

Promoting British business with the Middle East and North Africa



While no region of the world has been completely immune from the fall out of the global economic crisis, the Middle East has been less affected than most, with the IMF predicting growth of over 5% in 2009 compared with the world average of 2.2%. As recession looms in the developed economies, British companies will increasingly look to develop their business with the region. Saudi Arabia, the region's powerhouse and the UK's largest single market in the Middle East and North Africa, is a market British business cannot afford to ignore, accounting for £1.9 billion in British visible exports in 2007.

The UK-based Middle East Association (MEA), with its unrivalled knowledge and business experience of the region, as well as its network of high level government and private sector contacts, plays a leading role in encouraging and assisting British companies to take advantage of the many opportunities on offer in Saudi Arabia, and in the wider Middle East/North Africa region. Widely recognised as the UK's foremost private sector organisation for promoting trade and good relations with the Middle East North Africa, Turkey and Iran, the MEA is an independent and non-profit making association founded in 1961, which represents some 400 large and small companies from all business and industry sectors who together account for an estimated 70% of UK trade with the region. The Patron of the Association is HRH The Duke of York, UK Special Representative for International Trade and Investment. Our strong support of Business Councils (including the Saudi British Joint Business Council) and excellent relationships with the UK Government and Arab Governments are widely recognised. Our membership is going from strength to strength, which reflects the energy that the MEA has put into developing relationships with the Middle East and North Africa, as well as the wide range of opportunities for British companies in the region.

MEA activities include conferences, seminars, trade missions, lunches and receptions with visiting Ministers from the region and Arab and UK Ambassadors, and publications. The MEA takes more businesses to the MENA region than any other organisation and continues to break new ground, having taken three missions to Northern Iraq in the last couple of years, and recently taking its first mission to Azerbaijan. Another new initiative is the launch of the MEA Women in Business Network which we are developing in co-operation with Women in Business International.

Key focus

Saudi Arabia is a key focus of MEA activities. Our annual one-day 'Opportunity Arabia' seminar on Saudi Arabia is now a well established London event attracting



Above: Michael Thomas, Director General MEA; Abdulmohsen Albadr, CEO, Global Competitiveness Forum; William Patey CMG, HM Ambassador to Saudi Arabia; John Sfakianakis, Chief Economist, SABB; Sir Alan Munro KCMG, Seminar Chairman at the MEA's 'Opportunity Arabia 5' seminar

top Saudi and British speakers from government and business. 'Opportunity Arabia 5', which took place on 28 August at 1 Great George Street, London, attracted around 250 delegates – an indication of the growing recognition of the enormous opportunities offered by the Kingdom - in fact it was standing room only for the first few sessions! Speakers included William Patey CMG, HM Ambassador to the Kingdom; Dr John Sfakianakis, Chief Economist, SABB; Khalid Juraifani, Director of New Business Evaluations, Saudi Aramco; and Abdulhohsen Albadr, CEO, Global Competitiveness Forum, as well as RGBB Chairman Owain Raw-Rees. The seminar highlighted the tremendous strength of the Saudi economy and the enormous scale of opportunities on offer, as well as the increasing openness of the economy and society and the efforts being made by the Kingdom to bring its economy into the top 10 most competitive economies in the world. The seminar also brought out the strong focus on education and skills development and the challenges faced in the areas of Saudiisation and human resource development. The strength of the UK/Saudi relationship and the potential for co-operation were also highlighted, as was the need to dispel the negative perceptions about the Kingdom which still persist. Particularly inspiring were the presentations of the panel of Saudi women, who discussed the progress being made, albeit slowly, in enabling women to play a fuller role in the economy and society, and the efforts being made to remove the obstacles which they face.

The MEA is the pre-eminent organiser of trade missions to Saudi Arabia with unrivalled contacts in and business experience of the market. With the generous