

MEADFA outlines the road to recovery during Advocacy webinar

The Middle East and Africa Duty Free Association (MEADFA) held its first Advocacy webinar of 2021. Entitled “The Road to Recovery,” the webinar was dedicated to demonstrating how the industry in Africa and the Middle East can recover given the difficult situation it faces with the COVID-19 crisis. Over 160 participants attended the event from 28 countries.

The webinar saw a variety of key industry players participating, sharing their perspectives on the situation. John Hume, Founder & Managing Partner, Hume Brophy, moderated the event, while Sherif Toulan, Vice President, MEADFA, provided the opening welcome address.

Alan Murray Hayden, Head of Airline, Airport and Security Compliance and Operational Solutions at IATA, presented the opportunities for the industry that are possible with the newly developed IATA Travel Pass. Mutual recognition of vaccination among countries will be critical to the restart of aviation globally, and the only way that this can be done properly is by harnessing the power of modern technology. IATA’s Travel Pass is now being trialled by more than 30 airlines worldwide including Emirates, Qatar, Etihad and Gulf Air. Murray Hayden also suggested that this initiative might hasten the move toward document-free travel, which will have immediate implications for the duty free industry for passenger destination verification.

Rita Chidiac, MEADFA Advocacy Working Group Secretary General, presented progress from recent advocacy that the industry has engaged in, as well as the main regulatory issues MEADFA needs to address. Chidiac outlined the progress of MEADFA in terms of structuring its resources including the working groups that have been created to share regulatory intelligence. Chidiac’s call to action is very clear: “All brands from all categories are encouraged to reach out to educate authorities about our unique operating model. A cross category approach is needed alongside an efficient way of sharing intelligence.”

Sarah Branquinho, DFWC President, concluded the webinar with a presentation on the WHO Protocol to eliminate the illicit trade in tobacco products. In a clear call to action to retailers and partners in the Middle East and Africa she pointed to the fact that over 40% of countries that have ratified the Illicit Trade Protocol come from this region. “The purpose of this Protocol is to stop the illicit trade of tobacco products. I fail to see why it is targeting law abiding responsible retailers and their airport and airline partners. We need to make this clear to our governments in the months ahead,” she comments.

Sherif Toulan says “the light at the end of the tunnel is near.” To ensure our industry has the best chances of recovery, MEADFA must act with its partners to ensure we can get back to normal as quickly as possible. For this to be achieved, there must be increased cooperation between airports and airlines.