

## ***An IFC Reports Interview with***

# **H.E. Prof. Moudhi Al-Humoud, Outgoing Minister of Education and Higher Education, Kuwait**

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## **For our special report on Kuwait**



**IFC REPORTS: The education system here originates back to 1912 when the first school was opened, and then in 1935 it came under state control. Education and health are two of the main pillars of socio-economic development which are looked at by investors commonly as key performance indicators. Given the recent changes in Kuwait, namely the unanimous passing of the development plan last year, \$125 billion worth of projects are going to be injected into the economy. What is your opinion on the importance of education in building up human capital to ensure that this development plan is successful?**

**HE. Prof. MOUDHI AL-HUMOUD:** First of all, I would like to thank you for all the effort you have put in to give the world an idea about Kuwait and its future. As you said, Education is deeply rooted in the history of the development of the country. Kuwait's investment in the education system has contributed to the overall development of the country and has had a positive impact on neighbouring GCC countries. Kuwait continues to host students from Oman, Bahrain and the UAE.

I had a lot of colleagues from these countries at university as well, and these colleagues are now in leading positions in their respective countries. This is something we are proud of in Kuwait – we really helped with the development of our friends in other Arab countries.

At the same time, our education system was open to accommodate all the Arabs, Egyptians, Syrians and Lebanese in the community here in Kuwait. We also depended on these countries to supply our teachers and administrators in the education system in the 1950s and 1960s, and they have played a great role in our education system. The private sector has been a pioneer in promoting the education system in Kuwait and the Government came into the picture from the 1930s.

Kuwait educational system does not discriminate between males and females. This is unique to Kuwait in the region. The country continues to heavily invest in the development of education. Currently it provides 1,800 scholarships annually to students interested in pursuing their education in various Western, Eastern and Arab countries. Kuwait also houses 6 private universities, with an additional 6 currently in the pipeline.

In term of school education, Kuwait houses 750 public schools, to which 600,000 are enrolled and 200 private schools with enrolment of 200,000 students. In a society like Kuwait with a population of non-Kuwaitis at around 3 million, this gives you an idea as to how we really want to promote education between Kuwaitis and different generations. I personally believe that education is key to development and it can change the future.

I was Minister for Planning before and I helped make the education system a pillar in our national development plan. But now I am responsible for the education system. The first day I entered the Ministry I had meetings with different people at different levels. We are aiming to change three main things in the education system – As the education system evolves, Kuwait continues to drive its student to be involved in a global education. We continue to attempt to develop curricula in science, maths and languages that are of a global competitive standard. Kuwait's aim to be a commercial services hub by the year 2035 and has also encouraged the country to drive its youth into acquiring more globally recognized skills with advanced

technological and educational knowledge. Finally, a major aim is the employment of the students; Kuwait aims to have its students graduate locally from internationally accredited institutions at school and university levels.

We are trying to develop more powerful schools not only in terms of promoting more values in our students, but we want to give more to our students. Higher education is another area – we want to give our students more exposure to the outside world.

**IFC REPORTS: When it comes to improving the education system here and making it internationally recognised through accreditations, what role is the Ministry playing in promoting the transfer of technology and know-how with developed countries like the U.S. for example?**

**HE. Prof. MOUDHI AL-HUMOUD:** With regards to our general schools, we rely on international experience a lot. Currently, Kuwait is working with the World Bank on different educational projects including the integration of technology into curricula. We are also in the process on developing training agreements with the United States, however there are not yet established.

I just came from Singapore and we will shortly sign a contract between Singapore and Kuwait for technology and teacher training and other academic areas. We rely on many private companies from the East and the West in the area of education.

**IFC REPORTS: Given your background in women's rights, I understand that the new Sabah Al-Salem University City is going to be divided between men and women. This has caused some issues in terms of construction with regards to the medical centre etc. Within that scope, how does this fit in with your philosophy on combating women's rights? Do you think it is an issue having this separation in the state higher education system?**

**HE. Prof. MOUDHI AL-HUMOUD:** I have worked on women's rights and protecting women's political and social rights all my life. Kuwait has been open since the 1950s and we have sent our girls abroad to study and work. There is no limit to the fields that women can work in. However, being a Minister, I have to obey the law, regardless of what I feel personally. I do not think this will prevent women from engaging in their normal academic lives. I am not worried about Kuwaiti women.

My daughters were educated abroad and they are working and are very successful. I studied abroad in a mixed environment in the 1970s and 1980s, and this did not affect my development. But we have to respect the law, and if we have any opinion on it we have to go through the right channels to change it. We have built the university according to the law, and this is an investment I do not regret. It is an investment and we can use it either way.

**IFC REPORTS: What will the new University City, which will house approximately 40'000 students when completed, mean for the education system in Kuwait?**

**HE. Prof. MOUDHI AL-HUMOUD:** It is a landmark for Kuwait University's history and development. We were hoping to have a unified campus for our colleges because right now we have a multi-campus in 5 areas in Kuwait. Our students do not have the proper university environment and it is very difficult to manage all of these campuses from an administrative point of view. The University City will contain state of the art facilities for our students. It will stand to represent Kuwait University's ongoing development and evolution.

**IFC REPORTS:** Given that we will be publishing our report on 19th June which is Kuwait's *true* independence day, is there any final message you would like to convey to our readers with regards to Kuwait, the celebrations or the educational system here?

**HE. Prof. MOUDHI AL-HUMOUD:** Education is my main interest and objective. Any contribution to the education sector when it comes to development in terms of cooperation or investment in technology would help. Kuwait's educational system is in constant development. An exciting collaboration that we have is with larger multinational companies working in Kuwait. These companies provide offset funds that are directed towards providing student scholarships for graduate studies. I would like to see this further developed to include internship opportunities for our students and more development in technology and research. We need to spend more on research and development in the Gulf. The West is so advanced but we need to invest in research and development here. I think that any help from the west or developed nations in the Gulf will help us a great deal in the future.

**IFC REPORTS:** Your Excellency it has been an absolute pleasure, thank you very much.