed "a bridge between civilizations", and it is indeed a beautiful bridge between civilizations. We are very grateful to Pascal for what he has done and for this reason, he is truly in his rightful place here, at the center of this forum, under the fresco of Puvis de Chavanne.