

# **FAMILY PHILANTHROPY RETREAT : “MAKING A DIFFERENCE AND ACHIEVING GREATER PERSONAL FULFILLMENT”, LOEDSTAR – GENEVA,**

**Speech by Dr Leila Mezian Benjelloun  
President, BMCE Bank Foundation**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted to have the opportunity to speak about a personal and meaningful topic, close to my heart and heritage: the innovative model of construction and management of rural community schools, and its use of the Kingdom’s most ancient language, almost 4,000 years old, the Amazigh, which is also the name given to the original inhabitants of North Africa.

Allow me to briefly touch upon my background. Initially, my training has been as a Medical doctor with a specialty in ophthalmology, which I have practiced for about 25 years.

At the outset, I devoted my efforts to another passion: Education. It was within the Benjelloun-Mezian Foundation we set up, to provide scholarships for young Moroccan students worldwide, as well as to preserve our national heritage through restoring national monuments.

We believe our nation’s cultural heritage and education, extremely important to us, are interconnected.

We thought I could personally be even more involved in these domains by joining BMCE Bank Foundation. The Foundation had closely examined the issue of education, rampant illiteracy and related issues. It led us to clear choices: to intervene in Rural Areas where unmet needs were the highest, targeting the most disadvantaged remote regions of Morocco, and to focus on preschool and primary education.

In partnership with the Moroccan Ministry of Education and international strategic partners, we developed the Medersat.com school model as an integrated sustainable development program. Rarely before have we witnessed such a close relationship between the public authorities and a member of civil society in Morocco.

We had the conviction that the premise in fighting illiteracy or academic difficulties, is that children be taught in their mother tongue. Indeed, it is a way to equip them with the best foundation for their education. Moreover, the native skills they learn are an extension of their natural environment and a way to preserve their culture, while also improving their ability to learn other languages, thus opening doors to global society.

Our Foundation introduced Amazigh into the education system for the first time in the modern history of Morocco and in North Africa, and for 3 years now, Amazigh has been taught in our schools.

We developed a series of Amazigh instructional materials, which use the Berber’s traditional Tifinagh alphabet. We’ve also edited the first Amazigh school manuals ever in Morocco and we’re currently translating pre-school manuals.

Until the advent of the BMCE Bank Foundation program, Moroccan children of Amazigh heritage were unable to receive classroom instruction in their mother tongue.

Behind this major initiative, together with leading specialized researchers, in Morocco and abroad, were militants and advocates. I am honored to count myself among them.

Last year, the status of the language officially changed under the aegis of His Majesty the King of

Morocco, as he set up the Royal Institute of Amazigh Culture, for the promoting and safeguard of Berber culture and language, as an integral part of the heritage of all Moroccans.

Our Foundation's innovative approach spurred the Ministry of Education to begin teaching Amazigh on a pilot basis in the public school system.

I personally feel privileged to be living and contributing to this "history in the making", as a Member of the Royal Institute of Amazigh Culture.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

For us at BMCE Bank Foundation, and beyond, as a family credo, we consider investment in human capital, particularly in youth, as the most profitable of all investments. Its dividends can, indeed, be measured at any time in these children's faces and through their academic performance. Now and surely in 10 or 15 years down the road.

By building a school, our belief is that we sow the best of seeds in the fields of cooperation, mutual understanding and friendship between peoples.

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