

For Immediate Release



AUB holds first conference on CSR: Businesses should adopt sustainable practices

Beirut, Lebanon- 04/05/2012 - Sustainable business is no longer a luxury, but a necessity in this fast paced and changing global environment, and it is time for all companies to implement sustainable practices, urged a group of business professionals at a two-day conference on May 4-5, 2012 at the AUB Olayan School of Business, attended by a host of regional business leaders.

“CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) shouldn’t be a fact, but a tool, a mood, a way to bring people together, to be a common responsibility, not only a government responsibility. We have to be socially responsible. It’s not an option. It’s a must,” said keynote speaker, Minister of Economy and Trade Nicolas Nahas, during the opening session of the first Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Conference for the Middle East, entitled Moving Beyond Business as Usual: Next Frontier for CSR in the MENA.

Intended as a platform for business leaders to address the emerging challenges and opportunities presented by the rise of CSR, the conference included a series of panel discussions. It was attended by ministers, company CEOs and executives, and business professionals from around the world, offering a regional platform for practitioners to network and exchange ideas, while brainstorming about the evolution of CSR mostly in the MENA region.

In his speech, Nahas spoke about the importance of CSR in society, and how it is one of the tools bringing business to the community. He added that the Lebanese government has been aware of social responsibility but is still taking a more passive role. He suggested that the government should introduce an overall vision and policies, set up a task force of governmental agencies and NGOs to start taking a more active role.

The government doesn’t provide all functions to adopt CSR, but it helps support it and raise awareness,” he said, urging CSR agenda implementation, endorsing organizations that adopt CSR and encouraging public and private sectors to work together.

During the opening session, AUB President Dorman and Provost Ahmad Dallal, and founding dean of OSB, George Najjar gave welcoming speeches.

President Dorman spoke about AUB’s role in promoting sustainable practices.

“As Lebanon’s largest private employer, AUB is connected to communities within and outside our walls, safeguarding the environment that sustains us,” he said. “Since its establishment, AUB has been committed to reaching out to the community, instilling in students a strong sense of civic responsibility; and through research, outreach and activities, [AUB has been

working to] have a positive impact on the environment with departments such as the Center for Civic Engagement and Community Service, and the Neighborhood Initiative.”

Among the list of presenters were CEOs and partners from major international companies and organizations such as: the World Bank, Bank Audi, Coca Cola, J.P. Morgan, Microsoft, Google, Cisco, Turkey MENA Operations Emirates Environmental Group among others.

“Sustainability is not a choice. It is a mode of survival. We cannot live and face challenges in this region without having a total outlook towards our community, and environment,” said Hussein Hachem, new CEO of (Chair) of Aramex, noting the rising unemployment rates in the MENA region, especially among women, and that it’s a company’s responsibility to work to create jobs.

Deloitte, a professional services firm, has designed signature programs that show leadership on issues that are becoming increasingly important, investing in the community through education and skills programs and organizations and spending hours doing pro-bono work and volunteering, said Rana Ghandour Salhab, partner in Deloitte.

“The social responsibility of an enterprise is to make money. As a result, the best way to do CSR is to integrate its social benefit in the company’s strategy,” said Hala Fadel, Fund Manager of Comgest. “Otherwise CSR is not meaningful in terms of amount, it is cyclical because it often depends on a company’s performance, and it risks disappearing in tougher economic times.”

Rames Shehadi, partner in Booz & Co Middle East said that companies are increasingly becoming more active in their CSR reporting, integrating it into formal annual reports and should continue to embed CSR objectives in their business strategy. Effective change agents are on the leadership team.

“The way that we engage the community besides what we’re doing internally, is consulting, volunteering, fundraising, and doing what we’re good at for the benefit of the community, being agents of positive change,” he said.

“Modern CSR is not just the willingness to forgo profit, following the dictates of social conscious, but rather a call to practice corporate future proofing through social engagement, penetration of minds and not just markets,” said Najjar.

The topics included panel discussions about international CSR advocates, responsible business models, to regional best practices, views from academia at AUB, and what’s next on the agenda for CSR implementation.

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For more information please contact:

Maha Al-Azar, Associate Director for Media Relations, ma110@aub.edu.lb, 01-353 228

Note to Editors

About AUB

Founded in 1866, the American University of Beirut bases its educational philosophy, standards, and practices on the American liberal arts model of higher education. A teaching-centered research university, AUB has more than 600 full-time faculty members and a student body of about 8,000 students. AUB currently offers more than 100 programs leading to the bachelor's, master's, MD, and PhD degrees. It provides medical education and training to students from throughout the region at its Medical Center that includes a full service 420-bed hospital.