



NATIONAL U.S.-ARAB CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

غرفة التجارة الأمريكية العربية الوطنية

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
November 23, 2016
+1 (202) 289-5920
info@nusacc.org



U.S.-ARAB CHAMBER SUPPORTS ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

*As Global Entrepreneurship Week Wraps Up, NUSACC Takes Stock
of Programs Making a Difference for Youth in the Arab World*

*“Entrepreneurship is Part of the Lifeblood That Sustains Vibrant Economies,
Including Those in the MENA Region” -- NUSACC President & CEO*

Washington, D.C. – The National U.S. – Arab Chamber of Commerce (NUSACC), supporting the spirit of [Global Entrepreneurship Week](#), took stock this week of a handful of programs that are encouraging start-ups and entrepreneurship in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. (GEW) is the world’s largest celebration of innovators and job creators who bring ideas to life by starting businesses and driving economic growth. Created in 2008 by the Kansas City-based Kauffman Foundation, GEW has expanded to more than 160 countries, empowering roughly 25 million people through more than 25,000 activities. This effort has won the support of dozens of world leaders and is backed by an international network of 10,000 partner organizations, including NUSACC.

Startup Lebanon: Silicon Valley Roadshow



The Startup Lebanon - Silicon Valley Roadshow brought two dozen Lebanese venture capitalists, entrepreneurs, business leaders, media outlets, and government officials to Silicon Valley.

WASHINGTON D.C. (HEADQUARTERS) • HOUSTON • LOS ANGELES • NEW YORK • SALT LAKE CITY
1101 17TH STREET, N.W. • SUITE 1220 • WASHINGTON D.C. 20036
TEL: (202) 289-5920 • FAX: (202) 289-5938 • WWW.NUSACC.ORG

NUSACC recently supported Startup Lebanon - Silicon Valley Roadshow (www.startuplebanon.com), co-organized by the American-Lebanese Chamber of Commerce ([AmCham Lebanon](#)) and [Startup Megaphone](#). The Road Show brought two dozen Lebanese venture capitalists, entrepreneurs, business leaders, media outlets, and government officials to Silicon Valley to explore innovative programs for engagement with Lebanon's flourishing business community.

At the kickoff event in Beirut, the U.S. Ambassador to Lebanon, Hon. Elizabeth Richard, underscored the significance of the Roadshow, observing, "America seeks to advance a healthy, stable society in Lebanon through economic development." As part of America's ongoing efforts to encourage increased commercial ties between the two countries, the U.S. Embassy is "pleased to support this opportunity to showcase Lebanese innovation, connect talented Lebanese and American entrepreneurs, and promote investment in Lebanon."

During their time in Silicon Valley, delegates met with key companies and institutions in the area, such as Facebook, Google, LinkedIn, TechCrunch, Hobo Labs, Jawbone, and Stanford University.

NUSACC's President & CEO, David Hamod, was a guest speaker at the gala dinner. "A decade ago, NUSACC's High Tech Road Show® pioneered the concept of bringing entrepreneurs and tech delegates from around the Arab world to Silicon Valley and beyond. We are delighted to see that Lebanon is building on this concept for the benefit of that nation's remarkable youth and business community."



David Hamod, NUSACC President & CEO, was a guest speaker at the Startup Lebanon gala.

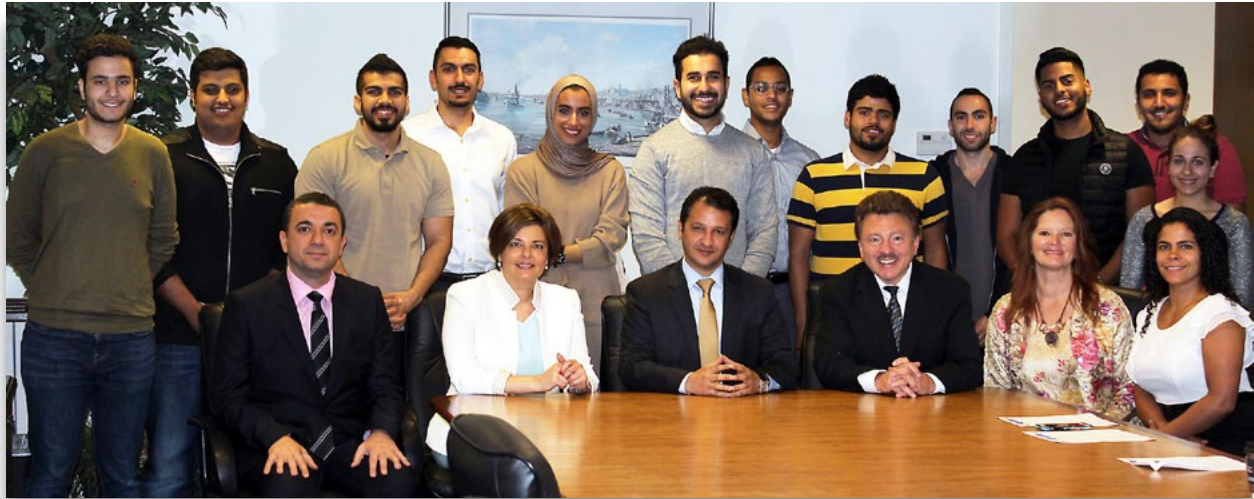
For more than 20 years, AmCham Lebanon has played an instrumental role in promoting commercial ties between the two countries. Salim Zeenni, AmCham's President, led the delegation to Silicon Valley. "The valuable lessons that we've learned this week, and the depth of connections that were made, are priceless," he noted. "But they also gave us a huge responsibility and a mission when we go back home. There is so much more to be done." Zeenni concluded, "You can count on us to be back soon . . . with new successes, inspiring stories, rejuvenated minds, and kindled hearts."

Professional Development Initiative: Kuwait

The [Professional Development Initiative](#) (PDI) is a signature program developed by NUSACC, the Embassy of the State of Kuwait in the United States, the Ministry of Higher Education in Kuwait, and the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences (KFAS). This cutting-edge initiative is an important success story in supporting youth and promoting capacity-building between the State of Kuwait and the United States.

On a competitive basis, Kuwaiti graduates of American universities are selected to participate in the PDI program, which teaches real-world business skills that encourage these young Kuwaitis to return home as successful, entrepreneurial professionals. The on-the-job training is enhanced by monthly programs led by top-flight American trainers. The most [recent gathering](#) brought together 12 PDI Fellows.

Now in its third year, PDI has engaged a wide range of U.S. companies, including but not limited to Boeing, BlueWave Capital, Dow Chemical Company, GE, Langan International, MetLife, and Philadelphia International Medicine.



Twenty PDI Fellows, staff, trainers and VIP guests from the Embassy of Kuwait participated in the PDI's third year of professional development and training for Kuwaiti graduates of American universities.

PDI provides a corporate social responsibility (CSR) opportunity for U.S. companies to support education and cross-cultural exchange. U.S. companies tap into highly motivated Kuwaiti graduates who bring the latest academic knowledge, specialized training, international experience, and a solid understanding of the Kuwaiti market to these American companies. PDI Fellows have an opportunity to gain valuable on-the-job experience in an American professional work environment, thereby laying groundwork for Kuwait – U.S. leadership development, economic growth, and productive job creation.

The Role of Digital Technologies: North Africa and Levant

NUSACC recently supported a conference in Marseille, France that highlighted the importance of digital technologies around the Mediterranean Sea, including the seven Arab nations that ring that body of water. The event was organized by the [World Bank Group](#), the [Center for Mediterranean Integration](#), and the [Agence Française de Développement](#). Entrepreneurs from numerous countries joined the event, while NUSACC's leadership participated at the invitation of [NxtVn Group](#), a Platinum member of the Chamber.

Organizers of the conference captured the importance of entrepreneurship to ICT, and vice-versa: With high levels of youth unemployment, the MENA region “faces a potential crisis unless new sources of growth in promising economic sectors such as ICT are identified and exploited. The private sector can play a larger role in helping governments and academia to focus investments on high-priority and high-demand skills A number of success stories exist in the region: creation of start-up incubators, mentoring entrepreneurs, partnerships with the private sector,” and so on.



H.E. Boutros Harb (left), Lebanon’s Minister of Telecommunications, with David Hamod (right), NUSACC President & CEO.

A number of Arab telecom ministers made presentations at the conference, including: H.E. Boutros Harb, Lebanon’s Minister of Telecommunications; H.E. Dr. Allam Mousa, the Palestinian Authority’s Minister of Telecommunications and Information; H.E. Noomane Fehri, former ICT minister of Tunisia and now CEO of BIAT Incubation Acceleration Program in Tunisia. The conference also drew strong representation from the MENA corporate community – including senior leadership from the Office Chérifien des Phosphates (Morocco) and the Suez Canal Economic Zone (Egypt) – as well as numerous Arab world educational institutions.

“The CMI team was pleased that a business-focused organization like NUSACC -- which has deep ties around the Mediterranean -- was able to participate in this important event,” noted Samia M. Melhem, the World Bank’s Lead Policy Specialist for Transport & ICT, as well as the Bank’s Global Lead for Digital Development CoP. “In fact, the first panel called on increased participation from private sector and associations to collaborate with governments in designing national digitization projects – which, in turn, will create more jobs.”



Some of the VIP delegates to the conference included senior government officials, business leaders, heads of NGOs, and World Bank representatives.

The bottom line of the conference was spelled out in two sentences: “Today’s younger generation is the first ever to have grown up with digital technology – we call them the ‘digital natives’ – and they are the ideal candidates for the digital jobs market. What should governments, donors, academia, and the private sector do to enable growth of digital jobs while producing skilled youth for these new jobs?”

Shafik Gabr Fellows: Egypt

NUSACC's executive team met recently with 24 Fellows selected by the Shafik Gabr Foundation. Many of these young professionals from Egypt, Lebanon, and the United States are rising entrepreneurs who are blazing trails across the Middle East; all were selected as Fellows for their potential to play a significant role in building bridges toward sustainable development and cross-cultural understanding.

Ambassador (ret.) Gordon Gray, NUSACC's Executive Vice President, spoke to the delegates about his career in public service. "I spent a good portion of my 35-year career in the U.S. Government trying to build stronger ties between the United States and people in the Middle East and North Africa," he said. "When people work together toward a common goal – in this case, to foster entrepreneurship – the result is that they understand what unites us, rather than what might divide us."



David Hamod (front center left), NUSACC President & CEO, and Amb. Gordon Gray (front center), NUSACC Executive Vice President, host this year's Gabr Fellows.

East-West: The Art of Dialogue initiative is a dynamic exchange program designed to connect and build constructive relations among future leaders from the Arab world and the West. The initiative was launched in 2012 in London, Washington DC, and New York by businessman M. Shafik Gabr. Gabr was recently honored by Drew University, which presented him with its "Peacebuilder Award" for his pioneering efforts to promote dialogue against a backdrop of increasing tensions and division.



Digitsole, founded by Algerian-French serial entrepreneur Karim Oumnia, won the startup competition in Paris.

“Cross-cultural understanding, nurtured by organizations like NUSACC and the Shafik Gabr Foundation, plays a vital role in the relationship between the United States and the Arab world,” said David Hamod, the Chamber’s President & CEO. “NUSACC supports people-to-people programs like this one because, at the end of the day, they are essential to building professional capacity and strengthening commercial partnerships.”

Paris Startup Competition

At the invitation of [Select USA](#), an investment initiative of the U.S. Department of Commerce, NUSACC recently supported a startup competition in Paris, France. Designed to foster innovation and an opportunity to launch in the largest market in the world, the United States, the pitch competition brought together ten top companies winnowed from scores of startups.

The event was organized by the [Chamber of Commerce & Industry Île-de-France](#) and Mr. Olivier Attia, Managing Director of [Gershon Consulting](#), which has offices in New York and Paris. The event received strong support from such corporate sponsors as [Williams Mullen](#), the U.S.-based law firm, and [Open Skies](#), the transatlantic airline owned by British Airways.

“NUSACC is grateful to Select USA for inviting our Chamber to support this event,” said NUSACC’s David Hamod. “This pitch contest took place in Paris, but the influence and innovation of the MENA region was very much in evidence among the top-ten finalists.”

The winner of the pitch contest, [Digitsole](#), is the brainchild of Karim Oumnia, an Algerian-French serial entrepreneur



Olivier Attia (left), Managing Director of Gershon Consulting, with David Hamod (right), NUSACC President & CEO.

whose clients include Beyoncé, Madonna, Jessica Alba, and other stars. Digitsole's success at the Paris event led to a round-trip ticket to New York City, as well as legal assistance, public relations support, sourcing assistance, hotel accommodations, office space, branding support, operational assistance, and an interview on [BFMBusiness](#).

The Path Forward

Entrepreneurship is critical to economic growth among vibrant societies, including those in the Middle East and North Africa. NUSACC has been a pioneer in this field, and the Chamber will continue advocating in support of – and building bridges among – entrepreneurs globally.

For more information on NUSACC and its mission, please click [here](#).



NUSACC helped to launch Global Entrepreneurship Week in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in recent years.

The National U.S.-Arab Chamber of Commerce, widely regarded as the voice of American business in the Arab world, is in touch with business communities across the United States and serves as the U.S. point of contact for the national chambers of commerce in the 22 Arab nations. On a daily basis, NUSACC works closely with leaders throughout the Arab world, as well as high-level decision makers in the U.S. business community, public policy research centers, multilateral institutions, nongovernmental organizations, media, and the U.S. Government.

WASHINGTON D.C. (HEADQUARTERS) • HOUSTON • LOS ANGELES • NEW YORK • SALT LAKE CITY
1101 17TH STREET, N.W. • SUITE 1220 • WASHINGTON D.C. 20036
TEL: (202) 289-5920 • FAX: (202) 289-5938 • WWW.NUSACC.ORG