

Dubai Arbitration Week

Between 11 November and 15 November 2018, I attended Dubai Arbitration Week with the generous support of COMBAR and the Bar Council Scholarships Trust.

The week included conferences, symposia, working lunches and dinners organised by the leading global arbitral bodies and a mix of local and international law firms.

Valuable local insights were provided at a number of events. A number of panels discussed the impact of the new UAE Federal Arbitration Law on arbitration in the region. Beyond the UAE, arbitration efficiency in the MENA region was discussed in light of recent changes to the arbitration legislative and regulatory framework of Bahrain (2015), Qatar (2017), Saudi Arabia (2017) and Jordan (2018).

A conference organised by the ICC highlighted the evolution of arbitrator disclosure in the MENA region in recent years and ended with an engaging discussion about the applicability of international standards in a local context. Even when adopting an international standard, local sensitivities are taken into account in determining whether there is a reasonable basis to challenge the confirmation of a particular arbitrator. For example, the affiliation of an English arbitrator to a particular set of Chambers would not be deemed a good reason to object to his or her appointment where the parties are based in England, for example, but could be a persuasive reason to challenge the arbitrator's appointment in the Middle East. Gender diversity, an issue facing arbitration practitioners globally, was also discussed from a regional perspective, with lively debate concluding with the soft launch of the Arbitral Women's Diversity Toolkit.

Beyond the MENA region, a panel discussion organised in conjunction with the Cairo Regional Centre for International Commercial Arbitration discussed the growth and development of arbitration in Africa, which highlighted the growing number of arbitral institutions in Africa.

The week concluded with GAR Live Dubai, which touched on a number of themes, including a lively panel discussion about the growth and impact of artificial intelligence and an inquisition-style debate between seasoned arbitrators and up-and-coming arbitration practitioners, which provided insights into career progression. Developing a career in arbitration was also the focus of an impressive panel at the Young MENA Arbitration Groups conference earlier in the week.

It was a week of anniversaries, with the DIFC-LCIA celebrating its 10th anniversary and the New York Convention its 60th anniversary. A panel discussion addressed the triumphs and areas for improvement in relation to both.

Dubai Arbitration Week provided a number of interesting local insights about the institutions operating in this region, as well as the legal and regulatory landscape in which they operate. It also provided a fantastic opportunity to meet a large number of local practitioners as well as international practitioners with a special interest in the MENA region. This is invaluable for young members of the English Bar who might be interested in developing an international practice.

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