

# A NEW ERA OF COMMUNICATION

## *Out with the Old, In with the New*

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**W**e must harness today's positive momentum between governments, industry and media to carve out a new standard of professionalism and trust across the GCC. Gatherings like the GCC Petroleum Media Forum in April this year are highly important to us, as leaders and decision-makers, to improve the true portrayal of the petroleum industry in the local and international media. Providing an accurate viewfinder into the GCC's oil and gas sector is also key to raising awareness of the importance of our natural resources.

We want to extend our contribution towards building relationships between staff working in the public and private sectors, media and academia by using innovative communication channels that lead to sustained and positive change. The appetite for such improvements is clear. The Forum attracted officials, media personnel, students and academics from across the Gulf to exchange knowledge, share experiences and strengthen strategic communications.

We are privileged to have a mix of traditional and modern media facilities and the presence of established and seasoned media personalities in the region, which are all gaining more prominence. This is in part thanks to technological expansions. This includes distinguished social media influencers; the GCC has one of the highest social media penetration rates worldwide.

We will not turn down a professional journalist who wants an interview, or a meeting. But there are things that we will not be able to talk about. Some individuals in the media must stop continually pushing for such information as it does not help build trust. We can sometimes be asked the same question five times in one day by the same individual – a question that we have already said we cannot yet answer.

We want to engage in longer term relationships with the media that are based on the right information. But everyone must remember that such information comes when the time is right. The credibility of our countries and the credibility of the organizations we represent – OPEC and the GCC, for example – are more important than individual ministers. Oil ministers will change,



but the credibility of the organization and country will remain.

We need a cooperative attitude from the media in terms of how they deal with us and how they get the right information to the market. For example, there has been a fundamental change in the transparency and sharing of data, such as OPEC's data, which is now publicly available. But I worry about how data can be selected to create a story that does not reflect reality. Sometimes we read the headlines and think there has been a disaster, when in fact the oil price has merely dropped by twenty cents.

Media professionals have easy access to a tremendous wealth of information thanks to technological expansions, which means that stronger analytical skills are required. Journalists must be able to analyze information before it becomes news. For example, I was asked by media personnel recently if Saudi Arabia is exporting oil from the UAE's Port of Fujairah. In response, I asked them if Saudi Arabia has a pipeline to Fujairah? No. Did we hear this information from state-owned Saudi Aramco? No. Have we heard it from the UAE's state-owned ADNOC? No. The media must go and get the information from the source – this is the first step to being a professional. Always contact the company, as the 'news' may just be an internal study that will have no impact on the market. Analysis is the business of the analyst. We as ministers are also market professionals and we will tell you what we think; we tend to be right more often than not in recent history.

### **A NEW RULEBOOK**

Many steps can be taken to improve the current dynamic. Greater emphasis

should be placed on accurate reporting and publishing and information must be harvested from facts and not based on rumors and speculation. There must also be more focus on preparing qualified official spokespersons within the oil and gas sectors and coordination and communication should be strengthened with the new generation of young influencers using social media. We also welcome the idea of integrating a prize for young and upcoming journalists at the next Forum to encourage the next generation into energy reporting.

Self-responsibility and internal monitoring must be established amongst those handling and publishing data and information. Access to data, understanding statistics and language skills are also challenges that need to be addressed. The same goes for assimilating specialized information and data analysis.

The next Forum should encompass all energy forms, from petroleum to renewables. These are all ways of providing energy to humanity and the oil and gas industry must work with other elements in the energy market to deliver a balanced equation. Each country chooses the structure that best fits their requirements to have a balanced energy mix.

The Forum has enabled us to start building a roadmap to improving that relationship and we will work with the media to deliver this. Building trust between us and our partners in the media is time well spent. We must keep discussing strategies and mechanisms that can lead to clear and accurate media messages. This is essential to enhancing the minds of our future generations. Thinking about energy is thinking about the future. We cannot afford to be idle. ■