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## Brazil and Jordan Exchange Pleasantaries and Vow Cooperation

Contributed by Isaura Daniel  
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One of the themes discussed at a recent meeting between the minister of Foreign Relations of Jordan, Salaheddine Al-Bashir, and members of the board at the Arab Brazilian Chamber of Commerce was the good moment for the economies of Brazil and Jordan.

Al-Bashir was in Brazil for an official tour of the country in preparation of the official visit to Brazil of the king of Jordan, Abdullah II, in October. The minister praised the good performance of the economy of Brazil.

"Brazil has a story of success," said the Arab minister, mentioning the political and economic performance of the country as an example of the fight against inflation. "The success of Brazilian industry is a global reference," said the minister. Al-Bashir stated that Jordan and the Arab world as a whole admire Brazil and added that he knows of the Arab participation in the Brazilian economy and industry.

At the meeting with Arab Brazilian Chamber directors, the minister also received further information about the size of the Brazilian economy. "Brazil is an international creditor. We are a country with strong agricultural talent. With the global food crisis, we may be the largest supplier in the sector," stated Arab Brazilian Chamber president Antonio Sarkis Jr. He told Al-Bashir that the country has the third largest aeronautics industry in the world and factories of over 15 carmakers.

For this reason, Sarkis said he believes that Brazil and the Arab world are at an appropriate moment for investment and partnerships. Jordan, according to minister Al-Bashir, is also living a good phase. He said that the country is proud of its low levels of illiteracy and infant mortality, in comparison to the first world.

"We have an economy of US\$ 14 billion, six million inhabitants and per capita income of US\$ 2,400," said the Foreign Minister. The foreign debt of the country, which was as high as 200% of the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in the late 80s, is now at 35% of GDP.

Al-Bashir stated that the stock markets of the country have grown and that levels of poverty and unemployment have dropped. The country has inflation, but, according to him, it is fueled by the greater oil and food prices.

"We are living a good to excellent situation in terms of transparency," stated the minister. Al-Bashir spoke about the trade agreements that the country has with Arab countries, the European Union and the United States. "Jordan is an economically open country and guarantees the rights of foreign investors," he informed.

Both Sarkis and Al-Bashir showed interest in greater bilateral investment between Brazil and Jordan. The Foreign Trade

vice president at the Chamber, Salim Schahin, said that Brazil needs investment in infrastructure, in ports, for example, and that the Arabs have been seeking investment opportunities. He also recalled that Brazil has a strong energy sector, which may operate in the region.

Other matters discussed at the meeting also included tourism, an area in which the Jordanians and Brazilians want to provide incentives to reciprocal visits. Al-Bashir stated that this sector has been growing significantly in Jordan and pointed out the importance of religious tourism to the country.

"Jordan is proud of its Christian and Islamic heritage," he said. Schahin presented to the minister the Abraham Path Initiative, a tourist route that includes the sites crossed by Abraham in the Middle East. The objective is to show the common origin of monotheistic religions.

Chamber director Adel Auada recalled that the tourist and cultural interest of Brazilians in the region grew significantly after the visit of Brazilian president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva to the region, in 2003. The vice president of Foreign Relations at the organization, Helmi Nasr, said to the minister, however, that Brazil still needs greater access to Arab culture. "There are many possibilities for cultural cooperation, not just economic, and the Arab community needs more sources of Arab culture," said Nasr.

Among those participating in the meeting were the Marketing vice president at the Arab Chamber, Rubens Hannun, the organization's secretary general, Michel Alaby, and directors Bechara Ibrahim and Mustapha Abdouni, who is also the honorary consul of Jordan in São Paulo, the future ambassador of Brazil to Amman, Fernando José Marroni de Abreu, and the ambassador of Jordan to Brasília, Ramez Goussous.

During a luncheon in honor of the Foreign Minister, Sarkis pointed out the opportunity that the Chamber in hosting "one of the most important Arab authorities; one who has contributed very much to the closer relations between Brazil and its friendly nation," and the fact that this visit by the minister is preparatory for the king's trip. "These two factors bring great joy to the Arab Chamber, which has been working on bringing Arabs and Brazilians closer together for 50 years," he said.

He also pointed out that authorities in both countries have been showing the political desire for these closer ties, which "should certainly attract more attention of businessmen so that they may learn about and make use of the existing opportunities." "Our trade relations are still small, but they may be much more promising for both of these countries once businessmen's interest is aroused," he declared.

After that, Al-Bashir said that king Abdullah II is interested in strengthening exchange with Brazil in the political, economic and cultural areas. "And the private sector plays an important part in this area," he pointed out.

The minister said that the expansion of relations between Brazil and the Middle East and North Africa and the participation of the Arab Brazilian Chamber in this process reflects the good level of development that the Arab community has reached in the country. He mentioned the dedication of the Arab colony in this respect.

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