

**An *IFC Reports* Interview with  
Mr. Wael A. Abdul Ghafoor, Owner,  
American School of Kuwait (ASK), Kuwait**

**On the  
21<sup>st</sup> February 2011**

**For our special report on Kuwait**



**IFC REPORTS: I would like to start off by discussing Kuwait's education system. This originates back to 1912 when the first school was opened and then in 1935 it came under state control. Education along with health are two of the main pillars of socio-economic development and they are viewed as key performance indicators by investors. Given the recent changes in Kuwait, namely the unanimous approval of the development plan, what is your opinion on the importance of education to building human capital and developing Kuwaiti entrepreneurs to ensure that this development plan is a success?**

**MR. WAEL A. ABDUL GHAFOOR:** You cannot build a pillar without concrete and education is the main foundation of every country.

**IFC REPORTS: Please tell us a bit about the history of the American School of Kuwait**

**MR. WAEL A. ABDUL GHAFOOR:** Back in 1964 there were a lot of International Oil Companies in Kuwait with many expatriate workers who wanted a school for their kids. So the parents opened the school with the help of a few Kuwaitis. At that time, they had maybe about 400 students and only a handful of Kuwaitis up until 1972. Then a privatisation law came into force which meant all companies in Kuwait had to be sponsored or owned by Kuwaitis. At that time I was in the school and the school wanted to close, so my father took over the school and funded it. I then took over the school in 1992.

**IFC REPORTS: Please explain to us the links you have with the U.S.?**

**MR. WAEL A. ABDUL GHAFOOR:** We have a purely American curriculum. We are associated with the U.S. State Department and accredited by an American Accreditation firm. The U.S. Government either owns a school or associates with a school in every country over the world and here they are associated with ASK. All the big American companies are here, including the military and this is their first choice; as Americans like to come here.

**IFC REPORTS: How does ASK motivate its students to develop competitively on an international basis?**

**MR. WAEL A. ABDUL GHAFOOR:** That goes back to the students. We have AP high school courses and a lot of students succeed in these programs and they get accepted in Ivy League schools in the U.S. 90% of our students go to American universities and colleges, and the other 10% have started to go to Kuwait because we have an American university here in Kuwait and there are other American universities in neighbouring countries like Lebanon and the Emirates. We have approximately 150 teachers from the U.S. and 95% of our academic employees are from the U.S.

**IFC REPORTS: Why do you predominantly employ American teachers and what benefits does this have?**

**MR. WAEL A. ABDUL GHAFOOR:** We are the American School of Kuwait so we cannot have an American school with an American curriculum taught by Kuwaitis. We need to have American graduates with an American teaching certification. I have three Kuwaiti ex-students that went to ASK, graduated and went to the U.S. to get their teaching certificate and now they are teaching here so their mentality and know-how is all American based.

**IFC REPORTS: Taking the interview to a slightly more personal level, you took over in 1992. How important is it for you to carry on the legacy of your father?**

**MR. WAEL A. ABDUL GHAFOR:** It is very important. I have a special attachment to the school. I was a student once upon a time here. The school has had a nice atmosphere since the 1960s and the students do not forget each other over the years. There is a nice union of ASK graduates, and this is very important for me. If ASK is succeeding, then Wael is succeeding, and if ASK drops, then Wael drops. It is a part of me. It is not the money or the advertising.

**IFC REPORTS: In terms of your management philosophy, what motivates you and how do you try to transmit this to your staff?**

**MR. WAEL A. ABDUL GHAFOR:** Educators have to be real; they have to teach from their hearts. A human being is a human being, so you have good teachers and you have bad teachers. But the majority is excellent. When we invest and go to the U.S. for two to three months and recruit at fairs, we hope that the teachers are as good as what we read about them in their resumes. It is not an easy job. If one of those teachers fails us, we have to send them all the way back to the States and we have to pay them. You cannot go wrong with education – if you have one bad teacher teaching 100 students, you have to make a decision. Money is not important – you have to send them back and recruit another teacher, and this is difficult sometimes because you do not find teachers on the street, you have to go over to the States and find them.

**IFC REPORTS: Are American teachers interested in coming to Kuwait?**

**MR. WAEL A. ABDUL GHAFOR:** Yes they are. At the moment they have no problems, but sometimes there are political issues that scare them, like in 2003 when Iraq was liberated when Saddam was overthrown. That was difficult. We had to go outside the U.S. at that time to Australia and South Africa to find teachers from there because American teachers were told not to go to the Middle East because it was a red zone. But for the moment, it is clear.

**IFC REPORTS: Given that we are publishing our report on the 19<sup>th</sup> June, Kuwait's true Independence Day, what final message would you like to send to our American readers about the celebrations or ASK?**

**MR. WAEL A. ABDUL GHAFOR:** I think we are lucky that we have good education in Kuwait, despite all the problems and improvements required. But if someone is serious about education, they can get it. We have the base for it and we definitely provide it in Kuwait in general. We hope that the Government will support us more, because without education, the Government cannot move forward.

**IFC REPORTS: It has been an absolute pleasure, thank you very much.**