



### **ICDL urges social media caution for GCC youth**

***Facebook users in Emirates and the Arab world reached over 45 million as of end June 2012***

Dubai, UAE (\_\_\_ May 2013) – Within less than two decades, social media has revolutionised the way people interact with each other. ICDL GCC Foundation, an organisation that promotes digital skills and cyber safety across the Gulf region, believes that while the technology is here to stay, people must continue to exercise caution in sharing personal information online so as to avert cyber threats.

Jamil Ezzo, Director General of ICDL GCC, said the need to address online safety in using social networking is particularly significant in the Gulf where smartphone and Internet penetration rates are high, and children have access to mobile devices.

“Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, LinkedIn and Tumblr are social media tools that have now become household names and their influence as a communication channel continues to increase. In the Middle East and North Africa, we recently saw how social networking sites can bridge communication gap. However, we must remember that despite being effective vehicles of social interaction, social media can also be abused and exploited by people with malicious intent,” said Ezzo.

According to the Arab Social Media Report published by the Dubai School of Government, Facebook usage in the Arab world has almost tripled in the last two years to reach over 45 million as of end June 2012 – about 50 per cent higher than the 37.4 million recorded in January of the same year. Out of the countries surveyed across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), those in the GCC posted the highest Facebook population in the region.

The report also noted that youth (those between the ages of 15 and 29) represent the majority or 70 per cent of Facebook users in the region, a number that has been holding steady since April 2011.

Ezzo said the figures point to a widening adoption rate of social media technology among young people. Users, who are often not aware of the security or privacy setting of various social networking sites, are more prone to fall victim to cyber-attacks.

“Facebook has undoubtedly been a major game-changer in the social networking sphere. Globally it is reported to have over one billion users. According to an independent survey, if Facebook was a country, it would have the world’s third largest population, more than twice the size of the United States,” Ezzo explained.

“This gives us an idea of how vast the social media community is growing and how potentially dangerous it can be for young users. However, parents can help their children use social websites more safely by first talking to them about why they have to be cautious online, and how they can protect themselves from cyber predators.”

Oftentimes, according to Ezzo, many children find it difficult to distinguish between real life and virtual life. However they use social media – whether to play games, interact with friends and family or post videos and photos – they should understand that the Internet is full of billions of people who can access their personal and private information with just a click of a button.

In a bid to protect children from cyber threats such as addiction, bullying and exploitation, ICDL GCC Foundation has partnered with law enforcement agencies as well as educational and other concerned government organizations across the GCC countries, to visit schools as part of a campaign to raise awareness on the subject amongst teachers and parents.

“We encourage parents to talk to their children about social networking. They can even make this a family affair. By being their children’s ‘friends’ online, parents can monitor their activities and list of friends while networking,” he said.

Most importantly, however, children should be trained to be able to recognise potential threats or messages that make them uncomfortable and to step up and call their parents attention whenever this happens.

“Some of the information children post on their social network pages, such as age, can make them vulnerable to scams and cyber-attacks. Parents should also warn them against divulging personal information to strangers and setting house rules, such as the length of time one can use the Internet, can go a long way in securing your children from the possible dangers of social media,” he commented. Ezzo concluded “Internet and handheld devices have removed all geographic boundaries and conventional discipline. By giving our children unrestricted access to the world for good intention, we are also exposing them to the world’s lures and dangers. Hence, protecting them from being exploited is an individual and institutional responsibility by raising awareness among them on the responsible and safe use of technology.

-ends-

**The International Computer Driving License (ICDL) is a global computer literacy initiative developed to provide knowledge about Information Technology (IT) and enhance competence of using personal computers and common computer applications for all the citizens of the world. The ICDL GCC Foundation is the sole body to implement and disseminate the program across the GCC States and Iraq with the support of leading educational institutions and accredited bodies. The Foundation mission is to enable proficient use of Information and Communications Technology that empowers individuals, organizations and society, through the development, promotion and delivery of quality certification programmes around the world.**

For more information, please contact:

Bahaa Fatairy

PR Manager at Genesis ME Consulting

Mobile: 00971553449341

Email: [Bahaa.fatairy@genesis-me.com](mailto:Bahaa.fatairy@genesis-me.com)

Website: [www.genesis-me.com](http://www.genesis-me.com)