



Ahmad Al Sayed, Minister of State; and Chairman, Qatar Free Zones Authority

## Centres of innovation

Ahmad Al Sayed, Minister of State; and Chairman, Qatar Free Zones Authority (QFZA), on attracting local and international investors to the country's free zones

**Given the level of regional competition, how can Qatar set itself apart when it comes to attracting local and international investors to its free zones?**

**AL SAYED:** Qatar and its free zones offer new infrastructure in a country that is rapidly diversifying and expanding its relationships with leading economies around the world. We offer a great access point to dynamic regional markets from Pakistan to Turkey, and East Africa to Europe. Our free zones are backed by the strength of our position as the world's largest exporter of liquefied natural gas, with one of the highest GDPs per capita, and by recent government reforms including the establishment of the Investment Promotion Agency of Qatar.

The country's free zones offer access to Qatar's airport and seaport, providing rapid import-export turnaround times, and easy connections between the zones – which are only 15 km from each other – and to Doha city centre. QFZA oversees the free zones as an independent regulatory body, providing a one-stop shop for the set-up and management process. More than 50 companies, including major international players such as Volkswagen and Thales, have already taken advantage of these opportunities by registering in the free zones.

Lastly, Qatar is a great place to live. Doha is a cosmopolitan centre with a large expatriate community, high-quality health care systems and schools, in addition to a wide range of cultural attractions and a thriving culinary scene. The country is a vibrant, safe and welcoming place, well suited to raising a family as well as expanding a business.

**What auxiliary impact is expected in terms of new business opportunities following the development of the free zones?**

**AL SAYED:** We expect a wide range of auxiliary business opportunities to support companies in the new free zones. Both free zones are dynamic, integrated

centres, with retail and recreation facilities as well as robust transportation links and ongoing construction and development. In addition, we are working to provide partnership opportunities with leading Qatari entities, offering exciting business opportunities not only in the free zones but also across Qatar.

**In what ways will the free zones foster innovation and international partnerships?**

**AL SAYED:** We are focused on promoting innovation, and have plans in place to build joint ventures and partnerships to support exciting areas including artificial intelligence, the internet of things, 5G deployment and cybersecurity. We have signed a wide range of international agreements with entities such as the Intellectual Property Office of Singapore to foster knowledge-sharing initiatives, and our zones include specialised clusters that allow companies in a given industry to benefit from a community of like-minded organisations, dedicated research and innovation facilities, and partnership opportunities.

**How can Qatar balance the development of industrial free zone clusters with the need to protect the competitiveness of local businesses?**

**AL SAYED:** QFZA and the free zones are designed to support the continued growth and diversification of Qatar's economy, and provide new opportunities for local entities as well as international investors. We target companies whose activities will complement local value chains. Moreover, the businesses operating in the free zones, both local and international, are export-oriented by design and therefore do not compete with local manufacturers but rather are well positioned to help them expand regionally and globally. More broadly, we are focused on and committed to sustainability and the ease of doing business, for the benefit of all our investors as well as everyone who works with Qatar's free zones.