

Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia Event Summary

A Conversation with Her Royal Highness Ambassador Reema Bandar Al Saud Celebrating 75 Years of Diplomatic Relations with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Hosted by the Greater Des Moines Partnership, Iowa Economic Development Authority,
and the Des Moines International Trade Council

July 16, 2020
Zoom Interactive Event
1:00-2:00 EDT

Ambassador Reema Bandar Al Saud addressed a virtual event, hosted by the Greater Des Moines Partnership, the Iowa Economic Development Authority, and the Des Moines International Trade Council on July 16, 2020. After being introduced by Gene Meyer, president of the Greater Des Moines Partnership, Ambassador Reema focused her remarks on several topics impacting the U.S.-Saudi partnership and participated in a question and answer session moderated by Ryan Carroll of the Greater Des Moines Partnership.

Hall Delano Roosevelt, grandson of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, and current president and CEO of the U.S.-Saudi Business Council, was a special guest in attendance. It was President Franklin Roosevelt who invited Ambassador Reema's great-grandfather, King Abdulaziz ibn Saud, to the first meeting between leaders of the U.S. and Saudi Arabia aboard the USS Quincy 75 years ago. Ambassador Reema and Del Roosevelt spoke about the vibrant history of cooperation between the U.S. and Saudi Arabia and the importance of the U.S.-Saudi partnership moving forward. Ambassador Reema further remarked on the importance of trade and deepening the economic ties between our two countries. Several companies in Iowa already benefit from a robust trading relationship with the Kingdom, and some on the call were beginning or already considering relationships with Saudi Arabia's business community.

Additionally, Abdulrahman Bakir, vice president of investment attraction and development at the Saudi Arabia Ministry of Investment, and Ahmed Abuzinada, commercial attaché with the Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia, joined the virtual event. They spoke to some of the specific questions from participants, described the business culture and economy of Saudi Arabia and expressed their appreciation to the Greater Des Moines Partnership for hosting this important event. Ambassador Reema made it clear that the Kingdom is making great strides in diversifying their economy under Vision 2030, and there is ample opportunity for Iowa businesses in Saudi Arabia.

Ambassador Reema discussed the bold transformation occurring in Saudi Arabia under Vision 2030. From diversifying the Saudi economy to opening Saudi Arabia to tourism, Vision 2030 touches every government department and Saudi citizen. Vision 2030 further seeks to empower women, an effort recently recognized by the World Bank Group whose annual Women, Business, and the Law report recognized Saudi Arabia as having made the biggest yearly improvement. Specifically, the report recognized Saudi Arabia for barring sexual harassment in both the public and private employment sectors, legally protecting pregnant employees from discriminatory dismissal, equalizing the retirement age for men and women, and mandating that women are paid equally compared to their male counterparts. Ambassador Reema spoke passionately about these changes and answered questions from Iowans hearing about Vision 2030 for the first time.

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Additional topics covered by Ambassador Reema included:

- How COVID-19 has impacted Saudi Arabia
- What agricultural commodities are in demand in Saudi Arabia
- Recent changes to Saudi Arabia's policies for visas and international business as a whole
- Saudi Arabia's stabilizing role in the world and partnership with U.S. security efforts

The event concluded with Ambassador Reema thanking the Greater Des Moines Partnership, the Iowa Economic Development Authority, the Des Moines International Trade Council, and the attendees who joined the event. She further expressed the importance for young people in both the U.S. and Saudi Arabia to explore each other's cultures and to continue to build on the vibrant and vitally important partnership between the two countries. Specifically, she described Saudi Arabia's young people, which make up 70% of the Saudi population, as inspired by Vision 2030 and excited to engage with their allies in America.