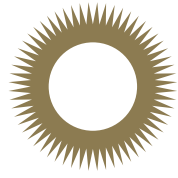


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UAE MANAGING PARTNER REPORT

LAW FIRMS TURN TO TECHNOLOGY TO
FACE THE POST COVID-19 LANDSCAPE

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BILL NASH, MANAGING PARTNER, MORGAN LEWIS (ABU DHABI) AND AYMAN KHALEQ, MANAGING PARTNER, MORGAN LEWIS (DUBAI)

Bill Nash, Managing Partner of Morgan Lewis' Abu Dhabi office and co-Leader of the firm's Middle East practice, has been resident in Abu Dhabi since 2008 and previously lived in Riyadh. He advises regional and global clients on a variety of corporate and business law matters, focusing on private investment funds, international transactions and joint ventures, and general corporate counseling.

Ayman Khaleq, managing partner of Morgan Lewis's Dubai office and co-Leader of the firm's Middle East practice, advises institutional clients and asset managers on cross-border investment management, capital markets, and structured finance transactions. In particular, Ayman advises on the structuring and documentation of private investment funds and alternative investment platforms.

WHAT MEASURES HAS YOUR FIRM TAKEN TO ADAPT TO COVID-19?

Bill: Our people and our clients have always been our priority, and that has not changed through this period. Focusing on the well-being of our colleagues and maintaining the strong levels of communication and connectivity that we have when we are in the office have been key. Technology has been important for this and given our longstanding remote working programme, we already had the infrastructure and safeguards in place to remote work wherever and whenever necessary. Our people quickly embraced the technologies to be able to transition effectively. In addition we have invested heavily in training our personnel to ensure they can continue to efficiently and effectively serve our clients. Lawyers faced with challenges often want to be part of a solution – whether it is for our clients or our communities. Our leadership is focused on supporting all team members to find a way to identify and contribute to solutions – big or small, personal, professional and for our communities.

“THE OPENING OF INTERNET CALLING OPTIONS WAS CRITICAL TO BUSINESS CONTINUITY IN MARCH AND APRIL AND WILL BE IMPORTANT AS BUSINESS ADJUSTS TO A MORE PERMANENT REMOTE ENVIRONMENT.”

Ayman: In parallel to the areas covered by Bill, we also made sure that we are there for our clients, as unique as this time has been for us, it is for them too. We quickly formed a multidisciplinary and global Coronavirus COVID-19 Task Force to help guide clients through the broad scope of legal issues to help them keep on top of developments as they unfold. Our UAE group was one of over 30 focused groups of more than 500 lawyers.

The ability to take advice from firms such as ours, which can help them with issues across their day to day business such as employment and financing needs, as well as their longer strategic requirements, and to learn from our global experience, has proven a real advantage.

WHAT ARE THE BIGGEST CHALLENGES FOR YOUR CLIENTS OVER THE NEXT SIX MONTHS?

Ayman: It varies depending on the client. However for institutional investors, including sovereign wealth funds and private equity funds with capital on hand it is assessing valuations around buy opportunities and engaging in remote or limited local due diligence.

Bill: For others it's access to capital and the ability to nimbly contract and accelerate their businesses. This is particularly the case in the healthcare and technology sectors which have been more active under the current circumstances.

HOW DO YOU ENVISAGE THE 'NEW NORMAL' FOR THE UAE LEGAL SECTOR?

Bill: In this environment, keeping the channels of communication open, staying on top of client needs and what comes next for them will be a critical component of success.

Ayman: The role of a lawyer as a 'trusted adviser' is taking prominence again. We represent most of our clients on multiple practice areas which has given us the opportunity to act as their go-to trusted advisors in relation to the legal and regulatory challenges they are facing and expect to face. This has brought us even closer to our clients.

WHAT REGULATORY INITIATIVE WOULD YOU MOST WELCOME TO SUPPORT THE RECOVERY AND GROWTH OF UAE BUSINESSES AND/OR THE LEGAL SECTOR GENERALLY?

Ayman: The opening of internet calling options was critical to business continuity in March and April and will be important as business adjusts to a more permanent remote environment. Similarly, the ability to utilise notary services remotely has been an important development.

WHAT IS NEW WITH YOUR FIRM?

Bill: We recently celebrated one year in Abu Dhabi. Our presence there has further strengthened our investment management and corporate offering in the Middle East and globally. Our UAE teams continue to work closely together on client matters and interact with colleagues in the US, Europe and Asia on a daily basis.

We also welcomed partner Chadi Salloum in November 2019 which increased our regional and global M&A capacity, and industry focus on energy and infrastructure.

His arrival coincided with that of Jennifer Josefson in Moscow and was closely followed by Ayesha Waheed in London, who also further reinforced and built on our global energy and infrastructure practice.

In addition to Chadi, we have added three associates in the past six months in our corporate, tax and litigation teams in the UAE.

“THE ABILITY TO UTILISE NOTARY SERVICES REMOTELY HAS BEEN AN IMPORTANT DEVELOPMENT.”

Ayman: We have seen an additional bolstering of our over 150 lawyer strong global investment management team.

Building on our new office in Abu Dhabi and our growth in Washington DC last year, we welcomed partner, Donald Waack, also in DC in January 2020. This was followed in May by a team in London which included two partners, Oliver Rochman and Rob Mailer.

This is important for our cross-border teams and gives a strong boost to our fund capabilities.

We are currently seeing a dramatic increase in regionally-based and outbound venture capital investments and regional fund formation and asset-backed securities mandates so these reinforcements are great.

WHAT GIVES YOUR FIRM THE EDGE IN A COMPETITIVE MARKET?

Ayman: The breadth and depth of our practices is a significant advantage. Our clients need to know that they are receiving advice that cuts across all aspects of their legal needs and this covers both local and international law considerations.

Bill: Our personal relationships and proven commitment to the markets we serve give our firm the edge. Our eight UAE partners have each practiced in the region for over 10 years and include several who have practiced for more than 15 years. ■



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