



Governance Global Practice
Middle East & North Africa

Issue 7
October 2016

CONNECTING VOICES

www.cvmena.org



Corruption & Development

Content

Public Financial Management (PFM)

08 Interview

Dr. Abed Kharabsheh,
President of the Jordan Audit Bureau



11 Extractive Industries in Egypt

Governance and the New Law



13 Methodologie PEFA

La conduite d'une évaluation de la
gestion des finances locales

16 Taxation

All's fair in love and (the global tax) wars?



17 Refugees

Aid to Refugees and the Internally
Displaced: Who is watching?



Public Financial Management (PFM)

19 Decentralization

Decentralization and Service Delivery in Iraq



20 Interview

Mr Alaa Marzougui, Fondateur de
l'Observatoire Tunisien de l'Eau &
chef du projet Watchwater



23 Humanitarian Engineering

Innovative Approaches and
Partnerships in Crisis Response



24 Procurement

Public Procurement Reform and
Modernization in MENA:
A Peer-Learning Experience

26 The G20 Needs to Pay Attention

Seven Lessons from a Sculptor in Pakistan



Corporate Governance & Financial Reporting (CGFR)

27 Interview

H.E. Dr. Talal Tawfiq Abu-Ghazaleh



29 Interview

Samia Msadek, Director Governance
Global Practice, World Bank



31 Integrated Reporting

Counting What Counts



32 MENA SMPs

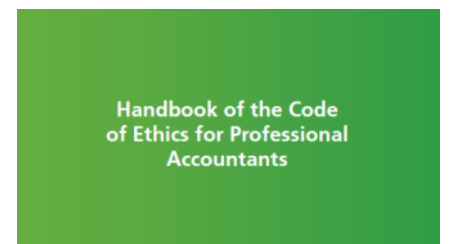
MENA Region Results from
the IFAC Global SMP Survey

34 Interview

Rajeev Swami, Lead Financial
Management Specialist, World Bank

36 Innovations in Ethics Education

IAESB Collaboration to
Support Worldwide Change



Corporate Governance & Financial Reporting

Interview

Exploring the Role and Impact of the International Arab Society of Certified Accountants (IASCA) on the MENA Region

H.E. Dr. Talal Tawfiq
Abu-Ghazaleh

IASCA Chairman



Please tell us a bit about yourself, your professional career, progression and the founding of IASCA. How did IASCA come to be? What are its objectives and goals?

I was born in Jaffa in Palestine in 1938 and I received my Bachelor's Degree in Accounting from the American University of Beirut. I established the Talal Abu-Ghazaleh International Organization in 1972 to become the pioneering global provider of professional and educational services. Today, it offers its services to clients through its 85 offices located around the world. The company provides services in all domains including — but not limited to — education, accounting, intellectual property, business and commerce, information and communications technology, science and



المجمع الدولي لعشبي المحاسبين القانونيين
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law. I established the International Arab Society of Certified Accountants (IASCA) as a non-profit professional accounting association in 1984 with a host of leaders from the accounting profession throughout the Arab world. The Society was founded upon my belief in the significance of this profession and its role in driving development, as well as the need for advancing accounting and auditing and other related topics at the level of the Arab League member states. In addition, the IASCA was established to maintain the professional independence of accountants to guarantee their protection and apply professional standards in supervising their work. In this way, the IASCA serves as a mechanism for improving the accounting and auditing professions. Finally, IASCA also plays a role in the development, facilitation, and dissemination of scientific and technical information through its constant exchange among accountants and auditors in the Arab world and at global levels. It does this through the convening of conferences, meetings, seminars, training courses, and scientific gatherings, as well as through the support of professional and scientific research.

What activities / certifications / programs does IASCA offer? What differentiates your products, services and efforts?

IASCA offers a host of professional services to its members, accountants and university students in the Arab world, primarily through the translation from English to Arabic of the professional publications issued by the International Federation of Accountants (IFAC), the International Accounting Standard Board (IASB), and John Wiley & Sons, Inc. Translation of these documents is vitally important in facilitating the understanding and application of the latest developments in accounting and auditing by Arab accountants. Furthermore, the Society holds professional exams for the professional certificates issued by the Society, such as the International Arab Certified Public Accountant (IACPA), the International Arab Certified Management Accountant (IACMA), and the International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS) Expert. Moreover, the Society organizes professional workshops, conferences and seminars throughout the Arab world. The Society also plays an essential advisory role to the public and private sectors in the application of International Public Sector Accounting Standards (IPSAS) and the International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS). What really characterizes the services of the Society is the provision of the option for learning in the Arabic language at the highest levels for Arab accountants. In addition, the Society utilizes up-to-date international

accounting standards and the International Accounting Education Standards (IESs) in authoring the professional curricula issued by IASCA. The Society's services are also accessible to all professionals in the Arab world in cooperation with the Talal Abu-Ghazaleh Organization's 85 offices around the world.

What do you foresee in terms of the future of IASCA and for the professional associations of the MENA region? What do you see as the key challenges and areas for opportunity for the MENA accountancy profession as a whole?

From our point of view, the profession in the Arab world needs continuous development to face current economic challenges and succeed in the evolving global economy. We, at the Society, constantly seek to develop the profession and help the national professional societies develop their member knowledge. IASCA supports this through our close relations with international professional entities and its presence at international conferences and events, including IFAC's Annual Meeting. In this way, we seek to share international experience with the Arab world. With regard to key challenges facing the MENA region's accountancy profession, IASCA views the lack of unification of the professional societies in the Arab world as important. Additional efforts are needed to engage and coordinate the diverse voices of the Arab profession throughout the region in order to support the development of modern accounting and auditing legislation. More effort is also needed to enhance accounting education at the university level, as well as to support the strengthening of educational institutions. To overcome these challenges, IASCA aims to establish an Arab Regional Center which will support the adoption and implementation of international accountancy standards in the public and private sectors. It would create a convening space where all professions may cooperate to advance the quality of accountancy throughout the Arab world. Furthermore, IASCA will continue to expand on its efforts to work with governments and private universities to develop and provide educational solutions (in particular through distance learning) that support the dissemination of accountancy knowledge.

I know that IASCA has been a strong supporter of the effort to encourage MENA region governments to adopt IPSAS. Can you tell us about this? What has been your motivation? What do you see as the challenges and success factors in moving IPSAS forward?

IASCA has had a significant role in supporting the Jordanian government's decision to fully

adopt International Public Sector Accounting Standards (IPSAS) through the provision of awareness-raising campaigns and specialized workshops. These were designed and undertaken throughout the Kingdom and helped to illustrate the importance of adopting the IPSAS, as well as the positive impact that these standards would have on national income and the economy. In reflecting on the challenges facing the MENA region and IPSAS adoption, one of the main issues concerns the lack of information and awareness regarding their significance — as well as the benefits that governments will gain through adoption and implementation. Policymakers are often dissuaded by fears regarding the complexity of the standards, costs associated with transitioning, and a lack of understanding regarding the potential benefits of standards adoption. IASCA's



establishment and development of the Arab Regional Center will help with the adoption of the International Public Sector Accounting Standards (IPSAS) through the conferences and workshops which the Society organizes. In this context, it may handle the costs associated with encouraging Arab countries to adopt IPSAS by offering them training and assistance to apply the standards.

A key theme of this edition of CV MENA magazine is anti-corruption. Can you speak to the efforts IASCA may be taking to support anti-corruption efforts in Jordan and throughout MENA? In your professional opinion, what role could the profession take in doing more to support government and private sector anti-corruption efforts?

The IASCA is continuously working to promote awareness about the need to combat corruption in order to boost national economies. To this end, we hold workshops and produce publications on various issues

related to the fight against corruption in coordination with the Talal Abu-Ghazaleh Knowledge Forum. This Forum has also recently hosted the launch of the "Nazaha" Integrity project under my personal patronage and in the presence of representatives of public and private sectors, non-profit organizations, and academic institutions. This project, which focuses on integrity, aims at promoting awareness in civil society of its crucial role in the reinforcement of concepts of integrity and the right of public access to information. At the regional level, I participated by serving on the board of the Arab Anti-Corruption Organization (AACO) which aims to strengthen transparency and good governance. The focus of the AACO is on hosting programs and issuing publications which strive to fight corruption — and

increase awareness of its destructive impact on the Arab economy and political stability. My professional contributions and research have focused on the financial corruption that might reach auditing institutions and accountants. This could have a grave effect on the Arab and global economy due to the auditors' lack of commitment to the principle of independence as advocated by the International Standards on Auditing. IASCA believes that we need to achieve a full partnership between the public and private sectors in combating corruption through joint efforts. In addition, professionals play an essential role in strengthening the concept of transparency and integrity through their commitment to the professional and ethical standards of conduct, as well as in developing systems, regulatory methods and policies, and appropriate accounting principles in conformity with international standards.