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MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

MOFA Brief on The UAE's 43 National Day

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On 2nd December 2014, the United Arab Emirates marks its National Day, celebrating 43 years since the state was established in 1971. For citizens and expatriate residents of the seven emirates of the federation, Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Ra's al-Khaimah, Ajman, Umm al-Qaiwain and Fujairah, it has been another year during which the country has continued to prosper, despite the turmoil that has continued to affect much of the Middle East region. The economic recovery witnessed over the last few years has continued its momentum, having a notable positive impact on business confidence.

Located in the south-east corner of the Arabian peninsula, with coastlines on both the Arabian Gulf and on the Gulf of Oman, the seven emirates, formerly known as the 'Trucial States', came together following the withdrawal of Britain after 150 years. Led by the UAE's founding father, the late Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, the seven rulers decided to work together to form a federation, to bring prosperity and development to their people. Aided by the vision of Sheikh Zayed, the UAE has since emerged as one of the fastest-growing and most stable countries in the region.

Sheikh Zayed himself died in 2004, after over thirty years as President. The process of growth, however, has continued under the leadership of his son and successor as President, His Highness Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the Vice President and Prime Minister and Ruler of Dubai, His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, their fellow members of the UAE's Supreme Council of Rulers and the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi and Deputy Supreme Commander of the UAE Armed Forces, His Highness Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan.

The UAE government's commitment to upholding all rights and freedoms for its citizens and other residents has led to the state becoming, in the words of President His Highness Sheikh Khalifa, "a paradise for citizens and others. All live in peace in a tolerant community that is free from segregation and injustice."

The economic and social progress achieved by the United Arab Emirates since it was established, coupled with the tolerance that characterises its way of life, has meant that Government has traditionally enjoyed overwhelming support from all of the country's residents, citizens and expatriates alike. That has continued to be displayed, with the UAE continuing to enjoy enviable stability, at a time when much of the region is in turmoil.

The guiding principles that underlie the success of the state, laid down over forty years ago, remain as fundamental elements in the policies of the UAE Government.

One was that the resources derived from the exploitation of Abu Dhabi's oil and gas reserves should be shared across the country in the development of its infrastructure.

A second was that, as Sheikh Zayed said, "the country's real wealth is its people", and that particular effort should be made to ensure that the people should benefit from the best available access to education, health care and social services, to equip both men and women to play their full part in the country's growth.

A third principle was that it should be a country where a spirit of tolerance between those of different nationalities, communities and faiths should prevail, yet one where its own national culture and heritage should be both cherished and protected.

Although firmly committed to the Islamic faith of its citizens, the UAE is now home to over 40 churches and cathedrals as well as places of worship for other faiths. The Government and people of the UAE are determined to ensure that this fundamental element of the country's way of life should continue.

And the fourth principle, looking outside the country, was that the UAE should seek to promote dialogue, co-operation and conflict-resolution, not only within the Arab world and the broader Islamic community, but also within the wider international community.

All of these principles have proved to be of critical importance over the course of the last year.

The Government's continuing focus on promoting equality of opportunity for UAE citizens and on ensuring that opportunities for education and training are open to all has meant that the country's women are now, gradually, coming to play an increasingly important role in the workforce.

Today, women account for nearly 70 percent of all university graduates in the country and fill around 60 percent of government jobs, providing four Ministers in the Cabinet, the UAE Permanent Representative to the UN, seven members of the

Federal National Council, including the First Deputy Speaker, 10 percent of overseas diplomats (including Ambassadors and Consuls-General), and even civil and Armed Forces pilots, including Major Maryam al-Mansouri, who attracted international attention this year because of her involvement in the multinational air campaign against the terrorist Da'esh group in Iraq.

One key achievement during the course of the past year has been in the country's progress as a good place in which to do business.

The UAE rose three places over last year, to 22nd, in the latest World Bank's Doing Business 2015 report, the highest ranking for any Arab country for the second year running, and ahead of a number of European and Asian economies, including Holland (27th), Japan (29th), Turkey (55th) and Italy (56th). The UAE was amongst the ten countries whose performance had improved the most over the year.

The UAE's performance in these and other rankings emphasise, as the Minister of Economy, Sultan Al Mansouri, has noted, that the UAE economy is the most closely integrated of all the Arab economies into the global economic system. This process continues to develop, through the signature of bilateral agreements to promote collaboration with other countries. During the year, the agreement of avoidance of double taxation and fiscal evasion with Poland was amended while discussions on a new double taxation agreement began with the British Channel Island of Jersey, an important international finance centre with close links with the Gulf. Other agreements signed included one on customs matters with the Maldives while the promotion of air transport links – a key component of plans to promote and diversify the UAE's international trade - were signed with Myanmar, Burundi, Sierra Leone and Slovenia.

Locally, efforts have continued to enhance the country's business-friendly environment, both to attract inflows of foreign direct investment, FDI, and to facilitate trade, both of which will help to achieve balanced, sustainable development. These efforts have included reforms and updating of legislation and various procedures designed to facilitate investment.

During the year, the new Competition Law came into effect, which regulates economic activities and exploitation of Intellectual Property Rights (IPR). This is expected to promote competition and to contribute to efforts to meet the objectives of the UAE Vision 2021 which seeks to build a knowledge-based economy.

The draft federal budget for 2015 was adopted in October 2014, being set at UAE dirhams 49.1 billion (around US \$ 13.36 billion), reflecting an increase of 2.9 billion dirhams (US \$ 790 million) over the 2014 figure. Of this amount, around 49 per cent, or 24 billion dirhams (US \$ 6.53 billion), has been allocated for service projects, social development and social benefits, including health, education and social services. This focus, according to His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid, will be complemented by the development of government services, in accordance with the vision of the President, His Highness Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan, to provide prosperity, security and a decent life for all citizens.

Other projected expenditure in the 2015 budget includes 20 billion dirhams (US \$ 5.44 billion), or 41 per cent, for the government affairs sector, along with 1.8 billion dirhams (3.7 per cent) for the infrastructure and economy sector, 1.6 billion (3.2 per cent) for financial assets and another 1 billion (2.1 per cent) for other federal spending.

Besides expenditure handled through the federal government, there has also been substantial investment throughout the year under the framework of the "Khalifa Initiative", launched in early 2011 by the President with follow-up from H.H. Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed, which focusses on improving the infrastructure in the emirates of Sharjah, Ajman, Umm al-Qaiwain, Ra's al-Khaimah and Fujairah. Designed to ensure that inhabitants of these emirates should enjoy the same facilities as those living in the larger emirates of Abu Dhabi and Dubai, this programme, administered by the Ministry of Presidential Affairs, under Deputy Prime Minister H.H. Sheikh Mansour bin Zayed Al Nahyan, has already funded the construction of new hospitals, clinics, schools and housing programmes.

The programme received a new boost on the occasion of the UAE's National Day on 2nd December 2013 when President His Highness Sheikh Khalifa announced that a further 20 billion dirhams (US \$ 5.44 billion) was to be allocated, along with a programme to build 10,000 houses for citizens, while the assistance provided to individual citizens through the Zayed Housing Programme, long-term, low interest loans, was increased from 500,000 dirhams (US \$ 136,000) to 800,000 dirhams (US \$ 218,000).

Turning to developments during the year, the tourist industry has for many years been an important part of an increasingly diversified economy and during 2014, the UAE has continued to strengthen its position as a top regional tourist destination.

Abu Dhabi's 156 hotels and hotel apartments reported that the period from January to September this year has been the most successful nine months ever so in terms of guest arrivals, guest nights, occupancy and revenue.

Figures released by the Abu Dhabi Tourism and Culture Authority, ADTCA, show that from the beginning of 2014 to the end of September, 2,498,672 guests checked into the emirate's accommodation, a 26 percent year-on-year increase. The arrivals delivered 7,502,924 guest nights, up 21 percent on the same period last year, with hotel occupancy rising 7 percent to 73 percent. Hotel revenues climbed to 4.27 billion dirhams (US\$1.16 billion), 15 per cent growth over the same period in 2013, with room revenues rising 16 percent to 2.17 billion dirhams (US\$591 million) and food and beverage income rising 12 percent to 1.63 billion dirhams (US\$442.6 million).

Paving the way for further growth is the massive expansion of Abu Dhabi International Airport, with the new Midfield terminal due to open in July 2017, and proceeding on schedule. Costing 10.8 billion dirhams, (US \$ 2.94 billion), it will take the airport's passenger handling capacity from the current 17.5 million a year to 55 million a year. The new terminal will be used exclusively by local flag carrier and its code share partners. Etihad, like its near-neighbour, Emirates, in Dubai, has continued to win numerous prestigious international airline awards during the course of the year.

In Dubai, meanwhile, the local hospitality industry has continued to record substantial growth as it prepares to welcome visitors from around the world for the DUBAI EXPO 2020. By then, there are expected to be around 160,000 hotel rooms in Dubai.

In the first half of 2014, local hotels welcomed more than 5.8 million tourists, the highest number on record, with increases across all key indicators, including hotel establishment guests, hotel and hotel apartment room revenues, food and beverage revenue and average length of stay. This was achieved despite a reduction of flights through Dubai international Airport due to refurbishment and upgrading of the runways, with strong growth being recorded from many key source markets, including China, Brazil, Australia and many European countries.

Since 1999, Dubai's vibrant hotel industry has already grown at a phenomenal rate. In that year, there were 378 properties comprising 254 hotels and 124 hotel apartments, offering a total of 25,188 rooms. Data released by the organisers of the Hotel Show Dubai 2014 show that, since then, a further 256 properties have been

added, to reach a total of 634 establishments and 88,888 rooms — an increase of over 350 per cent. That is an average of 17 new hotels a year over the past 15 years.

With traffic through Dubai International Airport rapidly increasing, it is predicted soon to overtake London Heathrow as the world's busiest airport while, with Al Maktoum Airport, or Dubai World Central, at Jebel Ali also attracting more business, Dubai will soon become one of the world's most visited cities.

Elsewhere in the country, tourism is growing too, driven both by foreign visitors and by UAE residents travelling throughout the country. The Sharjah Commerce and Tourism Development Authority, SCTDA, for example, reported that during the first half of 2014, the number of visitors to the emirate reached one million, a 15 per cent increase over the same period in 2013. The number of hotel guest nights during the summer months, normally a quiet period, showed a six per cent increase.

In Ra's al-Khaimah, the opening of new hotels, managed by leading international operators, has helped to cope with the increase in visitors from the emirate's top five source markets, led by the rest of the UAE, followed by Germany, Russia, the UK and India. A total of 330,048 visitors arrived in the first half of 2014.

Confidence in other sectors of the economy has continued to grow, with an improvement in sentiment being particularly noticeable in the property sector, both for local purchasers and for foreign investors. With the dark days of the 2008 slump in property prices now a fading memory, a number of major new development projects have been announced, not only in Abu Dhabi and Dubai, but also in the other emirates.

In Abu Dhabi, for example, investors flocked to snap up properties announced in the key locations of Sa'adiyat island and Yas Island, while the opening, in November, of the enormous Yas Mall, one of the largest in the Middle East and built by leading property developer Aldar, is expected to further drive demand for new accommodation, both for residential use and for investment. As construction continues of the major new museums planned for Sa'adiyat, including the Louvre – Abu Dhabi, the Guggenheim – Abu Dhabi and the Sheikh Zayed National Museum, this too will add further stimulus to the property sector, as well as providing an additional boost to the tourism industry.

In Dubai, one driving factor behind the optimism fuelling growth is the World EXPO 2020. Dubai's successful bid to host the EXPO was announced in late 2013, and Dubai EXPO 2020 will be the first EXPO to held anywhere in a region that extends from Morocco to India. Expected to attract several million visitors, it will also create thousands of new jobs as well as enormous demand for new facilities, including housing and hotel rooms. Several key projects placed on hold at the time of the 2008 downturn have been dusted off and are now off the drawing board and into the construction phase.

Also well under way is work on Mohammed bin Rashid City, a mixed-use development that, when complete, will include a park able to receive 35 million visitors yearly, the largest family leisure and entertainment complex in the Middle East, Africa and the Indian Subcontinent. Within the park will be more than 100 new hotels. Other projects within MBR City include the Mall of the World, which will be the largest anywhere, art galleries and the world's largest swimming pool, 40 acres in size.

Despite continued growth in sectors such as tourism, construction and real estate, the oil and gas industry remains the largest contributor to the UAE's Gross Domestic Product. Overall, the UAE has the fourth largest oil and fifth largest gas reserves in the world, most of these being found in Abu Dhabi, both offshore and onshore.

A heavy programme of investment in Abu Dhabi continues as the emirate's Supreme Petroleum Council and the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company, ADNOC, seek to achieve a target of a sustainable production level of 3.5 million barrels per day by 2017. The current production rate is around 2.85 million bpd.

At the offshore Upper Zakum field, Abu Dhabi's largest, with estimated reserves of 50 billion barrels, which is operated by ADNOC in partnership with ExxonMobil and Jodco, as much as US \$ 14 billion will be invested to increase production from the current 585,000 bpd, first to 750,000 bpd and then, by 2024, to 1 million bpd. Onshore, the Abu Dhabi Company for Onshore Oil Operations, ADCO, 100% owned by ADNOC since the expiry of the original concession agreement in January 2014, plans to invest a further US\$5 billion to \$7bn to meet its production target of 1.8 million barrels per day (bpd) by the end of 2017. Several major international companies, including several which were formerly partners in the original concession, are bidding for stakes in a new ADCO concession agreement.

A number of new entrants into the UAE's oil industry, like the Korean National Oil company, KNOC, are also exploring for new fields. Overall, as much as US \$ 60 billion is expected to be invested in field development by 2017, some of this being allocated to the introduction of the latest enhanced oil recovery, EOR, techniques.

Looking further ahead, His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, the Vice President and Prime Minister and Ruler of Dubai, launched during the year the National Strategy for Innovation, which aims to make the UAE one of the most innovative countries in the world by 2021.

One announcement in September which attracted international attention was the establishment of the UAE Space Agency, and the signature of an agreement between the Agency and the Emirates Institution for Advanced Science and Technology, EIAST, to build the first Arabic-Islamic probe to Mars under the supervision of the Agency.

For projects like this to come to fruition, of course, the UAE needs to continue to develop the skills and performance of all of its citizens, both men and women. While the continued improvement of education, at all levels, is an important part of this process, it is also important to develop a strong commitment both to striving for excellence at a personal level and to instil a desire amongst the country's youth to contribute in their own way to the country's future growth. This has prompted a major effort to promote recognition of, and pride in, the UAE's national identity.

In late 2014, a new programme was introduced to achieve some of these objectives, the launching of a military national service scheme, compulsory for young men and voluntary for women. It applies to all those between 18 and 30. Those who have completed secondary school will serve for nine months, while those who have failed to complete their schooling will serve for two years. Plans to establish a new national defence and reserve force have also been announced.

While the military service programme is expected to result in increased long-term recruitment into the armed forces, one other key benefit from the programme will be the impact it will have on those who, having completed their term, return to civilian life. The experience of working with others as a team and of learning both to receive and to give orders is likely to prove beneficial to all in their future careers, with a consequent benefit to the country's continued growth.

While the UAE is determined to pursue its economic growth, it is, at the same time, aware of the need to ensure that development is sustainable. Part of this is the recognition that natural resources are exhaustible, and need to be used wisely, coupled with the understanding that the country must play its part, along with others, to efforts to deal with the global threat posed by climate change.

In September this year, the UAE hosted Abu Dhabi Ascent, a preparatory meeting for a climate summit in New York for heads of state that is currently being planned. The event, according to the Foreign Minister, H.H. Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan, was a tribute to the central role the nation now plays in supporting practical actions to address climate change.

"Our contribution is based on a combination of strong domestic action, international investment, and support for international cooperation. In barely two generations we have built a modern nation in the desert. This remarkable achievement owes much to three principles that have guided us throughout our history: a profound appreciation for the natural world, and for the natural resources on which we all depend, openness and international cooperation, and the fact that our country is built on the principle that we should never lose sight of the long term vision. The world continues to present new challenges, whether from political instability, war, natural disasters or financial crises. But while meeting these challenges we must keep an eye on the horizon, to ensure our long-term welfare."

The UAE has invested at home and abroad in solutions to the climate challenge, leading the region in deploying clean energy, including four nuclear power stations that are now under construction and the world's largest concentrating solar power plant, Shams 1, developed by Masdar.

"We are deploying energy-saving infrastructure, from Dubai's world-class light rail system to a ban on traditional light bulbs, "Sheikh Abdullah said."We support the development of crops that can thrive in arid conditions and that use less fresh water, and we are investing in the future, with world-class innovation centres such as Masdar, which is both a world-leading sustainable urban development and the home of the Masdar Institute, a postgraduate education and research centre for clean technologies."

The UAE's rising population and the expanding economy continue to prompt increasing demand for water and electricity, and capital expenditure on desalination and power generation plants is an important component of both local and federal plans.

At the same time, however, efforts continue to educate UAE residents about the need to adopt a more sustainable lifestyle and to curb unnecessary consumption. As part of this, the 'Emirates Green Card' system was introduced during the year, to recognise devices that promote the rationalisation and reduction of water consumption.

The protection of the environment also remains an important theme. One particular area of attention has been the country's quarrying industry, now expanding again in response to demand from the reviving construction sector. Whereas a few years ago, there was no effective regulation of quarrying, leading to complaints from nearby residents about pollution of local water resources, dust pollution and damage being caused by blasting operations, tough new regulations have been imposed by the Ministry of Environment and Water. Supervised by local bodies like the Fujairah Natural Resources Corporation, these regulations have already led to the closing of some quarries or the imposition of heavy fines. The long-term objective is to ensure that quarry operators will abide by international standards.

One important feature of the United Arab Emirates is the diversity of its population. It hosts millions of workers of more than 200 nationalities from around the globe, all drawn to the country by the economic opportunities that it offers. Their presence is testimony to the cultural, social and religious tolerance that is a fundamental part of the philosophy that underpins the state.

The Government is committed to the implementation of comprehensive strategies to protect their rights according to the prevailing labour legislation, in particular for those in lower-paid jobs.

The Ministry of Labour has developed a strategy to ensure the right of workers to receive their wages, as well as mechanisms to achieve more flexibility and freedom of movement between different jobs and to provide workers with suitable housing and a safe working environment.

Other measures cover both pre- and post-departure needs of workers, beginning in the country of origin (for instance, by shielding workers from illegal recruiters), continuing after arrival in the country of destination (through, for example, measures curbing abuse and non-payment of wages), and on return and reintegration back home. Many of these initiatives are implemented in association with the Governments of labour-supplying countries, since it is recognised by the UAE that many of the problems that affect the labour force, such as debts incurred

when they are originally recruited, can only be effectively tackled in their country of origin.

Besides working to enhance the protection of the rights of its immigrant labour force, the UAE has also continued to participate actively in the international campaign to eradicate human trafficking. In common with many other UAE initiatives in the field of its external activities, much of the work in this field is done in collaboration with the United Nations and its specialised agencies.

In a speech in August on the occasion of the UN's World Day against Human Trafficking, the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Dr. Anwar Gargash, who is also Chairman of the National Committee to Combat Human Trafficking, noted that the UAE was committed to play a role in the campaign.

"This is an occasion to highlight our keen desire to coordinate with the international efforts to raise awareness among all entities concerned about the impacts of trafficking in order to achieve positive results at local, regional and international levels," he said, explaining the UAE's own '5 Ps' strategy of Prevention, Prosecution, Punishment, Protection and Promotion of International Cooperation.

While the Government of the United Arab Emirates has, naturally, focused much of its attention over the past year on its key objectives of promoting the country's economic and social development, to benefit both its own citizens and expatriate residents, it has, of course, also been engaged in efforts to respond to the rising turmoil in the Middle East and North Africa region, and to continue its long-established policy of contributing humanitarian and other assistance to the victims of natural disasters.

Prominent among the issues is the continued escalation of violence in Syria and Iraq. In the former, conflict between the regime of Bashar Al Assad and its opponents, including the terrorist organisations Da'esh and Jebhat al-Nusra, has led to an estimated death toll of over 200,000. Up to 3 million people are now believed to have fled to neighbouring countries, with an estimated 6.5 million more people internally displaced.

In Iraq, advances by Da'esh in the centre and north of the country displaced hundreds of thousands more people as the terrorist group embarked on an orgy of slaughter.

In September, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a statement which said, in part, that the UAE "expresses its deepest concerns and strongest condemnation of terror acts and criminal practices of violent extremists."

In particular, it condemned "the atrocities of the so-called Daesh, which aims to kill, terrorise, and displace civilians, ransack property, and demolish historic and religious sites."

The UAE, the statement noted, abhorred this indiscriminate violence and destruction, including mass executions, expulsions, and the abduction and enslavement of innocent women and children, adding that these actions undermine regional and international stability and threaten universal humanitarian values, cultural heritage, and norms of tolerance, multiculturalism, and religious diversity. "The insidious ideologies" on which such terrorist groups as Da'esh and Al-Qaeda are based do not reflect the peaceful teachings of Islam, the Ministry said.

The United Arab Emirates has joined over fifty other countries in the campaign to degrade and defeat Da'esh on the ground, with planes from the UAE air force flying dozens of sorties against Da'esh targets.

In his speech to the United Nations General Assembly, in September, Foreign Minister H.H. Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan noted:

“The UAE has announced its full support for the international efforts to combat the terrorism of Da'esh, believing that such a war on terrorism will not lead to a marginalisation of Sunni Muslims, will not lead to a dismemberment of the components of the people of Iraq and will not lead to intervention by foreign powers with subversive agendas. “

The security of Iraq is an integral part of the region's security, he noted, adding that “It is important for all of us to ensure its political and territorial unity.” Iraq urgently needed, he said, the adoption of a true and comprehensive national programme that rejects violence and includes all the elements of the Iraqi people, without exclusion or favouritism.

In a speech to the United Nations Security Council later in the year, H.H. Sheikh Abdullah added: "I would like to stress in this forum as an Arab and Muslim that I categorically reject that the terrorist organisation 'Da'esh' should be described as 'the Islamic State.'" It is, he said, nothing more than "a terrorist and criminal gang."

As part of its contribution to the fight against terrorism, the UAE hosts the International Centre of Excellence against Violent Extremism (Hedayah) in Abu Dhabi, while on 19th July, the UAE announced the establishment of the "Muslim Council of Elders," an independent, international body of scholars from Muslim countries, to promote the tolerance and values that lie at the core of the Islamic faith.

In November, in further confirmation of the UAE's opposition to terrorism, the Cabinet announced a list of 85 organisations it considered to be practising or promoting terrorist acts. Besides Da'esh and Jebhat al-Nusra, and the Boko Haram group in Nigeria, the list also included the international Muslim Brotherhood and all of its branches or affiliates, both within the Middle East and the rest of the Islamic world, as well as further afield. UAE banks were subsequently instructed that dealing with any of the organisations was henceforth banned, under the terms of legislation preventing the facilitation of any financing for terrorism.

The fight against terrorism, however, is not confined to the military political or ideological field, nor can it be confined to one particular part of the globe.

In a major newspaper article written in September, His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid, UAE Vice president and Prime Minister and Ruler of Dubai, noted that : "The global financial crisis taught the world how profoundly interdependent our economies have become. In today's crisis of extremism, we must recognise that we are just as interdependent for our security, as is clear in the current struggle to defeat Da'esh."

"We must acknowledge," he said, "that we cannot extinguish the fires of fanaticism by force alone. The world must unite behind a holistic drive to discredit the ideology that gives the extremists their power, and to restore hope and dignity to those whom they would recruit."

"Da'esh certainly can – and will – be defeated," he added. "But military containment is only a partial solution. Lasting peace requires three bigger ingredients: winning the intellectual battle; upgrading weak governance; and grassroots human development."

"Da'esh is a barbarous and brutal organisation," the Vice President wrote. "It represents neither Islam nor humanity's most basic values... What we are fighting

is not just a terrorist organisation, but the embodiment of a malicious ideology that must be defeated intellectually."

"The destruction of terrorist groups is not enough to bring lasting peace. We must also strike at the root, to deprive their dangerous ideology of the power to rise again among people left vulnerable by an environment of hopelessness and desperation."

The solution, he said, has three components. The first is the need "to counter malignant ideas with enlightened thinking, open minds and an attitude of tolerance and acceptance." The second is support for efforts by governments to create stable institutions and deliver real services to their peoples. "When governments fail to address instability, legitimate grievances and persistent serious challenges, they create an ideal environment for hateful ideologies to incubate."

The third component, H.H. Sheikh Mohammed wrote, "is to address urgently the black holes in human development that afflict many areas of the Middle East," which he described as an international responsibility.

"Our region is home to more than 200 million young people. We have the opportunity to inspire them with hope and to direct their energies to improving their lives and the lives of those around them. If we fail, we will abandon them to emptiness, unemployment, and the malicious ideologies of terrorism "There is no power stronger than that of hope for a better life," he concluded.

Despite the need to focus on the conflict raging in the Middle East, the UAE has continued to take other initiatives to promote peace and security in the region. These included the sponsorship, in September, of the 4th Counter Piracy Conference, held in Dubai. As a maritime nation, the country has a direct and strong interest in the security of international shipping.

Addressing the conference, H.H. Sheikh Abdullah noted that there had been a sharp decline in pirate attacks around the coast of Somalia, down from 236 in 2011 to less than 10 in the first nine months of 2014. This, he said, was testimony to the effectiveness of international counter-piracy cooperation in the Horn of Africa.

The UAE also cooperates closely with its partners in Somalia and the Seychelles to build local capacity, tackle root causes of maritime piracy, and prosecute offenders.

“However, there is no room for complacency”, Sheikh Abdullah said. "Although incidents of piracy have plummeted, other forms of crime on the high seas are on the rise. These include illegal fishing, human trafficking, the smuggling of arms and drugs, and armed robbery. The threats to regional security posed by these crimes amount to those of terrorist acts. And they are becoming difficult to control and contain."

Elsewhere in the region, the UAE has continued to call for the restoration of its sovereignty over the three islands of Abu Musa and Greater and Lesser Tunb, occupied by Iran since 1971. H.H. Sheikh Abdullah told the UN General Assembly in September that the UAE rejected the continuing Iranian occupation and that restoring UAE sovereignty is in the interest of stability and security in the region.

The United Arab Emirates has, since its establishment in 1971, provided assistance to those in need because of conflicts and natural disasters. Through the Emirates Red Crescent and a number of other bodies, including the humanitarian funds established by the President and Vice President, emergency assistance worth several hundred million dollars has been sent during the year to many countries.

Much, of course, has gone to refugees from the conflicts in Syria and Iraq, in particular to Syrian refugees now living in Jordan and Lebanon. In Jordan, the UAE Red Crescent Authority has established a special camp at Mrajeeb Al Fhood to accommodate over 10,000 people, which provides not only food and shelter, but also healthcare and access to education for all children. Here, as elsewhere, close co-ordination is maintained with international relief agencies and other international organisations. Other assistance was provided to Iraqis who fled in the Kurdistan region of the country after the rapid advance of the Da'esh terrorist organisation during the summer.

A summary of the UAE's role in the provision of humanitarian and other emergency relief was provided late in the year by Sheikha Lubna bint Khalid Al Qasimi, Minister of International Cooperation and Development, MICAD, and Head of the U.A.E. Committee for the Coordination of Humanitarian Foreign Aid, in a speech at the "Berlin Conference on the Syrian Refugee Situation – Supporting Stability in the Region".

Through government assistance, grants from the UAE's own humanitarian foundations and through UN agencies, she noted, Dh 378 million (US \$ 103 million) had been provided to displaced people in Syria, with other projects including the provision of food security, health care, water supplies and sewerage

projects, education and shelters for 420,000 Syrian refugees at Al Zaartari and Azraq Refugees Camps in Jordan. A UAE field hospital has also been established at Mafraq, Jordan, which can provide medical services to over 8,000 people a day.

It has not only been the fighting in Syria and Iraq that has prompted the need for humanitarian assistance and other forms of assistance in the Middle East region during the year, however.

The heavy fighting between Israeli forces and the Hamas administration in Gaza in July and August caused extensive loss of life as well as massive destruction of Gaza's infrastructure. Over half a million people in Gaza were displaced with over 50,000 buildings destroyed or damaged.

In July, President His Highness Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan instructed the allocation of 92 million dirhams (US\$ 25m) in emergency humanitarian assistance for the people of Gaza, while in October a donation of US \$ 200 million towards the cost of reconstruction was announced at the Gaza Donor Conference in Cairo, Egypt.

In a speech delivered to the conference, the Foreign Minister, H.H. Sheikh Abdullah, noted: "We again reiterate the UAE's commitment to participate and provide assistance for the rebuilding of Gaza and our support for the Palestinian people through the mobilisation of resources and the provision of requirements. We also renew our commitment to the Peace Initiative in the Middle East which urges all parties to work diligently towards the realisation of a comprehensive peace."

Elsewhere, the UAE has continued its commitment to the provision of humanitarian assistance for those in need, as a result of physical disasters, and also to programmes designed to improve infrastructure, promote development and eradicate poverty. During the last three years, according to figures announced by Sheikha Lubna, the UAE has provided 8.9 billion dirhams (US \$ 2.42 billion) in such programmes.

In a statement on the occasion of the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty, Sheikha Lubna said, "The humanitarian vision of President His Highness Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan and of the Vice President and Prime Minister and Ruler of Dubai, His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, as

well as the relentless follow-up of His Highness General Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi and Deputy Supreme Commander of the UAE Armed Forces, is reflected in the UAE's praiseworthy manner of addressing the international poverty issue by directing its efforts and effective contributions to alleviate the suffering of people in underprivileged societies." She added that the UAE has become a role model in this respect due to its commitment to achieving the objectives of the Millennium Development Goals, which prioritise poverty eradication.

Other aid has been provided by bodies such as the Abu Dhabi Fund for Development and Dubai Cares to support development programmes, both in terms of infrastructure and the financing of educational and health care programmes.

In July, speaking on the occasion of Zayed Humanitarian Day, Sheikha Lubna said that the celebrations were a reminder of the humanity of the late Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan.

The helping hands of the UAE, she said, extended to all needy people in the world, regardless of race, religion or colour, to alleviate the suffering of those affected by conflict, humanitarian crises and natural disasters, and provide them with a decent living.

She noted that, according to preliminary data of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the UAE is the top country in the world in terms of its development assistance grants as a portion of its national income.

Sheikha Lubna added that the late Sheikh Zayed represents the source of generosity and giving, and he is the one who had instilled a love of giving in the hearts of his people.

Besides the emergency relief aid provided to victims of conflict in the Middle East, noted above, the UAE's generosity has also extended to other countries.

In Pakistan, for example, the UAE Pakistan Aid Project, initiated by the President, His Highness Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan, has provided funds of US \$ 113 million so far for development, rebuilding and infra-structure projects. Between June and September, more than 13.2 million Pakistani children were inoculated against polio, in collaboration with the Pakistani Government and the World Health Organisation. His Highness Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al

Nahyan, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi and Deputy Supreme Commander of the UAE Armed Forces, has donated 440 million dirhams, (US \$ 120 million), to support global efforts in eradicating polio by 2018.

Ala Alwan, World Health Organisation Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean, commented that "The UAE's support for the polio vaccination campaign in Pakistan stands out as a model for solidarity that should prevail in the international community in the field of combating diseases and epidemics that know no geographic borders and indiscriminately hit all people alike."

With regard to the Ebola epidemic, the UAE Ministry of International Cooperation and Development, and the United Nations Children's Fund, UNICEF, are partnering to implement a US \$ 5 million project to fight the virus in the three West African nations of Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone.

Other overseas aid projects begun or continuing throughout 2014 include humanitarian aid to Yemen, Egypt, Somalia, Jordan and Afghanistan.

During 2014, the UAE has faced many challenges. Internally, the need for ever-improved services and facilities for the country's population has necessitated extensive new investment in areas such as education, social services, job creation, housing and infrastructure.

Externally, the political and security situation within the region and further afield has posed other challenges, such as those presented by the rise in terrorist-related activity, while the urgent need for humanitarian assistance globally is now at perhaps at its highest at any time in the last half-century.

Both have meant that a firm, confident and determined leadership of the country has been essential. It is to the credit of the UAE's leaders, led by President His Highness Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan, that, as the year draws to a close, the country can look back on another twelve months of steady progress at home and at an effective discharging of its responsibilities to the broader international community.