



Photo by Mahmoud Jaded

Shafeeq Ghabra (right) and Claude Smadja during the opening of the conference.

## GSGME opens two-day annual meet

# Confab to put special focus on region's governance 'failures'

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KUWAIT CITY, Feb 13: The Global Strategy Group Middle East (GSGME) opened a two-day annual conference at the Marina Hotel in Salmiya on Sunday. The conference, the eighth of its kind held annually, is being attended by top experts and participants around the world to discuss regional and global economic, social and political realities shaping the region. The mix of expertise and personalities gives the discussions a depth and openness, a forward thinking tonality not found in other conferences or meetings. The conference which is being held under the auspices of Jusoor Arabiya Leadership and Consultancy Center and Smadja Associates and sponsored by Kharafi National and Safwan Petroleum Technologies will run from Feb 14-15, 2011.

At the end of the first day of deliberations, Shafeeq Ghabra (President of Jusoor Arabiya) and Claude Smadja (President of Smadja Associates and former Managing Director of World Economic Forum), jointly appeared at a press conference to brief the press on today's deliberations as well as answer questions.

Smadja told the press that this small but highly intensive conference will focus this year on the Middle East with a special focus on the region's governance failures that have brought it to a political boiling point.

### Turmoil

Shafeeq in his address to the press said that with the current turmoil in the Arab world, the conference would try to understand the impact of the long term effects. "We are concerned about the Arab economy and its reform as well as the prospect of further collapse of state systems in the region", Shafeeq said.

"This time the meeting is taking place at a very crucial moment and a turning point in the history of the Arab world. We all agree that the events which have changed the picture (the current revolutions in Egypt and Tunisia as well as eruptions in other parts of the Arab world) mean an end to business as usual in the Arab world.

There is not a single country or regime in the Arab world which is immune to the major changes taking place. There is not a single country nor a single regime where we are not going to see new expectations, new demands or new aspirations from the people being expressed. The consensus in the discussions we had in the group is that whether the demands and aspirations will be met through reform and adjustments or through violence cannot be predicted. What is certain is that the demands and aspirations can no longer be ignored and must be met. In a way we are seeing a new Arab world just beginning to emerge probably in the next five to ten years.

### Stability

What is for sure is that stability in the region will take a new meaning, the normal stability that we knew in the last fifteen or twenty years is gone. I think one key new element with which the region will have to live with will be the notion of volatility in the region so as we said, this is something new happening in the region and in some way the Arab citizen starting with events in Egypt, Tunisia, Algeria don't want to become objects of history anymore but rather want to become subjects of history. This is a historic fundamental change which has been unleashed by events in Tunisia and Egypt and the consequences of that are just beginning to emerge and it will take quite some time to see where this leads the whole region", Smadja said in his speech.

In answer to a question, Smadja said that Arab regimes today are not only being asked to put food on dinner tables but also justify their legitimacy as rulers through providing their people some transparency and accountability.

He further added that these events we are witnessing is an emergence of a new mindset and that what we see happening now is the beginning of a cultural revolution in the Arab world.

"This cultural revolution could express itself in the form of art, literature and so forth in addition to many other expressions of freedom. The Arab world of today is not the same we had a month or two ago", Shafeeq chimed in.