

## **PRESS RELEASE**

# **11<sup>th</sup> GCC Banking Conference On The Role of The GCC Banking Sector In Supporting The GCC Economies<sup>(\*)</sup>**

Abu Dhabi (4-5 November 2013)

The Central Bank of the United Arab Emirates, in cooperation with the GCC General Secretariat, held the **11<sup>th</sup> GCC Banking Conference** on the “**Role of the GCC Banking Sector in Supporting GCC Economies**”, in the city of Abu Dhabi, the UAE.

The **GCC Banking Conference**, considered to be one of the premier banking and finance events in the Gulf region, is held every two years and is attended by Governors of Central Banks and Monetary Authorities of the GCC member countries, senior officials of the GCC General Secretariat, CEOs of banks operating in the region as well as renowned academics and representatives of concerned ministries and economic and finance departments.

The main issues of the conference pertain to the Role of the Banking Sector in Financing SMEs, Empowering Women through Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), Financial Inclusion and the Provision of Modern Financial Services in GCC Countries, Future Prospects of Banking Business in GCC Countries, Consumer Protection, and Development of Payment and Settlement Systems in GCC member countries.

Opening the conference, His Excellency Sultan Bin Nasser Al-Suwaidi, Governor of the Central Bank of the UAE stressed the importance of the themes of the working sessions of the conference. His Excellency Al-Suwaidi stated also the hope that attendees will “benefit from the debate that will focus on successful experiments in the GCC member countries and elsewhere, on subjects of common interest, like the incentives for banks to provide financing to SMEs, offering affordable financial services in the GCC member countries, taking initiatives aimed at empowering women to establish and manage small and medium enterprises. The Gulf Cooperation Council Secretary General was represented by the Assistant Secretary General for Economic Affairs.

The working sessions of the conference covered what follows:

### **Role of the Banking Sector in Financing SMEs**

The session focused on financing SMEs programs, with a review of the Korean experience by the President of the Korea Small Business Institute. The debate focused on the regulatory framework that would encourage banks to provide financing to SMEs, the role of governments, and the experiences of GCC countries in this respect.

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(\* ) The GCC member states are Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

## **Empowering Women through Small and Medium Enterprises**

Seminar participants stressed the need to take further initiatives aimed at empowering women to establish and manage small and medium size enterprises, and the supporting role women working at GCC banks can play in this regard. Job opportunities for female university graduates in GCC countries were pointed out as a major challenge, along with the provision of financing for women graduates' who wish to establish small businesses.

## **Financial Inclusion and the provision of state of the art Banking Services in GCC Countries**

The session opened with the definition of "Financial Inclusion". Available data shows that GCC member countries offer access to banking services through a developed network of bank branches distributed in major cities and remote areas. Also, online financial services, ATMs, POS terminals and m-banking services are available to large sections of the population.

## **Future Prospects of Banking business in GCC Countries**

The session provided the opportunity for GCC bankers and financiers to listen to and discuss their excellences Governors of Central Banks and Monetary Authorities views regarding the future prospects of banking business in GCC countries, and their views on developing banking legislations that better serve the GCC countries' society.

## **Consumer Protection**

This session addresses, at the beginning, the "Ten Consumer Protection Principals" issued by the Group of 20, and then discuss the problems that GCC citizens encounter while availing of banking and financial services at banks and other financial institutions, based on the chairman's experience in the UAE.

The session also highlighted the regulatory and compliance role of monetary authorities worldwide, who undertake the task of protecting consumer interests, and ensuring availability of clear and accurate information regarding the nature of the services provided and their costs, and to what extent the level and quality of those services correspond to the needs of the customer. Participants stressed also the need to have appropriate follow-up services, including an effective complaints procedure.

## **Development of Payment and Settlement Systems in GCC Countries.**

The session's focus is on the development of financial services infrastructure in GCC countries, with an efficient framework that guarantees the security of online transactions and appropriate laws to support local and a cross-border electronic banking/financial services.