

Local

US official predicts women 'at core' of greater cultural cooperation with Kuwait

Sports can serve as a universal language that can build bridges: Royce

KUWAIT: A ranking US official says a freshly inked statement of intent between Kuwait and her nation will pave way for greater cultural cooperation, saying it will also facilitate partnerships between cultural organizations of the two countries. Asked whether women play a role in the forecast wider cooperation in the field, Marie Royce, Assistant Secretary Bureau of Education and Cultural Affairs, said in an exclusive interview that they are the "core of exchange programs," noting that societies that empower women are more prosperous and peaceful.

Speaking on sidelines of the Third United States-Kuwait Strategic Dialogue, she confirmed the signing of a Statement of Intent on cultural cooperation between Kuwait and the US during the meeting — which will encourage more cultural exchanges between the two countries. She explained that the Statement will promote the visit of experts in museum curation, artists, athletes, and speakers from the US to Kuwait, and vice versa. "We also hope that this agreement will facilitate partnerships between US and Kuwaiti cultural organizations," Royce added. She stressed that cultural and educational exchanges are a path to a peaceful world, and to create mutual understanding among countries. Royce said that she chaired the education working group of the bilateral Strategic Dialogue with officials from Kuwait's Ministry of Higher Education, and discussed the chances available to increase academic and cultural exchanges between the US and Kuwait. "My commitment is to increase academic and cultural exchanges between Kuwait and the US," she added.

12,000 students

Royce pointed out that the Bureau of Education and Cultural Affairs works in the area of educating English teaching skills, and college admissions exchanges between Americans and Kuwaitis. She said that another area the bureau would like to arrange is working with Alumni groups. "The US remains the first destination for international students," she said, pointing out that

there are around 12,000 Kuwaiti students in the US. She confirmed that the US Embassy's Education adviser offers free advising services to all students and can help provide resources and guidance for interested students to find their own best-fit institution in the US. In addition, the bureau and the US embassy also offer Kuwaitis professional exchange programs to promote entrepreneurship, STEM education, intellectual property rights, disability rights and gender equality. "We encourage more Americans to come to Kuwait to study and conduct academic research and to engage in various projects, such as college preparation programs, and teaching English to English teachers," she said.

Royce confirmed that in the next year, the US State Department will work with the Kuwaiti government to sponsor training for English teachers and scholarship advisors who advise Kuwaiti students on how to apply to US colleges. "We will also be bringing a diverse range of artists, athletes and experts to Kuwait to work on areas such as girls' empowerment, cultural heritage preservation, and STEM education. In the fall, we plan to offer after school English class for high school students, called the English Access Micro-Scholarship Program," she pointed out.

"Another goal is to increase the number of students who participate in classroom exchange in Kuwait, they can work on projects together. This was applied between students from Arizona University and students in Egypt," Royce said. She confirmed that she received a lot of support for this program, stressing that "it is another example where we can collaborate in many subjects." She pointed out that over 2,000 Kuwaitis have participated in US sponsored exchange programs, primarily the International Visitor Leadership Program

and the Youth Exchange and Study Program, and many of them have become leaders in a variety of fields. She said that she is willing to increase virtual exchanges between Kuwaiti and American students through programs such as the Stevens Initiative, which connects students in the US with students around the world to work on projects to protect the environment and strengthen STEM education. "We will soon launch an association of Kuwaiti alumni of these exchange programs, to provide mentorship, networking and knowledge sharing opportunities," she indicated

Special cultural events

Responding to a question about arranging special cultural events for women, US Assistant Secretary said that the Bureau of Education and Cultural Affairs is committed to women's empowerment, which is core to exchange programs in both cultures and education. She stressed that "societies that empower women and promote inclusion are more prosperous, peaceful and stable." She mentioned that last year the bureau committed over \$25 million and reached over 150,000 women around the world in programs specifically designed to empower women and girls. Royce added that (TechWomen) is another initiative of the US Department to connect and support leader women in science, technology, engineering and math. Women participating in this initiative are from Africa, Central and South Asia and the Middle East. It provides them with the access and opportunity needed to advance their careers, and inspire women and girls in their communities. Similar flagship programs supporting women that have been running for decades include, Fullbright Program and International Visitors Leadership Program.

12,000 Kuwaiti students in the US



KUWAIT: Marie Royce, Assistant Secretary Bureau of Education and Cultural Affairs. —KUNA

Sport exchange programs

Answering another question about sport exchange programs with Kuwait, Royce expressed her belief that sports can serve as a universal language that can build bridges and mutual understanding. She revealed that the US Bureau is intending to arrange a visit for Sarah Huffman, a former US Women's Soccer Team member, to Kuwait as Sports Envoy at the end of April. Sarah will give soccer workshops for young girls and women to promote sports as means for them to develop self-confidence and leadership skills. She said that the bureau works to empower women through its Sports Diplomacy programs that include the bureau's (espnW) Global Sports Mentoring Program initiative to promote women in sports from grassroots to the leadership level. This program was recognized in 2018 with both the ESPN Stuart Scott ENSPIRE Award and the Peace and Sport "Diplomatic Action of the Year" Award. —KUNA

163,000 Kuwaitis applied for US visa in last five years

KUWAIT: The United States of America is one of the Kuwaitis' favorite destinations for tourism, study, business and medical treatment. US Deputy Assistant Secretary for Visa Services, Edward J. Ramotowski said in an interview that over a 163,000 Kuwaitis applied for US visa in the last five years. "We welcome and strongly encourage the Kuwaiti citizens to visit the US whether for business or pleasure or studying or any other legitimate purpose," Ramotowski added. The Deputy Assistant Secretary pointed out that those wishing to obtain the US tourist or student or medical visa can visit the online site to submit the applications and follow the required instructions.



Edward J Ramotowski

Ramotowski pointed out that the applicants need to book an interview appointment after submitting the online application and then visit the Embassy headquarter with all the required documents, noting that the process takes a week. He noted that not following the instructions properly, not completing the required forms and submit a photograph that doesn't meet the requirements are the most common issues that cause a delay for getting the visa. "Students must apply as early as they can because there are periods of time where the Embassy is very busy," he added.

Regarding the electronic visa waiver, Ramotowski said that the US has a visa waiver program but each country needs to meet its certain requirements and at the meantime many countries are working to meet these requirements, noting that in future Kuwaiti citizens might get an electronic visa waiver. "Kuwait is an important strategic ally with the US," the Deputy Assistant Secretary said, adding that the Consular Services Department was part of the third US-Kuwait strategic dialogue and they had productive discussions with the Kuwaiti consular officials.

Ramotowski affirmed that The American Citizen Services section at the US Embassy in Kuwait provides a range of services, including the issuance and renewal of passports, reports of birth abroad, and other routine and emergency services. The Embassy staff is ready to provide any assistance and information to those wishing to travel to the United States, he added. As one of the most popular tourist destinations in the world, the United States welcomed about 75.9 million international travelers in the past few years. The USA has the world's largest international student population, with more than 1,000,000 students choosing to broaden their education in the United States due to its world's finest university systems, with outstanding programs in virtually all fields. —KUNA

Kuwait firm supporter of global cooperation

BUENOS AIRES: Kuwait reaffirmed it has always supported cooperation among countries of the world to eliminate poverty, address the piling debts, curb climate change and alleviate the suffering of people. Kuwait Ambassador in Buenos Aires Abdullah Al-Yahya, addressing UN's 2nd High-Level Conference on South-South Cooperation in Argentina's capital, said his country was participating in the meeting out of its keenness to promote international cooperation in line with instructions of His Highness the Amir and His Highness the Crown Prince, Kuwait's Embassy said in a statement.

Yahya noted the conference, inaugurated by Argentina's President Mauricio Macri, was an excellent venue for developing countries to explore solutions for pressing challenges towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2030. Participation of Kuwait, he said, stemmed from its desire to cooperation with other countries to tackle challenges of sustainable development in south countries. Kuwait has always been supporting global collaboration to eliminate poverty, reducing debts on countries, addressing ramifications of climate change, alleviating humanitarian suffering of people in crises and offering assistance for least developed countries, said Yahya. Since Kuwait's independence in 1961, said the Ambassador, the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development has been offering financial assistance for developing countries. "Indeed Kuwait provided over the past years development aid more than double the internationally-agreed percentage of 0.7 percent," he said. —KUNA



BUENOS AIRES: Kuwait Ambassador in Buenos Aires Abdullah Al-Yahya addresses the UN's 2nd High-Level Conference on South-South Cooperation. —KUNA

ABK honors outstanding employees

KUWAIT: Al-Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) held its annual employee appreciation awards event to recognize the most outstanding individual and team employees for 2018. The prize categories included

the 'Team of the Year' and the outstanding performance employees.

Michel Accad, the Group Chief Executive Officer, ABK, congratulated the winners for the exceptional contribution they had all made towards ABK's success in 2018 and their outstanding commitment throughout the year to living the core values of the bank and delivering on the strategy of 'Simpler Banking'.

Accad said: "The success of our people is the success of ABK - they are key to everything we achieve here at the

bank, and this event recognizes the hard work, dedication to customer service and passion for excellence that they have shown throughout 2018. We are committed to supporting the development of our employees and we endeavor to show our appreciation for our most outstanding people. I cannot thank them enough for their contribution and we look forward to another excellent year ahead."

For the year that ended on December 31, 2018, ABK reported an 18.1 percent increase in net profit and a record oper-

ating profit of KD 103.7 million, exceeding KD 100 million for the first time in the history of the bank, as the bank continued to expand its capabilities and drive growth. Throughout the year, ABK continued to invest in technology, innovation and customer service under its 'Simpler Banking' strategy, and launched a number of digital products, in line with its digital transformation strategy. ABK won a number of awards in 2018 including 'Employer of the Year' from Naseba for the third consecutive year.

