

Talal Abu-Ghazaleh: Economic Openness in Syria Lacks Nothing

Dialogue with: Ziad Ali Darwish

Talal Abu-Ghazaleh to Souriana: Economic Openness in Syria Lacks Nothing

The humble beginning was in 1972. After working in a private vehicle, the first office was opened in Kuwait, and from there the organization's branches began to expand to reach 150 representative offices in the world today, becoming the largest company globally in the field of intellectual property.

Let us begin with the agreement signed between the Arab Society of Certified Accountants (ASCA) and Damascus University. What is the significance of this agreement and the future of your work in Syria?

We consider this agreement to be quite significant since it allows the community a chance to participate with this long-standing university at a global level. We consider this partnership to be very important since through it the Damascus Center for the Qualification of Scholarly Capacities in accounting will be created. So the program aims to prepare accountants to be qualified internationally and to be a 'certified accountant'.

The certified accountant is not an auditor. Auditing is one of the activities of a certified accountant. A certified accountant plays a role in **application**?? companies similar to the role the accountant plays in commercial companies or public or governmental installations and any other field. So we graduate the Arab certified accountant with a certificate that is accredited by the University of Cambridge, under the names of the

University of Cambridge and ASCA and signed by both parties. It is therefore a certificate that is accredited internationally.

What about the scope of this agreement? And the creation of the center in Damascus?

The period of the agreement is one year; renewable with the consent of both parties. Yet the period of any agreement is the period of its success, so the period for us will be a measure of its success. Establishing the center in Damascus University means that there will be a headquarters to conduct training, qualification and educational programs for the purposes of this certificate, followed by an exam, and this allows us to partner with Damascus University. The partnership is with the academic apparatus at the university and the professors who will supervise the exams and prepare papers as well. Our partnership with the professors will not only be for Syria, but will be a broad partnership to include all regions of the Arab world. By the way, up till now, the material of this certificate is taught and exams are held in 33 centers in the Arab countries. The Damascus center will be number 34, and is being established after the Syrian Capital Market Authority has accredited the certificate for licensing purposes as a certified accountant.

Is there a future plan to sign similar agreements with other Syrian universities?

I want this agreement to be exclusive to Damascus. Yet also, the door is open for other agreements from educational bodies in the Syrian provinces. However we have not created a plan for this, since our effort now is focused on implementing all of the clauses of the agreement with the Damascus University, so that this will be a window for the Society in providing its services to Syrian accountants.

Let us talk a little about the Talal Abu-Ghazaleh Organization.

This is something that is difficult to address statistically. The Talal Abu-Ghazaleh Organization is the largest “Arabic-English” and “English-Arabic”

translation establishment in the world. We are accredited by many international institutions for translation purposes. Annually we translate many items issued from various entities, whether in the field of intellectual property or auditing or otherwise.

It is noted that intellectual property (IP) is the most important field at the organization it is not implemented in a bigger scale in the Arab world.

When anyone asks about the Talal Abu-Ghazaleh Organization, it is known that it is the largest intellectual property establishment in the world. We work throughout 71 offices. We are the only company in the world that obtained a license to open an office in China in intellectual property, in addition to Moscow and Montreal. So we work in the IP field all over the globe. As for the Arab region, there has been great awareness and concern in the past two decades in respect of IP. There is also a remarkable growth, as our growth rate in the Arab region surpasses our growth rate in the West. This is because there is a need for this. They were ahead of us when we did not have the awareness and now since awareness continues to spread, there is an increased demand for our services in the Arab region.

In your opinion, what should be done in the Arab region for IP protection?

I want to clarify that all Arab states have good laws for IP protection, so the protection does exist. We have contributed to the creation of laws and policies specific to IP protection, and now IP protection systems in Arab countries in accordance with the requirements of international treaties. There is no problem in application except in certain instances. This is a matter of time, and time will overcome all obstacles. The issue is new to us and the experience of our courts is not adequate. When we talk about IP, many people think about intellect and intellectual creativity “authorship”. The truth is that authorship is a simple part of IP and it is called copyrights. IP also includes and to a larger extent trademarks and trade names, and herein lie the real value. So there could be a trademark that is worth one billion dollars. There are also patents such as those for medicines for example. So if a medicine is important, its value becomes in billions and

then comes everything that follows this in relation to programs, inventions, industrial models, etc. So IP is everything creative whether it is tangible, intellectual, authorship, etc.

Before the interview, you stated that the Syrian market requires fifty thousand certified accountants within the next five years. This is an economic theory. From this angle I will ask you what do you think of the economic openness in Syria and what does it lack?

We are talking about a young market and the market of professions in Syria is still at the threshold of development. If we calculate how many accountants exist at banks, companies and state institutions, we see that it is necessary to qualify them to become certified accountants. This will also help enhance and create new potentials in the future regarding certified accountants; thus serving the prosperity and advancement of Syria.

As for what economic openness lacks in Syria, I say what is needed to accelerate the pace of economic advancement and development in Syria. I am following the progress of the economic team led by Mr. Abdullah Al-Dardari, and from my close follow-up I can confidently say that the economic openness in Syria lacks nothing. What we are concerned with is the trend in the development process, whether it is in the structure or the investment structure "Is the trend in the right direction?". We are developing laws, executive and applicable procedures. We are working to develop the judiciary in order to serve the economic progress. Thus, the economic environment should consist of legislations that regulate, procedures that govern and a judiciary that rules, and these three elements must be constantly improved. This is indeed taking place. So I am talking based on my knowledge in respect of what is being done. We consider ourselves to be part of a very limited field according to our abilities in the submitting consultancy in the advancement process.

Undoubtedly there the global economic crisis has affected your work, so what were these effects like?

The financial crisis is global, and so its effects will reach the entire globe. To be honest, we, as an organization, have achieved the largest growth rate in our history in light of the crisis. The aggravated economic status as a result of the financial crisis that is storming through the world requires our services. So the demand for our services was greater, in order for our services to assist institutions in this critical time.

In regards to the personal aspect of Talal Abu-Ghazaleh, it is known that you apologize. So when do you apologize?

This is true and accurate. I apologize especially when there is any shortcoming towards my people in beloved Palestine. So I try, but no matter how hard I try I cannot say that I did my duty towards people in Palestine.

How would you summarize your life in a few words?

I can summarize my life in a few words: “the blessing of suffering”. I am a result of the blessing of suffering. My life endured difficult suffering, and some people consider suffering an evil, yet I am quite happy with my suffering.

A final word:

You are persistent and successful, and I follow up your ability to work quickly and accurately, so God bless you.