



Having recently returned from a two-week visit to Egypt and Jordan with a small group of friends, I am reminded once again of the importance of person-to-person contacts in promoting

understanding and tolerance.

It was my first visit to these two countries. Yet, though I have traveled all over the world including the Middle East, I found myself fascinated by conversations about culture, society and religion with our guides, drivers, business owners and others we chanced along the way. It was clear that both sides – the Americans in my group and the diverse group of Egyptians and Jordanians we met – were the better for listening to what each other had to say.

These discussions made it clearer than ever to me that meeting people from different countries, backgrounds and experiences helps to counter the stereotypes that dull our judgment. One of the greatest strengths of the United States over the years has been its openness to the multitudes who have visited and studied here, and then returned home with a greater appreciation of this complicated country. This has helped reduce misunderstandings, mistrust, even hatred – the sad realities bred in every society by lack of empa-

thy for those who constitute “the other.”

Unfortunately, we have become far less welcoming to foreign visitors since 9/11. And while there are signs that this is starting to change, we need to move more aggressively to encourage the future leaders of the world to come here again.

One of the reasons we host the Milken Institute Global Conference each year is to bring together people of different nations, backgrounds and viewpoints so they may open their minds to new ideas and promising solutions to the planet’s greatest challenges. (And you don’t have to fly to exotic climes to partake – just come to Los Angeles for three days, April 28-30, 2008.)

Decision-makers from literally dozens of countries – business executives, politicians, investors, philanthropists and the like – attend. And as you sit at a table with a Nobel Prize winner from Chicago, an economics minister from Chile, a CEO from a French-based multinational and an investor from the Gulf, it will become all too obvious that we can learn a lot from one another.

Attendees come away with insights about how very different cultures see the world. And this, surely, promotes a more tolerant – and peaceful – world. I hope you can join us in April for this extraordinary event.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael Klowden". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping underline.

Michael Klowden  
President and CEO