

Shared Challenges - Co-ordinated Solutions

THE TWO KINGDOMS DIALOGUE:

7-8 April 2009

The fourth meeting of the Two Kingdoms Dialogue took place in Riyadh 7-8 April. The UK delegation, led by former Foreign Office Minister, Baroness Symons, was made up of 25 representatives from business, government and academia. Members of the UK-Saudi Youth Forum also attended. The impressive participants on the Saudi side also ensured that a wide range of Saudi organisations, both public and private sector, were represented.

Given the current challenges facing the UK and Saudi Arabia, it was agreed that the focus of this year's conference should be the current global economic downturn and its effect on the Two Kingdoms.

In order to discuss some of the issues, a workshop to discuss trade and business flows between the two countries was held on 7 April. The workshop highlighted the challenges affecting companies in both countries and discussed possible solutions. The difficulties encountered when applying for visas to Saudi Arabia were raised. The UK side emphasised that the City of London is still very much open for business and ready to provide any expertise that may be useful to their Saudi counterparts.



The Saudi side were keen to highlight the many business opportunities that exist in the Kingdom.

At the plenary session held on 8 April, the recommendations from the workshop were reported to the Foreign Secretary and HRH Prince Saud Al Faisal. The Young Professionals Programme was also launched during the event.

The aim of this scheme is to provide an exchange programme for employees of UK and Saudi companies. Companies participating in the programme expect to see real benefits through the exchange of experience and expertise.

In addition to hearing from business leaders, the Foreign Ministers also had a session with the representatives of the UK-Saudi Youth Forum. They reported on the meeting of the Youth Forum in Jeddah and Riyadh in January and progress since then.

Following the meeting, feedback from participants has been hugely positive. And it confirms that the Two Kingdoms Dialogue continues to provide an opportunity to highlight the range of shared interests of both the UK and Saudi Arabia.

Young Professionals Programme

The Young Professionals Programme (YPP) was officially inaugurated in a ceremony at the Council of Saudi Chambers of Commerce & Industry (CSC) in April. The programme, which is a collaboration between the Arab-British Chamber of Commerce (ABCC) and the Council of Saudi Chambers of Commerce & Industry, under the auspices of the Saudi-British Joint Business Council (SBJBC), is set to launch in early May 2009. Sponsors include The Saudi British Business Council, British Offset, DLA Piper, HSBC, International Power, KPMG, Shell, Standard Chartered Bank, and Trowers & Hamlins.

Approximately 50 people, including prominent businessmen and women from the UK and Saudi Arabia who were in Saudi Arabia for the Kingdom to Kingdom Conference, attended the ceremony. Speeches highlighting the crucial role of young

professionals in today's economy were delivered by Secretary General of the ABCC Dr. Afnan Al Shuaiby and Chairman of the SBJBC Baroness Symons.

The initiative provides young Saudi and British professionals the opportunity to serve a limited term attachment in a company in the other country. The purpose of the programme is to provide participants with high quality practical work experience and the opportunity to make personal connections and gain cultural familiarity of the host country. At the end of the secondment, participating companies will report back to the ABCC and CSC to discuss progress of the programme. The British Council will serve as the contact point for UK participants in Saudi Arabia, while the Cultural Office of the Saudi Embassy in London will serve as the contact point for Saudi participants in the UK.