



TRADE IS A PART OF DMCC's DNA

* Gautam Sashittal

INTRODUCTION

Thanks to Lt Gen J. S. Ahluwalia, and the entire team at the Institute of Directors for the invitation to speak at this event. Over the years DMCC has worked very closely with the IOD. As most you know yourselves, IOD has been an incredibly influential body and a driver for change for things we believe in. The agenda for this conference is a clear case in point to discuss some of the most pressing issues facing the business world, and by extension, civil society. Corporate governance and sustainability are the central themes of this event, and have been chosen for good reason. Both are fundamentally important to the very essence of modern commerce – in fact, it's almost impossible to separate the two and as leaders of industry, they should be front of mind. I commend you all for being here this morning to discuss them.

THE IMF

Just last month, I read a compelling piece in The Economist – authored by the IMF's Christine Lagarde – that called for urgent economic, social, environmental and governance reforms. Ms Lagarde believed there to be a general lack of faith in global co-operation; a lack of faith in institutions of all kinds, which constitutes a real problem should we wish to successfully face up to, and overcome, as she puts it: “the great challenges of the 21st century.” One antidote to this prevalent level of distrust are the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, or the SDGs as they're known. First set out in 2015 with the hope of being achieved by 2030, Ms Lagarde goes on to explain how the SDGs in their design, overlap with the mandate of the IMF – that being, to affect sustainable and inclusive economic growth. Ms Lagarde states that

the IMF supports the SDGs and urges us all to work towards them today, to secure the future for our children tomorrow. It is hard to disagree with her powerful testimony, and I see no reason why we, in our own respective roles and organisations, shouldn't be looking to do the same. After all, who in this room isn't interested in driving “sustainable and inclusive economic growth”? In the SDGs, we are presented with a tangible path to secure just that. Not throwing our full support behind this global initiative would be simply, nonsensical. But of course, it's about action. One of Ms Lagarde's final points was to say that: “**governance is the foundation upon which everything else is built**”

TRADE

DMCC has a responsibility as the world's leading free zone. Trade is a part of DMCC's DNA.

It's what we promote; It's what we attract; It's what we facilitate; It's where we create global standards and regulation.

It's essentially what we do, and have done ever since our inception in 2002. We have created a unique eco-system for trade and commodities, which today supports trade of over US\$ 75 billion annually. We understand trade, and we understand the transformative role it can have in driving prosperity and progress towards the ambitious goals SDGs. According to the World Bank, the last three decades have seen the greatest fall in material deprivation in human history. Whilst the world economy has experienced rapid growth, there are still huge challenges to overcome; huge swathes of the human population in need of elevation from a position of poverty. Trade has a role to play here. And clearly, so do the SDGs.

It's worth remembering, sitting here in London, that trade thrust Britain from poverty in the early-19th century, and we can all see the impact trade is having in China right now – almost unimaginable 40 years ago!

So as trade experts; as industry practitioners, we have a responsibility to act in favour of the wider context of human progress. We are making a difference to the people, the community and the environment around us.

DMCC is:

- a) Home to a community of over 100,000 people who live, work and visit our district;
- b) The licensor and regulator to over 15,000 companies; from local start-ups to multinational corporations;
- c) The world's leading free zone, as consistently voted by our peers

DMCC SETUP

DMCC is influencing trade, and supporting its transformative power. Trade has been part of our DNA for nearly 20 years now, and during that time, it's fair to say we have learnt a few things. For instance, we know that there is a strong link between the performance of DMCC and the health of the local economy. DMCC contributes some 10 per cent to the city's GDP so in essence, if we do well, Dubai's economy benefits as well. We also know that if we are to maintain our year-on-year growth, we need to continue to remove barriers to trade; to make it easy to do business; and to create an environment that is even more welcoming to investment – foreign or domestic. We know that no economy can sustain growth without the right infrastructure.

First-class business gravitates to first-class infrastructure, and DMCC has made a point of developing its setup in to a truly state-of-the-art offering. Fast growing economies and businesses need access to finance, and round the clock expert services. We deliver both. So these are just some of the ways DMCC supports trade in the wider picture, and how we contribute to its transformative power to drive meaningful change.

DMCC SDGs

DMCC does not take its position for granted, nor does it fail to recognise the responsibility attached to its connection to the Dubai economy. Only a couple of weeks ago, we made history by being named the Global Free Zone of the Year for an unprecedented fourth consecutive time by the Financial Times' fDi magazine. This accolade was not the result of simply standing out from the crowd, rather; it was because of our position within it. In everything it does, in everything it strives to be, DMCC leads from the front and sets the example. Yes of course, hitting our commercial targets will always be important but so too is making sure that we step up to the plate and inspire those around us to

improve; particularly with our support of the SDGs. So again, what does this mean in practice?

Last year, DMCC was the first Free Zone in the GCC to commit to the world's largest corporate sustainability initiative, the UN Global Compact. We were the first Free Zone in the UAE to sign the UN Women's Empowerment Principles earlier this year, and a couple of months ago, became one of a very small group of Free Zones around the world to publish a Sustainability Report.

Prepared in accordance with GRI Standards, the first annual report is hosted on our website and available for public download. This is important because we want to be transparent, live up to our commitments and track our progress. On a more granular level, we stage networking events for the thousands of member companies we host to explain how they can improve their sustainability performance. And we constantly look at ways to better serve our community. Be it putting on regular health and wellbeing events for the community, enhancing its physical environment, or making sure the construction of the expanding district adheres to the highest possible energy and environmental standards in existence. One of the things I'm very proud of for example, is our record on electricity consumption in the community. As the result of a whole raft of measures introduced in the last few years, we have reduced electricity consumption in our Jumeirah Lakes Towers district by over 65 percent. Internally, we established a dedicated team to drive the SDG agenda, be the voice of sustainability within the organisation and ensure we're all on track with our commitments.

Quite aptly, they're called our SDG Champions.

There is a growing concern in the evident loss of faith in global-cooperation. As business leaders, we need to make a difference by working in partnership with others to drive meaningful change.

Trade has the potential to be one of the most powerful and sustainable routes available to deliver prosperity, lift people out of poverty and improve lives of millions across the board. I encourage you to continue being advocates for free trade, and extend the socioeconomic benefits of responsible enterprise even further. And, finally, we focus on the SDGs. I urge you all to place these critical targets at the centre of your organisation and direct your teams to act now to create a better world; a better future, for the generations to come. We are committed to setting the example in everything we do and we will always seek to drive sustainable growth by serving the greater good, and prioritising the interests of the people, community and environment around us.

Excerpts from the speech delivered by
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