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Environmental Data Initiative



## **PRESS RELEASE**

# **UAE launches 'Al Basama Al Beeiya'**

***- Ecological Footprint Initiative, a historic national project to ensure a sustainable future -***

**Abu Dhabi, October 18 2007:** The UAE today launched its historic national initiative to measure and understand the country's ecological footprint. Called Al Basama Al Beeiya (Ecological Footprint), the effort involves multiple stakeholders across the nation to work towards developing important guidelines for a more resource-conscious and resource-efficient government and society.

Al Basama Al Beeiya will commence with an extensive and complex nation-wide data collection exercise, sourcing data related to the resource availability and consumption patterns in the UAE across all sectors, such as energy, trade, fisheries, agriculture, water and urban planning. The launch of this initiative emphasized the importance of the active involvement and participation of all government departments, industry, NGOs, private and public environmental enterprise, and research and academic institutions across the UAE.

The acquired data would then be analysed to prepare the national footprint account of the UAE.

The four core partners in the Al Basama Al Beeiya initiative are the UAE Ministry of Environment and Water (MoEW), the Abu Dhabi Global Environmental Data Initiative (AGEDI), the Emirates Wildlife Society – World Wide Fund for Nature (EWS-WWF) and the Global Footprint Network (GFN), an international non-profit organization that promotes Ecological Footprint as a sustainability metric worldwide.

H.E Dr. Mohammed Saeed Al Kindi, UAE Minister of Environment and Water, inaugurated Al Basama Al Beeiya at a press conference in Abu Dhabi and said the initiative was in line with the country's efforts to preserve environmental resources and their sustainability in the light of increasing human consumption.

Describing the initiative as "one of the most important tools to measure the levels of consumption of natural resources", Al Kindi added: "The results of Al Basama Al Beeiya will be shared with the decision makers and policy makers so that they can tailor their plans to ensure the best use of resources in a way that ensures sustainability for current and future generations".

The minister noted that the Living Planet Report 2006 had reported that the earth will need to double its current resources by 2050 to sustain the current high level of consumption. He recalled the emergence of the issues of excessive consumption and increase in waste as major international issues in recent years, and cited global concerns raised by the Agenda 21 declaration of the Earth Summit held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, and the Global Summit for



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Sustainable Development held in Johannesburg in 2002. The summits had also called upon local communities to initiate measures to curtail consumption while coping with development.

Noting that rapid economic growth in the UAE had exerted increasing pressure on the country's energy and water resources, Al Kindi said "rational usage of these resources has become one of the most important if not a primary issue in our national policy."

He said Al Basama Al Beeiya will also be an important tool to build an accurate and developed database that provides new, credible and trustworthy data and information from different sectors and this process will result in high levels of transparency between official institutions and the public.

"The initiative is based on collecting data and information from different resources federally and locally from the private and public sectors. Therefore the success of the initiative is dependent on the coordination and cooperation of these different institutions to frame guidelines and develop mechanisms to facilitate cooperation between all of them," the minister said.

Addressing the press conference, Majid Al Mansouri, the Secretary General of the Environment Agency Abu Dhabi (EAD) and AGEDI, stated that the Al Basama Al Beeiya would now take the centre-stage of the UAE's environmental agenda.

"It is my pleasure to be part of the launch of the Al Basama Al Beeiya initiative. Gathering data is a challenging task. Unified standards and methodology are absolutely essential here... We realize that there are multiple stakeholders from each emirate and many government departments which will make it even more challenging. However, I am confident that the UAE is prepared, equipped with the right tools and ready, because we have the generous support of the leadership. I am confident that with the cooperation of all stakeholders, we will succeed in painting a true and factual picture of our ecological footprint", he said.

Razan Al Mubarak, Managing Director of EWS-WWF, the NGO partner in Al Basama Al Beeiya, said that each of the four partners have clearly defined roles to play. EWS-WWF would not only drive the communications for the initiative among its internal and external stakeholders but also channel WWF's global experience to the national project.

Detailing Dr Al Kindi's remarks on policy guidance to be provided by the Initiative and honoring the leadership for their support, Al Mubarak said: "Al Basama Al Beeiya is of utmost importance because it will provide reliable, verifiable data on the environment and consumption patterns in the UAE. It will also ensure that the data will be transparently collected, analysed and provided to decision-makers in the country."

Dr Mathis Wackernagel Executive Director of GFN, the international partner of the Initiative, made his statement in a pre-recorded video message. A proud and thrilled Wackernagel noted that the UAE is only the third country in the world to embark on such an in-depth research collaboration of this nature after Switzerland and Japan.

Comparing the footprint calculation to financial accounting, Wackernagel stated that the Ecological Footprint is about securing people's quality of life, while recognising the ecological budget



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constraints. The Ecological Footprint helps us to understand the significance of our natural assets for our economy and the natural capital constraints.

Providing a detailed overview of the Initiative, Mohammad Jawdar, General Coordinator at AGEDI, explained the phase-wise development of the Initiative and the relevance of the project to the UAE. AGEDI has made a good beginning in identifying ecologically relevant data and establishing the process of gathering the necessary data. "We will now use this experience at the national level," he said.

Emphasising the relevance of Al Basama Al Beeiya to the UAE's current situation, Jawdar said it is important to use the ecological footprint as a tool to raise national awareness on consumption patterns and resource availability. He explained that the initiative will also lead to guidelines and standards that will limit the negative impact of human actions on the environment.

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### **Editors' Notes:**

#### **Al Basama Al Beeiya**

The Al Basama Al Beeiya (Ecological Footprint) initiative is the UAE's national effort to ensure a sustainable future by measuring and understanding the impact of our way of living on planet earth. It is a historic initiative to collect vital national data according to uniform and proven standards. Al Basama Al Beeiya will be a major tool for the government to make informed policy decisions and to uphold Sheikh Zayed's environmental legacy. The national partners in the Al Basama Al Beeiya believe that the initiative is the UAE's need of the hour, considering the country's rising consumption levels and the rapid pace of development.

#### **Background**

The ecological footprint is a sustainability indicator that measures the use of natural resources by the population of a country. According to the Living Planet Report 2006, the UAE has the highest ecological footprint in the world at 11.9 gha (global hectares) per person. However, a review and analysis of the sources of the data used to calculate the UAE's ecological footprint has indicated that there is a considerable gap between the knowledge and data that existed in the international records and the ground data collected by local organizations. The Al Basama Al Beeiya initiative will not only close that gap, but will provide the country's leadership and government with reliable and much needed *information* that will then be used as a policy-guiding tool.

#### **Partners**

**MoEW:** The Ministry of Environment and Water in the UAE is part of the federal government and oversees the country's environmental policies and programmes. The ministry's mission is to achieve balanced and sustainable development in the country.

**AGEDI:** AGEDI was launched in 2002, as the UAE's response to a direly felt need for a formal body in Abu Dhabi to provide comprehensive and relevant data that would improve environmental



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policies and their role in the decision-making process. AGEDI's efforts led to the publication of the first State of Environment (SoE) report for the Emirate of Abu Dhabi in March this year.

**EWS – WWF:** The Emirates Wildlife Society (EWS) was established as a public interest society in February 2001 by a ministerial resolution under the Societies of Public Interest Law of 1974. The environmental NGO is registered with the Ministry of Social Affairs. Its mission is to conserve biodiversity and promote sustainable living through education and conservation initiatives in the UAE. EWS works in partnership with the WWF (World Wide Fund for Nature), one of the world's most well-known global conservation organizations.

**GFN:** Global Footprint Network is a charitable social-benefit organization with the mission of making ecological limits central to decision-making everywhere. Together with over 70 partner organizations around the world, GFN coordinates research, develops methodological standards, and promotes innovative applications to provide decision makers with tools that will help the human economy operate within the Earth's ecological limits. GFN serves as the steward for the National Footprint Accounts, which calculate the Ecological Footprint and bio-capacity of 150 nations from 1961 through the present. These accounts have helped the Ecological Footprint become one of the most globally successful and widely applied sustainability communication and education tools.

**For further information:**

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