



## Press release

### **Beirut hosts business forum on practical green measures for challenging economic times**

*Workshop organized by AFED in partnership with UNEP and Averda*

**Beirut, May 8, 2009** – A green economy initiative can help rescue the Arab region’s economy from the global downturn, a workshop held today in Beirut was told. Entitled ‘Corporate Environmental Responsibility: Challenges and Opportunities’, the event was organized by the Arab Forum for Environment and Development (AFED), in partnership with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and Averda, and hosted at Phoenicia Intercontinental hotel.

The one-day intensive workshop, which brought together executives from 35 leading private corporations and public sector bodies, addressed the business rationale for corporate environmental sustainability efforts and presented frameworks for incorporating environmental responsibility goals into business strategies.

“More and more companies are considering environmental initiatives. This strongly suggests that market forces are increasingly powerful drivers of corporate environmental improvement,” said Najib Saab, Secretary General of AFED. “This workshop, part of our Corporate Environmental Responsibility (CER) program, assists business managers steer their complex organizations through transition to environmentally responsible enterprises, and learn how to remain profitable while acting in an environmentally sustainable way.” Saab thanked UNEP for its support, and commended AFED’s corporate member, Averda, “for playing a major part in making this workshop possible.” He invited other companies to join AFED’s CER program and “become leaders in incorporating environmental issues into their goals for the future.”

Hussein Abaza, Chief of UNEP’s Economics and Trade Branch in Geneva, said: “Arab countries, like the rest of the world, are experiencing the effects of economic recession, which call for



efficient and immediate action. Today's economic slowdown presents us with a rare opportunity to re-direct our energies and resources toward making a transition to more sustainable patterns of development." Abaza called for "turning high unemployment, food and water security risks, and climate change into green opportunities". Explaining that the Green Economy Initiative "would be anchored in investments in environmental assets, clean and efficient production, renewable energy and regenerative urbanization," Abaza noted that the workshops are carried out in cooperation with UNEP's regional office for West Asia.

Maysarah Sukkar, Chairman of Averda, highlighted the need for businesses to find efficiencies across their operations. "All businesses can become leaner and greener. Some changes, like investing in cleaner technology, involve a short-term cost. But we have also streamlined many of our processes and seen immediate cost savings. We are very happy to be cooperating with AFED and UNEP and hope that by sharing our experiences we can inspire other companies to follow our example. Of course, there is always room for improvement. So this forum gives us the chance to learn from other organizations as we continue our journey towards greater sustainability."

The ten-hour workshop was led by Bashar Zeitoon, Director of AFED's Corporate Responsibility Program. It included presentations, discussions, case studies and group exercises, and concluded by forming a steering committee representing participating bodies.

The event inaugurates a series of seven workshops AFED is holding over the coming six weeks in Amman, Manama, Kuwait, Dhahran and Dubai. All workshops, supported by UNEP, will culminate in the formation of national steering groups entrusted with coordinating activities in the framework of an Arab Green Economy Initiative, undertaken by AFED in association with UNEP and other regional partners.

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### *Notes to editors*

#### **About the Arab Forum for Environment and Development (AFED)**

The Arab Forum for Environment and Development (AFED) is a regional not-for-profit, non-governmental, membership-based organization hosted in Beirut, Lebanon, and carries the status of international organization.

AFED is dedicated to achieving the goals of environmentally sustainable human development in the Arab world. We do so through education, advocacy, and by fostering partnerships with the private and public sectors.

Since 2007, AFED has provided a credible convening public forum that brings together business, government, academia, the media, and civil society to motivate cross-sector collaboration.

AFED employs persuasion and dialogue with all sectors as a guiding philosophy in order to reconcile environmental sustainability and human development. In our advocacy, we seek initiatives that are socially equitable, economically viable, and politically acceptable.

Guided by science, AFED undertakes to publish a series of policy-oriented reports annually to serve the decision-making needs of our societies and to guide our transition to environmentally sustainable human development. For more information, visit [www.afedonline.org](http://www.afedonline.org)

#### **About the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) and the Green Economy Initiative**

UNEP is the overall coordinating environmental organization of the United Nations system. Its mission is to provide leadership and encourage partnership in caring for the environment by inspiring, informing, and enabling nations and peoples to improve their quality of life without compromising that of future generations. (More information from <http://www.unep.org/>)

The Green Economy Initiative is a low-carbon, environmentally-friendly programme designed to produce a roadmap for governments and other decision makers so that they can reshape and refocus financial markets and public spending towards areas such as clean technologies, renewable energies, waste management, while sustainably using and preserving natural assets such as the planet's ecosystems. (More information from: <http://www.unep.org/greeneconomy>)

#### **About Averda**

Averda is a full-service integrated waste management company specialized in the cleaning, collection, treatment, recycling and neutralizing of liquid and solid waste. In short, we aim to solve waste problems intelligently and efficiently.

Averda is a company that always acts responsibly and works hard for the communities it serves and the environment we share. Based in Dubai, our operations extend to the United Arab Emirates, Lebanon, Oman and Saudi Arabia.

At Averda, we inspire people to care for our ecosystem.

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