

# No excuses for damaging environment

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**No excuses, enforce environmental law. That was the message that came out loud and clear in a short but passionate impromptu speech by Secretary General of the Saudi Wildlife Commission Prince Bandar bin Saud.**

He was summing up the environment session on the final day of the Gulf Environment Forum on Tuesday.

The session chaired by Prince Bandar had reviewed the legal framework that currently exists in the Kingdom for environmental protection and demonstrate that laws designed to minimize environmental impact actually existed.

In addition, environmental impact studies were also reviewed. "Our forefathers used [the environment] sustainably. God told us through many messengers to do this, but in only the last 50 to 100 years we have destroyed it on a monumental scale," he said. A former incumbent of Prince Bandar's office, Abdulaziz Abuzinada, commented from the floor that without enforcement the laws were ineffective.

Waleed Al-Nuwaiser, managing partner of law firm Al Nuwaiser, thought that over the past decades there had been a shift away from environmental concerns in investors.

"Now we see changes, and people are coming back to their senses," he told delegates.

Currently, investors are obliged to undertake environmental impact studies and comply with existing laws.

“This is now a standard part of sales and purchase agreements,” he said.

However, legal sanction was not the only method by which compliance could be achieved. Both questions from the floor and a review by Suhail Khan of Queensland’s environment and resource management department in Australia of the structures in place there, suggested that cash or tax/license fee breaks were also effective methods.

Khan pointed out that large companies structured themselves in such a way that they maximized incentives and complied as a matter of course. However, small businesses had not found compliance cost-effective and in some cases continued to ignore regulations.

The conclusion, according to an environmental expert from Sweden, was to raise public awareness that waste was a valuable resource, rather than something to throw away, by offering cash incentives for the return and considered disposal of, for example, plastic bottles.

“If you did that, I am sure the country would be clean in one year,” he observed.

Prince Bandar took up Abuzinada’s point about enforcement in an interview after the session.

“Implementation of the law is, in my opinion, one of the most effective methods of raising awareness. When you go through a red light and they give you a ticket, it is much more effective on your psyche, than if they gave you a little booklet telling you that you were dangerous,” he said.

Prince Bandar said that you could do all the educating and spend all the money you wanted on raising awareness, but if the laws were not implemented it would go to waste.

“We have many laws; I am calling for implementation. You will see a difference in six months. We should all get together and clean our house, because we only have one house.”

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