

# MEADFA holds first virtual event to address impact & recovery

The Middle East & Africa Duty Free Association (MEADFA) held its first virtual event outlining how travel retail in the Middle East and Africa is fighting against the impact of COVID-19. Over 150 participants from across the world joined the event. It's noted that coordinated advocacy by airports, airlines and retailers is key to the recovery of the channel.

"This is a crisis like no other, and travel retail is very much in the eye of the storm. Our industry requires the full support of our governments and our airport partners and stakeholders. Global industry associations including MEADFA, ICAO, DFWC, ACI WORLD, IATA, ETRC, APTRA, ASUTIL and many more are working together joining efforts to mitigate the effect of COVID-19," says Rita Chidiac, AWG Secretary General, MEADFA.

The event was moderated by John Hume, Hume Brophy Managing Partner, and included high profile speakers including Ali Tounsi, Secretary General, ACI Africa, Rames Cidambi, CCO, Dubai Duty Free, and Rita Chidiac, Corporate Affairs & Communications Manager - Worldwide Duty Free, JT International.

While the impact of COVID-19 has been catastrophic, positive steps toward recovery in the MEADFA region are taking place. Despite very low numbers, passenger behavior and spending patterns have continued and many categories are proving to be resilient.

"Our airport and airline partners have taken major steps to make traveling by air very safe. Travel retail operators have worked hard to create the new safe operating conditions in our shops to protect both staff and customers. All of us must now work together to convince people that they can fly safely and comfortably.

Most importantly, more needs to be done to ensure the industry maintains a deeper dialogue with governments in the Middle East and Africa. The patchwork of quarantine and traveling restrictions currently in place means that passenger confidence and ability to travel is at an all-time low.

We need to move away from quarantining travelers and introduce consistent and coordinated testing procedures to give our passengers the confidence and the ability to take to the skies again," adds Chidiac.