## Address by David Carpenter

## Advisor ICDL Saudi Arabia

At the press conference in Riyadh

*Saturday, August 14, 2010*

**Distinguished Guests,**

**Members of the Press,**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Thank you for accepting our invitation to this press conference. ICDL Saudi Arabia considers the media as a key partner to promote its vision of a computer-literate community. Given the recent events here in Saudi Arabia with the suspension of the ICDL programme, we would like to reiterate the importance of your support and the vital role of ICDLøs initiatives in accelerating this countryøs growth into a digital society.

The quality and reputation of the ECDL Foundationøs certification programmes are founded on over a decade of expertise in delivering digital literacy based on a unique concept to more than 10 million people in 46 languages around the world. I personally served as the CEO of the ECDL Foundation for many years and retired my position to provide consultancy work for growing markets where challenges become inevitable when a national digital literacy initiative reaches the magnitude of scale such as ICDL has reached today in Saudi Arabia and the GCC region.

I would like to begin by clarifying the relationship between Taqniyat Al Maarifa li Al Taaleem Al Motatawwer and ICDL Saudi Arabia. ECDL Foundation, the owner of the ICDL concept and the body responsible for appointing licensees all over the world, oversees it own offices in Dublin, Brussels and Singapore, and carefully selects national partners, also known as ‑National Operators,ø to implement its ICDL certification at the national level. So in Switzerland, for example, the authorized licensee operates as ICDL Switzerland; in Germany it is ICDL Germany; in Oman, ICDL Oman, in Jordan, ICDL Jordan, and so on. In the KSA, Taqniyat Al Maarifa, operates as ICDL Saudi Arabia responsible for managing the implementation of the ICDL programme and to operate it following stringent quality assurance standards that ensure consistency in international implementation. ECDL Foundationøs role is to ensure that these standards are met through constant audits, monitoring, supervision and communication.

I will briefly explain some fact on the circumstances by which the ICDL program was introduced to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. In late 2002 Taqniyat Al Maarifa was engaged by TVTC to provide computer competency training for all TVTC students. Based on independent research as to the unique needs of the TVTC student population, Taqniyat Al Maarifa recommended the ICDL training and certification program to TVTC, who were unaware of the ICDL program at this time, as being the most appropriate international certification program to meet the needs of the Kingdom.

Taqniyat Al Maarifa then contacted the ECDL-Foundation, to seek Foundation assistance for having TVTC centres accredited for ICDL certification testing.  As a result of this dialogue Taqniyat Al Maarifa arranged for a meeting between myself as CEO of the Foundation and Dr. Sulaiman Al-Dhalan, the then TVTC  Director General of International Cooperation, in London in March 2003 to discuss potential licensing arrangements for the program in the Kingdom.

As a result of this meeting and subsequent discussions a licence agreement for the ICDL program in the Kingdom was signed between ECDL-Foundation and Taqniyat Al Maarifa in May 2003.

In October 2003, Taqniyat Al Maarifa, now operating as ICDL Saudi, signed a five year agreement with TVTC, which stated that ICDL Saudi is certified by ECDL-F to be the only authorized company to operate the ICDL program in the Kingdom and required ICDL Saudi to accredit only those private training centres for the ICDL program already licensed by TVTC provided they met the accreditation and quality standards of the ICDL program.

Ever since it acquired the licence for the program, ICDL Saudi has sought to impose the highest standards of quality assurance, even going beyond those of ECDL-F and TVTC at its own expense. This commitment is evidenced by the fact that 71% of ICDL Saudiøs 115 staff (82 staff) work exclusively on quality assurance.

ICDL Saudiøs commitment to the Kingdom is evidenced by the fact that it directly employs 115 staff, of whom 76 (or 67%) are Saudi nationals. Female staff account for 36% or 41 staff members. ICDLøs commitment to quality assurance is evidenced by the fact that the last audit of the organisation by ECDL-Foundation found zero non-conformances, which is evidence of exemplary quality assurance performance. In addition, despite recent announcements in the media by TVTC, regarding quality assurance concerns TVTC during the entire relationship has only reported 5 minor incidents of quality assurance concerns related to test invigilation since October. During this period ICDL Saudi has conducted well in excess of 1 million certification tests.

ICDL Saudi has invested heavily in the program since 2003 not only in quality assurance but also in providing the only complete in-application Arabic testing solution within the ICDL community, specifically designed to cater for the needs of candidates in the Kingdom.  This single testing solution is in full conformity with the testing standards of the ECDL-Foundation, which approves all such testing systems. Indeed the ECDL-Foundation approved the ICDL tests for Syllabus Version 5.0 as recently as December 2009. In addition, to this ICDL Saudi has invested heavily in developing tests specifically designed to meet the needs of visually impaired students with Syllabus Version 5.0 tests approved by ECDL-Foundation as recently as 15th July 2010.

ICDL Saudi employs a highly educated and dedicated staff of 115 people across the Kingdom and through its promotion of the program provides significant employment opportunities to hundreds of other Saudis across its 400 training and testing centres in the Kingdom.

ICDL Saudiøs achievements since 2003 have made it one of the most successful licensees within the global ICDL community with its success formally recognised by the ECDL-Foundation at its global awards ceremony in October 2009. Indeed, ICDL Saudi has led the way for other licensees to succeed and provided advice and models on how to do so based on its own success in the region.

I came on board as an advisor to ICDL Saudi Arabia long before the current dispute with TVTC to help further grow the ICDL programme and leverage the expertise, successes and best practices gained by ICDL Saudi for the benefit of other GCC countries. As a former CEO of the ECDL Foundation and current advisor to ICDL Saudi Arabia, I can confirm that I was always impressed with the creativity and the strategic thinking as well as the investments carried out by the shareholders and management of ICDL Saudi for the cause of spreading digital literacy in the Kingdom and the GCC region.

On behalf of ICDL Saudi Arabia and shareholders, I would thus like to reaffirm our commitment to continue supporting Saudi Arabia with the best digital literacy programmes and we intend to continue our mission to be a leading promoter of computer competency in the Kingdom and a major driver of the Kingdomøs ICT and overall development.

**Thank you for your support and we look forward to the fruits of our sustained partnership.**