



Media Release

Five Arab nations share economic freedom awards during ceremony in Beirut

For Immediate Release

BEIRUT, LEBANON, 11 December 2006 – Five Arab nations shared this year’s Economic Freedom of the Arab World Awards at an awards ceremony in Beirut, Lebanon, the International Research Foundation (IRF) of Oman and the Fraser Institute of Canada announced today.

Oman was first overall among all Arab nations in economic freedom, which measures the extent to which individuals, families, businesses, and other organizations are free to make economic decisions without government interference. Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Kuwait also won awards in various aspects of economic freedom.

The awards are based on the third annual *Economic Freedom of the Arab World Report*, published by the IRF and The Fraser Institute.

“This is a tremendous achievement for these nations,” said IRF CEO Azzan Al Busaidi. “A large body of empirical research shows that economic freedom will open the door for new growth and productivity in these nations.”

Last year, Lebanon and Oman shared top spot. The awards ceremony was part of the first meeting of the Economic Freedom of the Arab World Network, co-sponsored by the IRF, The Fraser Institute, the Friedrich Naumann Foundation of Jordan, and the MENA-OECD Investment program. More than 50 representatives from across the Arab world and from outside the region attended.

“Despite the current troubles in Lebanon, we thought it important to proceed with the meeting to show our support for Lebanon and the region, and the role that economic freedom can play in its future,” said Fred McMahon, director of The Fraser Institute’s Centre for Globalization Studies.

The meeting also saw a screening of individual filmed stories of entrepreneurship in the Arab world that Al Jazeera will broadcast later this month across the region and around the world. The stories are in Arabic but will be translated later into English.

Due to increased data availability, the *Economic Freedom of the Arab World Report* measures at least some areas of economic freedom in 22 nations, up from the 16 nations included last year: Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, the UAE, and Yemen.

Comoros, Iraq, Djibouti, Somalia, Sudan, and West Bank and Gaza were added this year.

However, data limitations allowed full ranking only of Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, UAE, and Yemen. The rankings are entirely based on third party objective data. No subjective judgments are involved. The full data sets are available at www.freetheworld.com.

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Nations are ranked in five areas: size of government; legal structure and security of property rights; access to sound money; freedom to trade internationally, and the regulation of credit, labour, and business.

The top performer in each of the sub-categories were:

1) Lean Government Award: Lebanon

This category examines various measures to determine whether the government sector is inappropriately large, crowding out personal choice with government decisions.

2) Rule of Law Award: Saudi Arabia

This area examines whether laws, primarily dealing with economic matters, are fairly and transparently applied in a timely manner, and whether property rights and contracting are protected by the rule of law.

3) Sound Money Award: Lebanon

This measures the extent to which a nation's currency is sound and holds its value over time.

4) Free Trade Award: Qatar

This measures the extent to which businesses and individuals can freely trade with businesses and individuals in other nations.

5) Ease of Doing Business Award: Kuwait

This measures the extent to which the regulatory burden hinders the formation or advancement of businesses, the free movement of labour, and ability to obtain or advance credit.

The **Economic Freedom of the Arab World Annual Report** is based on the Fraser Institute's **Economic Freedom of the World Annual Report**, found at www.freetheworld.com and co-published with the global Economic Freedom Network, a group of independent research and educational institutes in more than 70 nations.

The project is supported by a grant from the John Templeton Foundation. In 2005, The Fraser Institute was selected as one of three recipients of a \$500,000 (US) grant as part of the foundation's "What Works in Enterprise-Based Solutions to Poverty" competition.

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