

## **ICDL GCC Foundation to launch GCC-wide initiatives to engage the underprivileged in digital society**

*ICDL's strategy geared towards establishing a GCC digital society as it takes cue from a UN report about business models for the poor*

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ICDL GCC Foundation, the governing body and certification authority of the International Computer Driving License (ICDL) program in the Gulf, has announced that it will be unveiling several initiatives that aim to empower the underprivileged throughout the GCC region with essential computer skills. ICDL GCC Foundation further disclosed that it will sustain the momentum of a highly productive year in 2008 by focusing its theme and mission during 2009 on engaging the underprivileged in the digital society through several initiatives including making technology affordable by a wider spectrum of the society.

ICDL GCC Foundation's strategy for the coming year comprises of three primary undertakings that are in line with its endeavours for spreading digital literacy in the GCC. First, ICDL will seek the support of corporate citizens in the region to fund programs that promote digital literacy through corporate social responsibility (CSR) contributions. ICDL's ongoing efforts have been inspired by a UN Development Programme (UNDP) report titled "Creating Value for All: Strategies for Doing Business with the Poor," the first report under the UNDP's Growing Inclusive Markets Initiative that featured 50 case studies about companies demonstrating their successful pursuit of both revenues and social development regardless of their size.

Secondly, ICDL will actively campaign among telecom and technology companies to reduce the cost of services and products for the underprivileged allowing them to have affordable access to computers and Internet. ICDL revealed that it has already achieved concrete results with its call to make available the products and services at more affordable prices, as evidenced by Etisalat's recent initiative of reducing internet rates. ICDL is continuously calling on all other ISPs and computer related product manufacturers to offer more affordable and localised products, and reduce the fees of Internet access.

“Special attention for the less fortunate members of our society is greatly required from various concerned parties. In line with this, ICDL GCC Foundation is participating in a collaborative effort with the region’s public and private sectors to transform the underprivileged into IT-enabled, prolific individuals who are capable of contributing to economic national development. This will help us attain our broader goal of moulding the region into a digital society and affirms our support for the UNDP’s belief that the private sector is a relatively untapped resource which plays a significant role in supporting the attainment of the UN’s Millennium Development Goals,” said Jamil Ezzo, Director General, ICDL GCC Foundation.

The third part of ICDL's strategy is centred on partnering and collaborating with government and funding organisations to establish low-cost or free-of-charge IT literacy programs including other initiatives to be directed at different age groups and social groups of the society, such as the retirees and the unemployed. The move is part of a long-term campaign in view of the GCC's growing population that is expected to double to nearly 60 million by 2030, potentially resulting to the increase in the number of the underprivileged in the society. Moreover, with the current difficulties in the global economy leading to a large number of employees losing their jobs, ICDL believes that it is highly crucial at this time to deploy programs specifically aimed at the society's unemployed and has accordingly steered its strategy for the next year towards empowering them with computer skills.

The UNDP is the UN’s global development network for advocating change and connecting countries to knowledge, experience and resources with the goal of helping people build better lives. The organisation maintains its presence in 166 countries, working with the government and the community to formulate solutions to local and international development challenges.

ICDL GCC Foundation oversees vendor-neutral end-user computer skills certification programs to enhance computer literacy throughout the Gulf. Led by the Foundation’s efforts, the region has emerged as one of the top three contributors to the global ICDL certification program, which reported its 7 millionth registration worldwide in October 2007.