

Harnessing the power of the sun

17 February 2009

A.T. Kearney report shows viability of UAE government renewable energy target



Dubai, - Following the announcement that the UAE has joined the International Renewable Agency (IRENA) as a founding member, a recent report by A.T. Kearney, one of the world's leading management consulting firms, shows the viability of renewable energy in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region.

The report comes at a time when the UAE government has announced a renewable energy target of seven per cent. A.T. Kearney's report, *Tapping the Sun: Embracing Solar Energy*, shows how the power of the sun could be harnessed to provide solar energy.

"Sunshine is almost guaranteed for more than 300 days per year in most MENA locations. This, coupled with the vast deserts available for putting solar panels, which require a lot of space, makes the region ideal for the development of solar energy," said Robert Ziegler, Vice President, A.T. Kearney Middle East, and author of the report.

Robert Ziegler, Vice President, A.T. Kearney Middle East

IRENA is an initiative that Germany launched with like-minded countries. Mandated by governments worldwide, IRENA aims to become the main driving force in promoting a rapid transition towards the widespread and sustainable use of renewable energy on a global scale. The founding conference was held 26 January, where UAE Minister of Foreign Affairs, Shaikh Abdullah Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, signed the statute in Germany.

Solar energy is likely to quickly gather a foothold in GCC due to increasing energy demand and innovation developments and the potential economic value for solar energy is huge, estimated at US\$11 billion per annum.

Renewable energy is one of the key solutions to the current challenges facing the world's energy future, and solar energy has seen a 19 percent growth in the MENA region over the past few years. Key drivers for the growth of solar energy are improved technology coupled with the region's strong and abundant sunlight.

Using alternative energy, such as solar power, would not only prove to be an efficient way to cope with the region's increasing demand, the report said, but it would also allow for the export of excess capacities. For example, the UAE could produce its drinking water with the use of renewable energies instead of gas and thus better meet its projected demand, with limited pressure on electricity production. In addition the country could then export the gas saved and use the proceeds to finance the investments required in solar energy and other infrastructure projects.

"Using solar power and renewable forms of energies has several positive effects," Ziegler said. "While tapping the sun's power will alleviate the regions increasing energy demands it will also have less impact on the environment helping to cut greenhouse gas emissions."

However, while a commitment to renewable energy, such as solar power, is paramount to meet future energy demands, the growth of the solar industry will have to be supported by national and regional strategies. This may include the development of specialized free zones, education and research, strategic investments in state-of-the-art solar farms as well as industry specific incentives and regulation.

{Zawya}