

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen ---- welcome to the MEADFA conference. It has been another exciting year for this region. In 2013, Duty free sales in the middle east grew by 11.1% contributing 9.3% of world wide sales. Africa grew by 7.3% contributing 1.4% to the global duty free business. We are witnessing tremendous growth in the Middle East and African aviation sectors and in our industry.

It has also been a year of challenges. Ebola has been a real challenge to the tourism industry in Africa. But, having recently returned from the African airport council assembly, I can see commercial activities are moving to the forefront and playing an important role in airport development plans. While north and Southern Africa have mature duty free markets, east and west are eagerly continuing to develop commercial activities at their airports.

A testimony to the success of the winning formula of our region was the winning of 'Airport retailer of the year' by Dubai Duty Free and also 'marketing campaign of the year' by Bahrain Duty Free at the recent Frontier awards in Cannes. I also wish to recognize Colm McLoughlin on receiving the Irish presidential distinguished service award for the Irish Abroad.

Working with other associations is very important to the development and success of MEADFA. We have a lot to learn and share with our peer groups. I am delighted the Duty Free World Council has been set up. Unlike downtown shopping, a passengers experience in a duty free store worldwide is a lasting impression **that** passenger has on all our industry. Whether it is development of our industry or challenges we face, It is therefore timely to have an association which helps us to operate as one global unity with one direction.

As I look around the room today, I am aware that a high percentage of the audience are suppliers in our industry. I thank you for your support. While our region has been tremendously successful, I feel we should not be complacent. I encourage you to continue to give our region the attention, innovation and support that it deserves from your brands.

I am very excited about this years conference. We aim to present a conference that is a true reflection of our industry, representing a broad range of topics and locations that highlights the diversity of our region. We have sessions on inflight, airport and land based duty free shops. We will travel from north to South Africa, from Jordan to Abu Dhabi, South America to China. Along the way we will hear how retail is being re-invented and how the biggest airport in the world is being developed on our doorstep.

We aim to continue the winning formula of past MEADFA conferences but also try new initiatives.

We will hold a debate in which you the audience can contribute by means of an interactive ipad. I encourage you to get involved. The aim of the debate is not just to discuss the topic addressed but to give a clear message that MEADFA is about communication. It is about development, it is about addressing issues and working together.

I wish to thank all our sponsors to this conference. This year will see a record number of attending delegates. But, the MEADFA conference is so much more than a conference. It is about networking, its about meeting friends of old and new ones too. I hope you enjoy our conference and that it is productive, successful and rewarding for you.

**THANK YOU.**