My Move to Prairie View A&M University
By Mohamed Chouikha

In the fall of 2018 and after 30 years at Howard University in Washington DC, I joined Prairie View A&M University (PVAMU) located in Prairie view, a small city, outside of Houston, Texas. Change is always hard, no matter what type of change it is, and no matter where, when and how it happens. Moving from a university that I knew very well and that I loved and continue to love, to a University that I did not know much about (at the time) and to a place that I have never been was going to be hard, or so I thought. Fortunately, I was wrong. The warm welcome, friendship and respect I received from my new colleagues at PVAMU was unbelievable. The unconditional support of my friends at IEC was another blessing that got me through the difficult times during that period. So why am I in Texas? And what am I doing?

Prairie View A&M University, a member of Texas A&M system, received a grant under the Chancellor Research Initiative (CRI) program to develop research centers of excellence. One of these centers was the Cybersecurity Center of Excellence. PVAMU Vice President of Research and PI of this CRI proposal made me (and others) aware that his office is looking for someone to lead the center, and he encouraged us to apply.

About 9 or so years ago, 2 PhD students and I started working on two problems dealing with counterfeiting and tampering with electronic hardware. These and other related problems were of great interest to the DoD and other agencies/industries, so we did develop hardware security federally supported projects at Howard. Three years later we extended our research to include the topics of machine learning and applied cryptography to hardware security and trust. Finally, with the addition of Dr. Salmani, a hardware security expert, to the ECE faculty Howard became, in my best knowledge, the only HBCU with expertise in Hardware security. I plan to bring that expertise to Prairie View A&M University.

I was hired as the cybersecurity center executive director and chief scientist; and executive Professor. Simply put, I was asked to direct and strengthen the Cyber Security Research Center in the Electrical and Computer Engineering (ECE) Department, expand the research base of ECE Department, and the University by serving as a key collaborator for projects that involve secured complex systems. I was also asked to support the educational mission of the College of Engineering of the Prairie View A&M. I am planning to develop research programs in Cyber Physical Systems and hardware security. Another research project is to investigate the role Artificial intelligence will play in these areas. At the same time, I plan to extend cybersecurity education through the University by working with departments and colleges at PVAMU to develop cybersecurity curricula and outreach programs. As I mentioned in the beginning of this article change can be a challenge, it also can be an opportunity and as such it brings new positive energy and new goals. With the infinite optimism and drive of PVAMU students and the support of the IEC community, the future looks very bright.