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DR. MAMDOUH SHOUKRI
PRESIDENT AND VICE-CHANCELLOR OF YORK UNIVERSITY

ADDRESS TO THE TORONTO REGION BOARD OF TRADE

Canada's Social Innovation Opportunity:
Extending the Impact of Investment in Research

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CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Today, I'd like to discuss a subject that is close to all of us here, and one that is vital to Canada's social and economic future.

That subject is social innovation, and the potential it carries to transform our products, processes, services, our communities, and indeed, our very way of thinking.

Social Innovation: An Integrated Model of Innovation

But first, we need to understand what we mean by innovation—a term that has become the buzzword of this new century.

Innovation is the process of identifying and enacting new or better ways of doing valued things. Since the 1990s, to many of us, innovation referred to a business model, emphasizing how knowledge in science, engineering and medicine is deployed to create economic value. In this regard, we have become familiar with terms like commercialization and technology transfer.

But I think the traditional focus on tech transfer misses the opportunity to find and share value from research in the humanities, social sciences and the arts, as well. The value created by deploying research results in these areas enhances social services, public policy development, the well-being of communities, and is a key driver for economic and social development.

As Chad Gaffield, President of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), has noted, the old distinctions between "business innovation" and "social innovation" are fading, and a new integrated model of innovation is emerging.

So, I would like to challenge what has been the conventional definition of innovation by calling for a consideration of a broader spectrum of knowledge as being equally important for deploying knowledge for the benefit of society, and thus representing a broader value to society.

What exactly do we mean by social innovation? To quote one reputable source, the *Stanford University Centre for Social Innovation*:

> "A social innovation is a novel solution to a social problem that is more effective, efficient, sustainable, or just than present solutions, and for which the value created accrues primarily to society as a whole rather than private individuals."

One thing this definition overlooks, of course, is that the value generated by innovation may accrue to private individuals or entities as well.

Social innovation is sometimes seen, wrongly in my opinion, as limited to using knowledge to enhance social services. What is good for society is *also* good for the economy—and this is increasingly being recognized by some of the world's largest corporations.

That is why many of these corporations are moving their commitment to social responsibility from a marginal activity into a core business driver. Today, the most successful businesses and organizations are fostering cultures of innovation within their

operations and collaborating with research partners to improve products, services and processes.

Even in the areas of technology transfer, incorporating social innovation moves the focus from simple lab-to-market transfer to technology as a human phenomenon. This encompasses the human and social context of using new technologies.

Another case for the growing importance of social innovation is the growth of our service sector. A 2008 report by the Impact Group shows that Canada's service sector generates 69% of all economic activities, accounting for more than $88 billion of the GDP. In other words, our economy is becoming both a knowledge-based and a service-based economy—a reality which necessitates robust research and innovation to support both sectors.

To summarize these points, social innovation is now being considered:
- a new strategy for social and economic development;
- a new business paradigm;
- and a new societal and governmental priority.

In this sense, the social innovation model is inherently a collaborative one; it is built on partnerships (for example, the community-industry-university collaboration), and grounded by a triple bottom-line: benefit to society, environment, and economy—or "people, planet and profit."

One interesting example is that of Unilever, a company that has moved social benefit from a marginal corporate social responsibility mandate to a core business driver. Unilever makes and sells soap. But they have recently partnered with governments and NGOs in Vietnam and Uganda to promote clean water and hand washing as means of addressing dysentery and other water-borne diseases. The result is that as hand washing increases, Unilever sells more soap [*core business driver*], and water-borne diseases are reduced [*social benefit*].

Social innovation and social enterprise aren't new. Canadian universities have been active in these areas for over thirty years. But these have been individualized activities; provincially and nationally, we have lacked a coherent framework to enable these activities.

Our twenty-first century emphasis on social innovation is broadening the previous century's thinking about the value of applied research, technology transfer, and commercialization.

As our thinking about innovation evolves, so too does the scope and impact of our innovations.

As I've noted, over the last two decades, science and technology and related innovations have fostered national and global relationships through research hubs and innovation networks. International partnerships are now necessary for innovation and for the advancement of science and technology. As a result, science and technology continue to be considered major mechanisms for socio-economic development.

But how else is knowledge being mobilized? What other kinds of research collaborations and community partnerships are our universities developing? And what are the key contributions of other disciplines to the social innovation enterprise, such as business, health, law, humanities, and social sciences?

Researchers from all disciplines are increasingly interacting with companies, governments, and communities seeking to develop new products and services as well as improved processes within their own operations.

Many Canadian companies are introducing initiatives on the economic impact of social innovation. While Canada has examples of individual enterprises, we also have many initiatives and assets supporting social innovation. These include, in our own region, York's Community BUILD (with ventureLAB and United Way York Region), the Solutions Lab at MaRS, and Ryerson's Digital Media Zone.

Social innovation is increasingly becoming a provincial and federal governmental priority as well as an emerging direction in the postsecondary education sector. The Council of Ontario Universities (COU) issued a report on Ontario's social enterprise strategy this fall, and SSHRC's Connection program funds grants that create opportunities for collaborations between universities and partners, including its Partnership Grants and Partnership Development Grants, which provide funding to foster new research and to support new or existing research partnerships and initiatives.

Social innovation has also become a priority for the current Governor General of Canada, David Johnston, who has initiated the Governor General's Community-Campus Collaboration Initiative (CCCI), a collaborative comprised of a pan-Canadian organization committed to supporting collaborations between our academic and community sectors. York's Vice-President of Research and Innovation, Dr. Robert Haché, sits on the Executive Leadership Committee for this collaborative and Dr. David Phipps, Executive Director of Research & Innovation Services at York, is on the working group.

How Universities are Mobilizing Knowledge for Social Benefit

How are Canadian universities responding to this emerging social innovation landscape?

Today, universities are increasingly creating value by finding new ways to address persistent social, economic and environmental challenges. Canadian universities and colleges are the primary producers of new knowledge and new talent for Canada's innovation systems.

Individual faculty members and their partners have a long tradition of supporting social innovation in partnership with the public, private and non-profit sectors; however, the response of Canada's academic institutions has been *ad hoc,* and pan-Canadian frameworks are only now beginning to emerge.

As always throughout their history, universities respond to the needs of society.

Today, we are seeing universities come to the table to enable a broader conversation and to develop institutional models or systems for social innovation. This was highlighted recently in a Special Report in *The Globe and Mail* on research partnerships between universities and industry.

One important change for universities and colleges involves the decision to complement their investments in technology transfer offices with investments in Knowledge Mobilization Units. The mechanism universities use to maximize the impact of university research is knowledge mobilization (KMb), which enables social innovation.

Social innovation creates opportunities for universities to interact with the economy beyond our graduates moving into labour markets and traditional tech transfer or commercialization efforts. These new opportunities are also reflected in the growth of community-campus collaborations, which I will speak about in a moment.

Simply put, we must acknowledge that while pure science and tech is important, there are now, more than ever, broad and complex societal issues that cannot be addressed by the standard research practices that occur in university labs and incubators across the country. We definitely still need these standard practices—but we also need more.

York University, in tandem with the MaRS centre, wrote a paper in 2012 titled "Knowledge Mobilization and Social Innovation," and in it the authors wrote:

> "There is clearly a need for the development of a new paradigm to provide investment in infrastructure for social innovation that is on par with that given to technological and scientific innovation" (5).

York is investing in and developing this new paradigm for leveraging investments in higher education research and development to maximize impacts on the triple bottom line.

The York Model

York University is a leader in mobilizing research—a process whereby the research that our students and faculty undertake has practical and tangible uses outside the classroom so that it directly impacts the community.

York is a leader in social innovation and knowledge mobilization, historically, in the areas of social sciences and humanities; increasingly, in the fields of business, law, health, engineering, and environmental studies.

York's historic strength in these disciplines, combined with a longstanding commitment to social justice, enabled us to be active in social innovation at a very early stage. This is particularly reflected in our community–campus collaborations in research and in the deployment of our research results.

As such, York is taking a leadership position in driving social innovation in Canada.

Four important factors have combined to account for our strength in social innovation:
    i. Academic excellence
    ii. Our location
    iii. The diversity of our population
    iv. Core value of social responsibility

These factors have combined to result in two important aspects of our contributions to the social innovation landscape: a local, grass-roots approach, including our community-campus collaborations; and our global vision and strong research networks.

Our unique research collaborations have scientific and technological impact, and our 288 international partnerships help students think bigger, broader and more globally.

In addition to our global outlook, York has adopted a multidisciplinary approach to postsecondary education that fosters entrepreneurship with the private sector.

Through a series of partnered collaborations, York's Knowledge Mobilization Unit has worked with 231 community and government organizations in York Region and the GTA, including**:**

- the United Way York Region: our primary community partner and a key supporter of collaborative community solutions.

- TD Community Engagement Centre: a teaching, research and resource centre located in the Yorkgate Mall at Jane and Finch that is committed to community-based research.

- and Community BUILD, a social enterprise support model for the York Region. York University is partnering with ventureLAB and United Way York Region to mobilize existing assets into a coordinated system of support for social entrepreneurs in the York Region.

As these examples suggest, an important space for social innovation is in collaboration with the voluntary, not-for-profit sector. We see it as a key driver for social innovation.

According to a recent National Survey of Nonprofit and Voluntary Organizations undertaken by Imagine Canada, there are approximately 161,000 nonprofit and voluntary organizations in Canada. Collectively, these organizations report annual revenues of $112 billion and employ over 2 million people. When hospitals, universities and colleges are excluded, the sector has $75 billion in annual revenues and 1.3 million employees.

Social innovations can be developed by not-for-profit organizations adopting the discipline of entrepreneurship to find new ways of supporting individuals and communities.

Unmet social needs create economic burdens for Canada, so there is an economic opportunity of addressing unmet social opportunities in markets such as: at risk kids, poverty, immigration, homelessness, mental health and autism.

These markets exemplify the potential for social innovation in Canada, and its ability to create a return while also addressing unmet social needs.

Social Innovation @ York

The campus-community collaborations that we are developing at York are examples of social innovation in action. They build on our longstanding commitment to social responsibility and engagement with our local and global communities.

As an institution, over the next five years we will be looking to advance research and partnerships in five strategic areas:
- Digital cultures
- Engineering research that matters
- Healthy individuals and communities; global health
- Public engagement for a just and sustainable world
- Scholarship of socially engaged research

Let me highlight a few examples of research already underway that is being translated through social innovation.

Connected Health and Wellness Project: York's Faculty of Health is collaborating with 16 partners on a new people-centred, technology-enabled health and wellness system that incorporates e-health technology (i.e. cloud-based health information and health management software) and health coaching to promote healthy living.

Through this project, York will develop training and professional standards for the health coach profession, the first university in Canada to do so.

This pioneering $38 million dollar project (with $15.5 million from the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario) is an example of social innovation enabled by new technologies. By bringing together private sector, academic and not-for-profit partners, this project is addressing social and health issues, creating solutions, implementing those solutions and facilitating the creation of new jobs.

York's **Schulich School of Business** is ranked among the top business schools in the world and is consistently ranked as Canada's leading business school for programs in sustainability and social impact. Over the past two decades Schulich has developed leading research and teaching programs in Corporate Social Responsibility, Social Innovation and Social Entrepreneurship.

Schulich is home to the Centre of Excellence in Responsible Business, the Canadian Business Ethics Research Network, and we recently launched a new Centre of Global Enterprise—a dynamic hub of research, teaching, and consulting to support and encourage small and medium-sized enterprises in Canada to think big, create robust business networks, and look beyond our borders in order to compete on the world stage.

Our Faculty of Liberal Arts & Professional Studies, Osgoode Hall Law School, and our new Lassonde School of Engineering are also leading multidisciplinary social innovation initiatives in their fields.

The Way Forward: A National Strategy for Innovation

All across the country, universities are embracing a more integrated innovation model by complementing their technology transfer offices with knowledge mobilization units, and incorporating the transfer of knowledge from the social sciences, humanities and arts to benefit economic and social development.

University researchers are responding by taking their results: (i) into the communities through community-campus collaborations, and (ii) nationally and internationally through research networks.

The size and continuing growth of the social service sector represents an ideal opportunity for social innovation. As such, social innovation can have significant positive social, economic and environmental impact on Canadian society.

Many private sector companies as well as manufacturing and technology firms are embracing social innovation as a core business driver. They are addressing growing markets for social innovation in areas such as poverty, mental health, immigration, and many others.

The not-for-profit sector is also recognizing the role of innovation and enhancing the effectiveness and efficiency of their services.

Despite the incredible potential and impact of social innovation, we continue to lack a national framework to unleash the true potential of research in Canada.

To address this, York University is leading an initiative called ResearchImpact, which is exploring how to turn research in the social sciences and humanities into reality. An initiative co-founded by York and the University of Victoria, ResearchImpact is a consortium of 10 Canadian universities across the country seeking federal government support of the infrastructure for a national network in social innovation.

I would note that the federal government, through its commitment to social innovation, has shown leadership in advancing the potential of social partnerships and social finance and impact investing initiatives on the social and economic development of Canada. We need to encourage the government's critical role as a catalyst in filling gaps in the innovation funding pipeline.

York is also in discussion with a number of companies to develop a private sector advisory group for social innovation, and have initiated discussions with Unilever, Bullfrog Power, Power Stream, Hewlett Packard and IBM.

With support from government and the private sector, Canadian universities can continue to be agents of change and dynamic global players—mobilizing knowledge, advancing prosperity, and helping to brand our country around the world.

By supporting research collaborations between the postsecondary education sector and other sectors, and by leveraging our universities' contributions to knowledge mobilization and social innovation, we can assert Canada's competitive advantage and our continued leadership in the global economy.

Conclusion

Everyone is talking about innovation, but can we move beyond platitudes and buzzwords to make innovation happen? Can we step outside our sectoral silos and truly collaborate?

Social innovation through knowledge mobilization involves connecting university research and expertise to government and community agencies to help organizations make better informed decisions about public policy and social services.

Done right, it can transform communities.

But the benefit is hardly one-sided. Engaging communities through knowledge mobilization initiatives is an important facet of university research. It keeps our research honest; it requires us to be relevant.

In calling for a national strategy to advance Canadian prosperity and competitiveness, I hope I have made a case for social innovation as an integral part of that strategy.

Given the excellence of our research across disciplines and the growing strength of our partnerships, Canada is ideally positioned to lead the world as a model of twenty-first century innovation.

Thank you.