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ITC joins forces with Sharjah Business Women Council

(Sharjah) – International Trade Centre (ITC) Executive Director Arancha González and Her Excellency Ameera Bin Karam, Chairperson of Sharjah Business Women Council (SBWC), today signed a Memorandum of Understanding to work together on the economic empowerment of women in the United Arab Emirates and across the Arab region.

A particular focus of the SBWC is to provide women in the handicraft and textile sectors with opportunities to structure and grow their businesses while respecting fair labour standards, sustainability and artisanal traditions. The partnership between ITC and SBWC will seek to connect more businesswomen in the region with foreign markets.

ITC will provide support to SBWC to enable the association to step up its on-going efforts in reviving traditional skills and customary crafts. Joint capacity-building projects will aim to link artisanal women with the global fashion business. Ensuring greater market access for micro, small and medium-sized enterprises leads to more employment, which again contributes positively to livelihoods.

Despite an increase in the number of women in the Arab world involved in business, a recent study by the New Arab Women Forum, suggests that women in the region continue to face challenges. Despite the fact that Arab women are increasingly more educated, more empowered and engaged than ever before – from business to politics – they still make up only 28% of the active workforce. This is the lowest rate in any region in the world. Similarly, 2011 figures in the latest report on the Millennium Development Goals indicates that female unemployment is very high in the Arab region: around 19% compared to a world average of 6.2%.

‘Providing women with decent jobs improves education for children, the well being of families, but most importantly it gives women dignity,’ Ms. González said. ‘I look forward to working closely with SBWC to provide Arab women with solutions that will enable them to structure and grow their business to take better advantage of the opportunities offered by the world market.’

For ITC, boosting competitiveness of local producers in Sharjah, the Emirates and the wider Arab world, is a long-term engagement. One specific area to be addressed is in the area of market standards which are constantly evolving. This will be reflected in the training and advisory support that will be provided to SBWC.

‘Through this joint endeavour we will provide more women with a stable income and allow them to explore new opportunities,’ Ms. González said. ‘And a younger generation of both women and men will learn and apply traditional skills, and contribute to maintain the history, the heritage and the customs that make the Arab region unique.’

Note to Editor: ITC is the joint agency of the World Trade Organization and the United Nations. ITC assists small and medium-sized enterprises in developing and transition economies to become more competitive in global markets, thereby contributing to

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sustainable economic development within the frameworks of the [Aid for Trade](#) agenda and the [Millennium Development Goals](#)

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