MAMDOUH SHOUKRI
PRESIDENT AND VICE-CHANCELLOR, YORK UNIVERSITY

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CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Good evening—it's wonderful to be here with you tonight. As Mitch noted, it is truly a great honour for Canada to host this event this year. It is also an excellent opportunity to share best practices and build partnerships with thought leaders and economic and policy leaders throughout the hemisphere.

I know you will be hearing from a variety of speakers as you tour the region over the coming days, and I may be biased, but I think it is very appropriate that this conversation is beginning here in Toronto, which is:

- one of the most diverse and culturally vibrant cities in the world;
- one of the largest financial centres in North America;
- the fourth most livable city in the world according to the most recent annual livability index (*The Economist* Intelligence Unit, August 2016);
- and an epicenter of innovation—in tech, fintech, with major strengths in health, safety, security and sustainability.

Toronto is, by any definition, on its way to becoming one of the world's 'smart cities'—a topic that is increasingly receiving attention in all regions of the world, not only in terms of the need to support innovation ecosystems but also in terms of creating efficiencies, economic growth, jobs, and enhancing the quality of life and services for citizens.

As a university president, I am obviously well-positioned to tell you about the tremendous intellectual capital in the city, which is driving and catalyzing innovation in the region, including at my own York University, which is home to Canada's top-ranked business school, the Schulich School of Business; our new Lassonde School of Engineering, which last week hosted the Governor of Utah and a trade mission delegation to Canada who were here to learn more about advanced technology and entrepreneurship in higher education; and a new Institute for Global Health, which will be a hub for international dialogue and collaboration in health innovation research and teaching.

I will be brief, but would like to say a few words about changes I have seen in the thinking around innovation, the regional context for innovation and entrepreneurship, and how this may relate to what is happening across the hemisphere and in the broader global context.

The Research and Innovation Enterprise

I have been thinking about innovation for a long time, and over that time have noted a change in focus and even in terminology. There has been a shift in focus over the last two decades or so, moving away from a concern around 'productivity' to an emphasis on 'innovation' and, more recently, as we have seen here in Canada, to ensuring that considerations around 'inclusivity' are included in a national 'innovation agenda.'

Toronto's mayor John Tory and other mayors in the region, along with a number of other influential voices, have been calling for an innovation strategy and the need to support strong, dynamic innovation ecosystems, locally, regionally and nationally.

For innovation to truly have an impact, you need scale, as we have seen in Silicon Valley, in Boston, and in other innovation epicenters. If you look at this region (Waterloo, and across to northern Toronto, down to Hamilton, and across to the Niagara Region), there are innovation hubs of differing degrees of evolution in terms of human capacity, research capacity and infrastructure—those that are thriving and successful (i.e. MaRS) and those that are still evolving (i.e. Markham).

Referred to by many as the Toronto-Waterloo Innovation Corridor, there is tremendous potential in this area to better integrate these hubs so that their impact is much greater—and by better connecting all of this talent, technology, research and industry, we could better serve the province, the country and the world in terms of economic growth and prosperity.

Building an Innovation Region: Criteria and Characteristics

So, how do we do this? What are the necessary criteria to build an innovation region? What are the characteristics that make innovation regions successful? And how is this regional context relevant to the hemisphere and to the broader global context and considerations?

First, we need smart cities. We need to harness emerging technologies and support mission-driven research to grow competitiveness and innovation within our urban centers.

Second, we need to create pipelines or pathways to mobilize talent and knowledge, and this is where higher education can play a critical role in innovation ecosystems.

Universities help to grow talent pools, supporting big ideas as well as entrepreneurial approaches and opportunities (such as start-ups) for students through experiential learning. They equip graduates with the skills needed in an increasingly globalized environment—this is why both broad-based education as well as professionally relevant programs are important.

Third, we need to create pathways for industry to access the full innovation capacity of our universities, as well as more opportunities (such as internships or work-integrated learning) for university graduates to access industry.

Finally, let's not forget governments' role. To truly support innovation, bold, ambitious government strategies are needed that set priorities and targets, and assign accountabilities. Governments need to support knowledge and innovation hubs in real terms by aligning efforts, incentives, programs, and policies that facilitate rather than deter collaboration.

Ideally, governments are not simply funding or facilitating research, but conducting it as well. Public research institutions play an important role in innovation systems by ensuring the provision of new knowledge and to meet specific needs of national interest such as defence and public health.

An Example: York University-Markham Centre Campus

Let me give you one exciting example of an industry-government-university partnership and how it is supporting talent, innovation and economic growth in the region.

York University's Markham Centre Campus, which was selected among 13 other bids for support by the Ontario government, and which is slated to open in 2020, will be a 21st-century campus that will answer to key economic and innovation priorities in the region.

We have partnered with the City of Markham, the Regional Municipality of York and Seneca College to create what will be an urban, integrated campus in the vibrant and growing Markham Centre—in direct response to increasing demand for high-quality education in the region. In addition to the $45 million that York University is contributing, York Region is contributing $25 million, the City of Markham donated two hectares of land in downtown Markham, and Seneca College will offer joint programs.

With easy access to transit, major employers and research hubs, the York University Markham Centre campus will meet the evolving needs of the region by:

- offering diverse professionally relevant programs and workplace-based learning opportunities for more than 4400 students;
- fostering innovation to maximize regional impacts;
- helping to build up the community by forming partnerships, sharing knowledge and creating opportunities for commercialization and jobs to maximize research outcomes in areas such as entrepreneurship, health, IT, sustainability and social justice;
- and aligning with the needs of regional employers. York Region is projected to create 280,000 jobs from 2010 through 2030, so the Region's major economic clusters are vital to the success of Ontario's economy.

So this new campus will both benefit from and help to grow the significant economic clusters already present in York Region—including IT, life sciences and healthcare technologies, financial and insurance services, and clean tech.

We have been hearing a lot lately about the need for 'next-generation learning' (flipped classrooms, experiential education, etc), and the importance of knowledge mobilization and the knowledge economy to drive profitable innovation that will grow our local, regional and global economies.

More fundamentally, I think we also need to be asking what are the skills that will be needed in the future? How can universities adapt to anticipate those skills and ensure they are equipping students with them? This leads me to my final, concluding point.

Conclusion: A New Definition of Innovation

I believe we are starting to see a new definition of innovation emerging—one that includes notions of inclusion and integration, and that seeks to understand how we can break down existing barriers to unleash not only the fullest potential of industry, academia and government, but the fullest potential of each citizen and group so that all have access to and can contribute to the knowledge economy.

To create truly sustainable and successful innovation ecosystems or innovation regions, we need to do more than embrace disruption, or push the boundaries of discovery. We need to integrate a diversity of voices and perspectives. We need to be open to radically revaluating how we do things and be willing to change.

We need communities that are open to new gateways or pathways to innovation, new ways of doing things, and complex exchanges of ideas. The truly prosperous communities of the future will be inclusive and collaborative communities.

So, to summarize, I believe the fundamental criteria necessary to support an environment of competition and collaboration in this region—and in any region—include the presence of smart cities; strong universities with strong academic programs; large companies with global reach; services and infrastructure to support innovation and collaboration; governments to act as catalysts, funders/facilitators and performers of research; and a definition of innovation that is itself disruptive—one concerned less with profits, products or individual achievements and founded on the principles of sustainability, collaboration and inclusion.