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**EXECUTIVE FORUM ON  
NATIONAL EXPORT STRATEGIES**

**EXPORT OF SERVICES: HYPE OF HIGH POTENTIAL?  
IMPLICATIONS FOR STRATEGY- MAKERS**

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Export of Business and Professional Services—Exporting Solutions

**A paper contributed by  
Mr. Ismail Akil Abbasi  
Abbasi Group of Companies  
United Arab Emirates**

Ladies and Gentlemen, honoured guests, it is a privilege for me to have been given the chance to appear here today before a Forum established by the International Trade Centre, an organisation which plays such an important role in helping companies like mine do business internationally. The ITC Executive Forum's 2005 Global Debate helps to further the aims of growing multi-national businesses, something that I and the group I represent warmly endorse.

As one of the companies that has seen the emergence of Dubai grow ever more rapid over the past generation, the Abbasi Group, has interests in several areas including textile trading, real estate development & hospitality.

However, it is the Abbasi Group's activities in real estate that chiefly concern today's Forum. Bonyan Holdings is a Dubai-based property developer, supervising development of projects for commercial and residential use throughout the Emirate of Dubai. The company also acts as agent for Emaar Properties, Nakheel, Dubai Properties and Dubai Waterfront projects promoting and selling the market leader's villas, apartments and lands.

After helping develop Downtown Dubai in the last decade, we are now aggressively positioning the company to benefit from Dubai's construction and real estate boom in the city's newly-developing areas, where the Government of Dubai has made a strategic decision to open up the real estate market to expatriates.

This has seen marked increases in land and property values since the Dubai Government's decision in May 2002, to allow property to be held freehold by non-UAE nationals. Tremendous growth in special areas for freehold property is allowing Bonyan Emirates to help deepen the market by building strategic projects in the heart of Dubai's new freehold zones. The fact that legislation regarding property ownership is pending from the Government of Dubai's Land Department can only increase expectations for the sector's stability.

To enable it to push forward with its real estate strategy, Bonyan Emirates Properties needed a strategic international partner to enable it to bring international best design practice, from an architectural firm of the highest repute, to Dubai. Although I met David Hisham, a dynamic young architect from Kuala Lumpur, in 1997, as a result of contacts made through attending a Young Entrepreneurs' Organisation gathering in Malaysia in 1997, it was not until 2003 that our working relationship began.

I am glad to say that the long-term partner we chose in 2003 has just signed with us a Memorandum of Understanding for the establishment of a joint venture. Our first project together is a sizeable commercial property called the ICON in Dubai Internet City. For those of you who don't know, Dubai Internet City is a zone within the new section of Dubai dedicated to the high tech industry and business incubation for this sector. The area is characterised with modern and stylish structures and state of the art buildings that fit the high tech industry.

What is the criteria that enabled our business relationship to flourish? Most important of all is trust. I had time to develop a personal relationship with Veritas' David Hashim before we embarked on a business relationship. This, I must stress, is one of the hallmarks of business in the Arab world—a relationship based on mutual trust and respect.

Another important factor in choosing a Malaysian architectural practice with which to develop long-term ties was the importance of working with a company that has experienced the full real estate cycle. Malaysia has undergone a real estate boom. They have learned how to manage the entire cycle—and they have learnt from their mistakes.

This is very important to Dubai-based companies seeking to move forward. Our Malaysian counterparts possess valuable knowledge which can help Dubai's push for growth. We have to learn from them. Their experience is very valuable to us in Dubai as we seek to position our company to take advantage of a growing property market.

I now move to the question of recommendations for developing economies' strategic responses to building growth at the enterprise and sectoral levels. I am happy to report that Dubai is not deficient when it comes to smoothing the path for private sector efforts to grow economies. Indeed, the city's government has often been referred to as "Investor friendly," offering "Red carpet, not red tape" government assistance. I could give innumerable examples of international companies moving to Dubai to take advantage of competitive salary conditions, tax rates and a vast region with an excellent business growth potential.

In addition, the Government of Dubai enables quick labour-visa and building-permit processing. This makes the enormous enterprise of developing large-scale properties for market much simpler. I would therefore encourage my audience today to take a closer look at the methods Dubai has adopted to attract entrepreneurs, traders and investors to its shores.

I would like to make a passing reference to the excellent trade and country statistics drawn up by the ITC, a key member of the United Nations' Conference on Trade and Development, in order to highlight the need for improvement of informational inputs and market insight sought by those who do business in the Arabian Gulf. Great progress has been made in this respect, but more needs to be done. Commercial and professional services will be able to move more freely if this deficiency is rectified. Government, especially at the Federal level, has a key role.

It would be bold on my part to make suggestions about how government services in other countries could be improved. I would merely add that my experience of dealing with a Malaysian company, built on strong ties of warmth and personal knowledge, have been of great benefit to my city. Our progress is helping to give the Arab world a new—and much more eye-catching—face.

Many thanks for your kind attention and I wish you fruitful debate throughout the conference.