



BMENA "Business Dialogue" Presentation

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 "Forum for the Future" Meeting
 Rabat, Morocco
 December 12, 2004

H.E Bin Eissa Foreign Minister of Morocco
 H.E Colin Powell, Secretary of State
 Excellencies, honorable guests, ladies and gentlemen:

Bonjour, assallaam aleikum, and good morning. It is an honor to have the opportunity to address you today.

On behalf of my colleagues of the BMENA region, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Government of Morocco, who is our host today. Thank you for your warm hospitality and excellent arrangements.

I have been selected to speak to you today by the Business Dialogue, a group of distinguished business leaders from the Arab World and the Broader Middle East. Unfortunately, Shafik Gabr, chairman of the Arab Business Council, who addressed many of you in New York, is unable to join us today as he has come down with the flu.

I'm pleased to be joined by my colleagues from Egypt and Morocco.

The business community of the region feels that the need for reform is real and the consequences of not taking this window of opportunity to reform are serious. It is very sad that the Man on the street in our part of the world believes that business is not on his side and does not represent his interests—and I am sure that many of you may also feel the same way. To the contrary, we in the BMENA region believe that the business community can serve as the compass and lead the way for reform in the region by promoting and encouraging (1) transparency, (2) rule of law, (3) openness, and (4) competition. Ladies and gentlemen, by doing this, we can increase the Pie many times over rather than fighting over the modest opportunity that exists presently in our region today. And by doing so, we will not only help ourselves, but we will provide opportunities for those who currently have none—the "Man on the Street."

Ladies and gentlemen: before I talk about what we the business community and you the governments need to do to accelerate reform, let me highlight some quick facts that demonstrate the "Time Bomb" that we face. This should encourage all of us to act forcefully together:

- | Average unemployment in the region is 15 percent—higher among the youth, where it's near 30 percent.
- | Imagine—just to maintain the present levels of unemployment, the region needs to create over 100 million jobs between now and 2017.
- | Unfortunately, productivity levels are some of the lowest in the world.
- | Again, just imagine—the combined GDP of the region is less than that of Spain.

While these challenges are daunting, they are not unachievable. Let me tell you about what we the business community of the Broader Middle East think needs to be done and how you the government leaders can help achieve this.

First—what the business dialogue is proposing to do.

Recently, Morocco was very kind once again to host the Arab Business Council annual meeting at the end of November, just a few weeks ago. The ABC opened its doors to the Broader Middle East business community and a representation of the G8 business community.

Several action items were agreed to at this meeting, which have been circulated to you this morning. I'm not going to go into the details, but to mention a few:

- | Number one, cooperate with the OECD investment initiative, which is chaired by Jordan, and hopefully, you will hear more about this from H.E, the Jordanian Minister this afternoon. A meeting was held in Paris on November 19th to agree that the Business Dialogue/ABC would help create an Investment Task Force to serve as a private sector advisory group.
- | It was also decided to continue to work with the Forum for the Future: We agreed that the Business Dialogue/ABC will work with the Forum, and we would like to really have a continuous engagement, with a role in the agenda, the process, and the outcome.
- | ABC has already launched a series of competitiveness councils: These councils will create awareness and support monitoring and benchmarking. The first council has already been launched in Egypt.

Now, let's talk about the responsibilities of the governments of our region and the G8 countries.

The business community definitely cannot stand alone to achieve these reforms and goals. From you, the governments, we require determined action in the following areas:

- | We the Business Dialogue would strongly urge the G8 and the countries of the region to work together to solve the long-outstanding conflicts of the region Fairly and Urgently. The Arab Israeli Conflict, The Kashmir Problem. Everyone knows that peace and stability are the basic requirements for Economic growth and prosperity.
- | Liberalization of trade and the removal of other barriers. This will promote investment and create opportunities for Young Entrepreneurs.
- | Develop human capital by investing in schools and universities. Not only do we need to invest money in our schools, but also to teach skills that are required in the modern workplace.
- | Finally, to build institutions that will earn the trust of the \$1 trillion of regional funds that are currently invested abroad "as we keep hearing." Let's be fair—these funds will only come back to the Region if we have "Strong Institutions": (1) fair courts, (2) transparent capital markets, and, most importantly, (3) accountable governments.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, this seems like a long, long road, but "WE CANNOT AFFORD TO FAIL". We in the Business Dialogue from BMENA Region look forward to working with you the government leaders to improve the conditions of "The Common Man On The Street."

Thank you very much for your time,