



Economic councils, private sector leaders and professional associations gather at the Chamber of Commerce and launch the "BROADBAND NOW Group"

**- 10 business leaders and professionals to form the steering committee –
- www.broadbandlebanon.org**

Beirut, October 31st 2008: An impressive gathering of economic councils, business leaders, and professional associations gathered on October 31st at the Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture of Beirut and Mount Lebanon to launch the Lebanese Broadband Stakeholders Group, referred to from therein as "BROADBAND NOW" group.

President Adnan Kassar, representing the Lebanese Economic Organizations spoke about the necessity of a modern telecommunications infrastructure for economic growth and social development. He stressed the importance of market liberalization in this respect. President Mohammad Zaatari, representing the Federation of the Chambers of Commerce, addressed the national challenge of reduced productivity and competitiveness because of the lack of broadband. President Ghazi Koraytem, welcomed the attendees and supported the broadband initiative as one gathering various players within the private sector. Mrs. Salam Yamout, Program Manager for the Partnership for Lebanon gave an overview of the Broadband Now Initiative and laid out its objectives and scope of work.

On this occasion, the steering committee was introduced, formed by 10 professionals and business leaders including Mr. Nabil BuKhalid, Mr. Gaby Deek, Mr. Jalal Fawaz, Dr. Toni Issa, Mr. Dany Richa, Ms. Jennifer Sarraf, Mr. Bassam Tueini, Mrs. Salam Yamout and an "Association Des Banques" representative. The group appointed Mr. Salim Edde as the group's spokesperson.

The steering committee will have the responsibility of driving the group to reach the main first phase objective: Provide broad and non-partisan support for broadband, protected from political and other controversies, while working to fulfill the 10 points, communicated previously in the Broadband Manifesto:

- True broadband in Lebanon: up to 1 Gb/s
- Accessibility to all citizens
- Recognition of the role of Broadband for economic growth
- Privacy and security
- Open, fair and competitive market
- Access to public infrastructure
- No restrictions on content

Broadband NOW

- Support for the development of local content (intellectual property rights)
- No restrictions on applications and services
- Development of online public services

In fact, the Broadband Manifesto is the common belief that gathers all group members. It started with the objective to draw attention on Lebanon's crucial need for Broadband, in order to compete with the global market and take the country's economy to the next level. Three months later, the Broadband Stakeholders Group gathers more than 500 citizens, business leaders, organizations, chambers and associations who have adopted the Manifesto.

Today, the group is calling decision makers to find an immediate solution and bring fast, reliable, and affordable connectivity to Lebanon. As a matter of fact, Broadband is a true driver for growth: The National Broadband project will inject investments in the country and will create new job openings to individuals and business opportunities for companies. By using broadband, Lebanese companies will be able to cut down on operational costs and widen their business on an international level while optimizing their worldwide exposure and exploring new markets out of Lebanon.

Therefore, Broadband is a vital need for business development: Many industries rely on the availability of high speed broadband to expand, to name but a few: call centers, universities and research centers, content developers, media and hospitals. And it goes without saying that all industries rely on data networks to relate branches to the head office nationally or regionally, and use the Internet to connect to their clients and suppliers located thousand of miles away.

"If we really intend to build a high added value software industry in Lebanon, as has been successfully the case in several similar countries, it is absolutely inconceivable to keep the telecom infrastructure in the deplorable state it is currently in. We definitely need to upgrade it to the standards which are currently available in all nations" said Mr. Edde. High speed broadband is also necessary to transmit accurately video and voice applications. "Imagine how difficult it is for us to send a video production, a radio spot or a song. Even locally, we are forced most of the time to send it as a hard copy, which is a waste of time and money. Not to mention if we want to send it abroad. In this case, the CD has to be checked by the General Security for screening purposes. How can Lebanon be competitive without this technology?" said Mr. Jihad El Murr from MTV.

High speeds of broadband are not available in Lebanon and the price for basic data services are much more expensive than in the Arab and European countries.

Data networks are the infrastructure of the twenty first century. They are a pre-requisite to national economic growth and social development.