

A more integrated MENA region can build resilience and reduce risks

28 October 2010

Marrakech, Morocco, 27 October 2010 - Better regional integration will enhance resilience and reduce shared risks in the MENA region, said global leaders at the World Economic Forum on the Middle East and North Africa.

Brian Duperreault, President and Chief Executive Officer, Marsh & McLennan Companies (MMC), USA; Co-Chair of the World Economic Forum on the Middle East and North Africa, outlined the three most relevant risks to the region: water scarcity, energy security and underinvestment in infrastructure. "These key risks are highly interconnected and act as limits to sustainable growth."

Sustainability means responding to risks while taking advantage of the concomitant opportunities, noted Salaheddine Mezouar, Minister of Economy and Finance of Morocco. "In recognition of the risks and opportunities related to energy security, Morocco has set an ambitious energy mix target of 60% fossil fuels and 40% renewable sources such as solar and wind power."

However, individual country actions are not enough said the minister. "Without a stable, integrated MENA bloc it will become ever more difficult to compete with large countries such as India and economic alliances like the European Union." The challenge is to overcome internal resistance within individual countries; mindsets need to be opened up before the region can open borders.

Lars H. Thunell, Executive Vice-President and Chief Executive Officer, International Finance Corporation (IFC), Washington DC, emphasized the need for inclusiveness and pointed to a number of hurdles to integration. "Poor regulation, governance and transparency are all holding the region back," he said.

"It's better to shape regional integration proactively rather than waiting for it to happen reactively," said Khalid Abdulla-Janahi, Honorary Chairman, Vision 3, United Arab Emirates; Regional Agenda Council on the Middle East & North Africa. The public, private and NGO sectors are all guilty of shifting the blame to others, when they should be increasing collaboration to deal with common challenges, he added.

In closing the session, Ian Goldin, Director, Oxford Martin School, University of Oxford, United Kingdom, said: "There is enormous growth potential in the MENA region - but without better regional integration and resilience building, the growth won't be sustainable."

The World Economic Forum is an independent international organization committed to improving the state of the world by engaging leaders in partnerships to shape global, regional and industry agendas.

Incorporated as a foundation in 1971 and headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland, the World Economic Forum is impartial and not-for-profit; it is tied to no political, partisan or national interests (<http://www.weforum.org>).

