

PROGRESSIVE REFORMS NEEDED IN THE ARAB WORLD: EXPERTS

JUSOUR & SMADJA HOLDS GLOBAL STRATEGY CONFERENCE

By Nisreen Zahreddine

KUWAIT: Jusour Arabiyah and Smadja held their eighth global strategy conference at the Marina Hotel yesterday. Both speakers at the press conference following the group conference, Shafeeq Al-Ghabrah and Claude Smadja, agreed that the current events are the beginning of a cultural revolution in the Arab world, which will express itself in all aspects of daily life. Shafeeq Al Ghabrah, the president of Jusour Arabia for leadership and consultancy, said that the meeting discussed the reflections of the two Arab revolutions that took place in Tunisia and Egypt and the impact of these transformations on the current situation in the region and Arab world.

"Arab legitimacy needs a serious reform or else the street will move towards this kind of reform," he said, adding that the new generation which had taken place in the march of history in these countries is now taking the initiative overleaping the political parties and the active forces and the society elites as well, all towards a regime change and a reform on the basis of people's empowerment and choices and participation in the political decision-making process.

Claude Smadja, the chairman of Smadja Associates, said that no government should take its legitimacy for granted since people are asking their rulers to justify their legitimacy, not only in terms of providing the natural necessities such as food and employment opportunities but for human dignity in terms of transparency and accountability. "We are witnessing the emergence of new mindsets," he said.

Smadja described the current times to be "crucial moments" as the events which change the picture are a turning point for the Arab World



Kuwait: Claude Smadja (left) and Shafeeq Al Ghabrah speaking during the press conference at Marina hotel yesterday.

—Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

and its business sector." There is not a single immune regime from the major changes in the Arab world", he said. One consensus in the discussions during the conference was on whether the demands will be met with some adjustments and reforms or through violence. He, on the other hand pointed to the fact that a new Arab world is beginning to emerge and it is still in the early stages. This brings forth the talk about a new meaning of stability in the region as the Arab citizens do not want to be objects of history anymore, on the contrary they want to be the subjects of history.

Al Ghabrah, on the other hand, emphasized the need for more progressive laws, freedom of expression and media freedom, judicial independence, and the foundation of political parties for a healthy political and social life for people. Such changes are badly needed for the GCC states such as Kuwait for instance, he said, adding that this should be applied in all monarchic regimes in order to enable them to survive.

He added that the expectations are that Egypt will restore its image in the Arab region as a major player and will regain its influential role in regional policymaking. It will, however, have to focus on internal issues first which needs great effort to reform it before broadening its role. On foreign investments, Al Ghabrah asserted that the Arab region was not a real subject of attraction for foreign investment as corruption is deep-rooted in the regimes. Similarly, Smadja refused to link between the revolutions and requests of change and the economic situation of the countries posted in figures. He explained that both Tunisia and Egypt are doing well in terms of GDP, but the wealth distribution discrepancies are wide, with few grabbing the wealth and many deprived of it.

The eighth Global Strategy conference on the Middle East brings together top experts and participants from all around the world in order to discuss the regional and global economic, social and political realities shaping the region.