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SAUDI ARABIA

King reflects on Saudi accomplishments at Shoura opening

The Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz on Sunday inaugurated the annual session of the Majlis Al-Shoura (Consultative Council). In his speech, King Abdullah addressed a variety of issues, including employment, education, counterterrorism, women's rights, economic policies, oil prices, the Arab-Israeli conflict and humanitarian aid.

On foreign policy, King Abdullah stated, "At the international level, our position is clear and based on friendship and promotion of peace among peoples and nations." Saudi Arabia will continue to promote dialogue and tolerance in an effort to eliminate hatred, he added. The King thanked the soldiers who fought against foreign infiltrators along the southern border and emphasized that the Kingdom is still a leader in the ongoing global efforts to combat terrorism and extremism. Noting the similarities between the goals of the Kingdom and those of the international community, he said, "We have the same objectives – to spread security, peace, counter terrorism and corruption in all its forms, and establish principles of development, progress, prosperity and civilization."

King Abdullah emphasized the government's commitment to its citizens through a series of programs, including an initiative to create more than 200,000 jobs in the education sector and \$311 million in emergency aid for distribution to social security benefactors, among them orphans and people with special needs. The current budget, at approximately \$144 billion, is the largest in the Kingdom's history, said King Abdullah. He stressed the government's efforts to promote education through an increased education budget of \$36.5 billion and pointed to the inauguration of the King Abdullah University of Science and Technology and other new universities, which raised the number of Saudi higher education facilities to 25. King Abdullah also discussed efforts to empower women through the establishment of facilities and programs, including the Princess Nora bint Abdulrahman University, which is managed entirely by women.

King Abdullah vowed that the Kingdom will continue to maintain its moderate economic policies, which have helped shield it from some of the damage of the financial crisis. "Saudi Arabia sought in the wake of the global financial and economic crisis to minimize the impact of the crisis on the stability of oil markets and on the interests of producing and consuming countries alike," he said.

FOREIGN RELATIONS

King Abdullah holds talks with Lebanese President Michel Suleiman

King Abdullah and Lebanese President Michel Suleiman co-chaired bilateral talks in Riyadh on March 6. The discussion focused on Saudi-Lebanese relations, as well as regional and international issues. The session was attended by Crown Prince Sultan bin Abdulaziz and other senior officials. President Suleiman arrived in the Kingdom on March 6 for a two-day visit. He was accompanied by Interior Minister Ziyad Barood and a number of other Lebanese officials.

FOREIGN AID

Saudi Arabia provides funds for Cote D'Ivoire Islamic centers

The Kingdom has provided \$1.33 million in assistance to Islamic centers and societies in Cote D'Ivoire. The Saudi Ambassador in Abidjan, Jamal Balkhoyour, handed over the checks to the beneficiaries during a reception held on March 2. Addressing the gathering, the Ambassador noted that the assistance comes within the framework of Saudi Arabia's commitment to its Islamic and humanitarian role in the world.

