

Address by Dr. Jamal Al Hefdh
General Manager, ICDL Saudi Arabia
At the press conference in Riyadh
Saturday, August 14, 2010

Distinguished Guests,

Members of the Press,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

A pleasant evening and Ramadan Kareem to you all, and thank you for joining us in this conference. It is very refreshing to meet up with our media partners and get the chance to renew our ties while addressing matters that affect our shared desire to support the development of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Over the past years, Taqniyat Al Maarifa, has acted as the local governing body and certification authority of the global International Computer Driving Licence (ICDL) program. We have been consistently one of the most productive Middle Eastern arms of the computer literacy programme in the world. We maintain close partnerships with some of the Kingdom's top governmental organizations and constantly communicate with various authorities such as the Ministries of Education and Communications and Information Technology in pursuit of the promulgation of computer illiteracy throughout the country.

We are proud to say that our efforts have helped enhance the economic and social development of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and have been instrumental in encouraging more women, youths and students to improve their technological competencies. In recognition of our

exemplary local implementation of ICDL certification, the ECDL Foundation, the global governing body of the programme, even saw it fit to present us with a special award for persuading major Saudi universities to integrate ICDL certification into their academic programs during the 2009 ECDL Foundation Annual Global Forum.

We were thus totally surprised to learn of allegations hurled against us by the Technical and Vocational Training Corporation (TVTC). One of the questions raised by the corporation is our legitimacy as the sole body handling the ICDL programme in the Kingdom. We would like to note that this is a common practice among several ICDL-adopting countries, and that we have been adhering to the same implementation standards followed by members of the international network.

This and other issues originated from the Technical and Vocational Training Corporation's criticisms over our recent rate increase, which is very marginal and has been long delayed despite numerous global economic and inflationary fluctuations. So, the crux of the matter started as financial then to take over our license and not about quality issues as they claim.

As a result of TVTC's suspension of the program over 78,000 candidates (of which 36% or over 28,000 are female) **who** were in process of completing the ICDL have been affected and currently cannot complete their ICDL due to the fact that testing is not being allowed. Further TVTC has made threats to remove the Civil Services accreditation so if testing can resume, candidates will want assurances that their certification will be recognized by the Ministry of Civil Services.

A total of 165 Centres of which 72 are female centres under TVTC's supervision were operating the ICDL program delivering the program to the affected 78,000 candidates and have also been badly affected by the loss of revenue resulted suspension.

Since 2003, over **99,438 full ICDL certificates have been awarded in Saudi Arabia** making it one of the fastest-growing and most successful ICDL programs in the world. Additionally, in 2009, Saudi Arabia registered more students in the ICDL program than did the UK.

Despite TVTC claims regarding quality assurance only 5 complaints have ever been received from TVTC with regard to quality assurance concerns on test invigilation since 2003. This reflects the effectiveness of TAM's quality assurance standards as no other ICDL licensee in the world other than TAM has adopted and enforced 100% test supervision as one of its Quality Assurance standards.

In order for a private training centre to be considered for ICDL accreditation, it must have a valid license from TVTC which TAM enforces in cooperation with TVTC on the ICDL network of centres. However, not all of the TVTC centres meet the more stringent requirements set by TAM. To the best of TAM's knowledge, no centre licenses have been revoked by TVTC due to any quality assurance issues. Rather the ICDL program has been stopped.

TVTC claims that TAM was not serious about renewing the agreement. However, TAM paid a commission in advance for the period expected for the contract renewal negotiation which was received and cashed by TVTC.

The renewal contract draft sent by TVTC to TAM fundamentally changes the terms between the parties. For example, TVTC would be the holder of the license for the ICDL program and TAM would only be the operator. Whereas TAM now holds the exclusive license. That further means that TVTC would get revenues and profits generated from all ICDL business conducted in the Kingdom including that of universities, Corporate and government organizations, not just the TVTC centers and the private centres under its jurisdiction. TAM tried to no avail to come to an agreement with TVTC and acquiesced on nearly all points but its own security as an Operator. TVTC would not agree that TAM could not be removed as the Operator so TAM was left with the choice of signing the agreement under duress or not signing and continuing to try and come to an agreement. TAM did not sign, and TVTC shut down the program and took the matter public without prior notification to TAM.

TAM knows of no other certification program operating in the Kingdom which must pay TVTC a commission.

TAM customers not under TVTC's domain continue to offer the ICDL program. These customers include King Saud University, Princess Noorah University, Taibah University, Tabook University, Prince Sultan University, Al Dammam University, Um Alquorah University, King AbdulAziz University, Girls Community College in Al Ahsa, Al Baha College, Jazan University, Najran University, Al Baha University female branch, King Abdullah Air Defense Academy, and others. In summary, TVTC has stopped the same digital literacy certification program which has been endorsed by many of the best institutes of higher education in the Kingdom some of which have made the ICDL mandatory for their first year students. Unfortunately, TVTC started to contact these institutions and other non-Private centers lobbying to stop the ICDL tests and accreditations.

Hence, we are grateful for this opportunity to air our side of the issue and provide necessary clarification. We have worked hard to advance the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's transformation into a knowledge-based society, and through your support and trust we shall move forward with this mission despite the actions of our detractors.

Thank you and good day.