News Release

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Open Forum Sessions Address Sustainable Cities, Energy Security and Prosperity

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- Cities today and in the future must be guided by the principle of sustainability.
- Sustainability must be driven by public demand.
- With burgeoning population growth, energy diversification is critical.
- Cooperation among MENA countries should be a key strategy in ensuring that new energy models are viable and sustainable.
- More information about the Summit is available here: www.weforum.org/gac10

Dubai, United Arab Emirates 28 November 2010 – The general public of Dubai was invited to two Open Forum sessions organized in conjunction with the World Economic Forum's Summit on the Global Agenda. Participants at the Open Forum on Cities debated how more sustainable cities could be created – economically, socially and environmentally. Panellists unanimously called for "sustainable urbanization", but were divided on how to achieve it and whether there is a strong business case for sustainability.

Khaled Awad, Founder of Grenea, United Arab Emirates, called for incentives for the private sector to adapt new, green technologies: "The public needs businesses to come with the solutions, then they will embrace them." For industries that continue to generate excess greenhouse gas emissions, such as the concrete industry, it is a matter of "tougher regulation or more incentives", he added. The region is concerned about sustainability but is hampered by water and energy subsidies and a lack of regulation.

Phoenix, Arizona, the fifth most populated city in the US and one of the country's fastest growing urban centres, faces many of the same challenges as UAE cities built in the desert. Mayor Phil Gordon agreed: the public has to want sustainability. "We took leadership as 70% of our citizens wanted Phoenix to be a sustainable city with a high quality of life. The government cannot force it. We can lay the foundation, build the infrastructure and provide education. If the public wants [sustainability] the market will follow."

Sustainability means more than sound environmental practices. "Sustainability is also about economic and social development," said Fahd Al Rasheed, Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer of Emaar The Economic City, Saudi Arabia. He called on urban planners to "think holistically". Al Rasheed pointed out that Saudi Arabia's new economic cities are "master plan communities"; they are accelerating major regional development and are "a way forward" for sustainability.

Konrad Otto-Zimmermann, Secretary-General of ICLEI - Local Governments for Sustainability, Germany, called for a paradigm shift whereby cities under increasing stress from climate change and resource scarcity become "eco-efficient, disaster and climate resilient", driven by green economies, and focus on health and happiness for the population. "Being the biggest, fastest, highest and the richest is a thing of the past," he said.

In the port city of Tianjin – one of China's fastest growing cities with a population of 13 million – urban planners are using a mix of old and new technologies, according to Ren Xuefeng, Vice-Mayor of Tianjin, People's Republic of China. Half of the city's budget will be invested in sustainable growth. Solar energy, seawater desalinization and a sophisticated public transit system are in place.

Later on panellists at the Open Forum on Energy Security and Economic Prosperity for the Region agreed that with the world population set to hit 9 billion by 2050, the diversification of energy sources will be vital for meeting increasing energy needs. To this end, cooperation among MENA countries should be a key strategy to ensure that new energy models are viable and sustainable. Today, 1.4 million people are living in "energy poverty" and that number will only increase if more resources are not funnelled into developing sustainable sources of energy. Research and development must be aimed at all potential sources of energy – including oil and gas, coal, solar, biofuels, wind and nuclear.

"Don't look at water alone, solar alone, coal alone," said Nejib Zaafrani, Secretary-General and Chief Executive Officer of the Dubai Supreme Council of Energy, United Arab Emirates. "We have to look at the entire package and learn as we go along. We need integration and collaboration. Some countries in the region are poor in energy, some are rich; some have more education than others. We need to work together to set the vision and strategy."

For example, nuclear energy has to be one of the options. But not every country has to develop its own nuclear power plants. We need maybe two or three major plants throughout the region."
The world needs more energy and more food, both of which require a continued reliable supply of useable water, said Margaret Catley-Carlson, Patron of the Global Water Partnership (GWP), Canada. "Energy production needs water, for oil and gas plants, bioenergy and coal. Food depends on water and water depends on energy. And so we are in a triangle – energy, food and water. The energy water linkage is very strong in the MENA region," she said.

Building human capital by investing in better quality and the diversified composition of education for the region's young people is at the heart of ensuring that MENA countries achieve long-term prosperity.
"MENA is one of the world's fastest growing populations," said Cornelia Meyer, Independent Energy Expert and Chairman of MRL Corporation, United Kingdom. "In the next decades, the region will need to create millions of jobs. It takes 10 years to 'grow' a nuclear engineer. But we don't need a million university graduates. Don't forget technical training."

Although new sources of energy often need government subsidies to get off the ground, it is important that they be affordable without subsidies. "New initiatives need government support," said M. S. Srinivasan, Chairman of ILFS Tamil Nadu Power Company, India. "But when technology improves and gets cheaper and everyone wants it, subsidies can be withdrawn. It will stand on its own."
The Open Forum sessions at the Summit on the Global Agenda are sessions on selected topics open to the general public of Dubai, co-organized by the World Economic Forum, the United Arab Emirates and the Government of Dubai.

The Summit on the Global Agenda 2010 is a unique gathering of the Forum's Network of Global Agenda Councils, the world's most relevant thought leaders from academia, business, government and society. During the three-day Summit, over 600 participants are engaging in interactive workshops and sessions to set priorities for the most compelling ideas to improve the state of the world and identify the latest trends, risks and innovative solutions to address the world's challenges.

The Co-Chairs of the 2010 meeting are Sultan Bin Saeed Al Mansoori, Minister of Economy of the United Arab Emirates, and Sami Dhaen Al Qamzi, Director-General, Department of Economic Development, Government of Dubai.

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