



K&L Gates deepens its presence in Qatar

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Having witnessed remarkable growth in Qatar, international law firm, K&L Gates, aims to further deepen its presence in the country. Qatar remains at the forefront of the firm's priorities, said Amjad Hussain, Senior Partner, K&L Gates in Qatar.

"We are one of the largest international law firms with a permanent presence in Qatar and opened our office in 2011. Our journey in Qatar has been one of remarkable growth, success and collaboration. We have been fortunate and honoured to have played a leading role in some of the landmark transactions in Qatar," said Hussain.

"We have also been privileged to be appointed as trusted advisors to many of the leading institutions and businesses here in Qatar for over a decade now. We are truly grateful to our clients and friends in Qatar for their ongoing trust and support," he added.

K&L Gates' team of lawyers have a deep local understanding totalling more than 60 years of advice in Qatar's legal, regulatory, commercial and financial markets, together with substantial experience of the wider Middle East and international markets. The law firm has the capacity to provide practical, timely and tailored advice in both Arabic and English languages and cover local as well as international laws.

"We provide a one-stop shop full-service legal offering from our Doha office. The areas we cover include merger and acquisitions, regulatory and legislative drafting, all manner of projects, public-private partnership (PPP), energy and infrastructure (including transportation), aviation, banking and finance (including Islamic finance), telecoms, media and technology, real estate and construction, intellectual property and dispute resolution," said Hussain.

The seamless integration of K&L Gates' Doha office with its other offices throughout the world is a hallmark of K&L Gates and has ensured that clients' legal requirements are dealt with by the most appropriately qualified lawyer across its global platform so that it is able to provide the highest quality of service to its clients.

"We are committed to maximising our clients' commercial pursuits by providing top-of-class advice and timely support. With proven reserves of both oil and natural gas and one of the world's highest per capita Gross Domestic Product (GDP) rates, Qatar's economy remains one of the fastest-growing in the world."



Amjad Hussain
Senior Partner, K&L Gates in Qatar

K&L Gates represents major State of Qatar-backed entities, family conglomerates, listed companies, and financial institutions doing business both domestically and abroad; as well as international clients doing business in Qatar and across the Middle East region.

Members of the K&L Gates team have worked on numerous strategic government advisory mandates and are regarded as

leading practitioners in Doha. These mandates have included advising government agencies on the preparation and drafting of the entire suite of laws and regulations for their operations and projects, advising on strategic and trophy-asset acquisitions, drafting template documentation which have been issued to the market by State entities, advising on award-winning corporate transactions and supporting strategic restructurings.

"We take pride in having one of the few specialist PPP teams based in Doha and the wider Middle East, giving us the unrivalled ability to advise on front-end construction projects, infrastructure transactions, tendering, contract drafting and financing," he added.

In regards to the firm's expansion plans in the country, Amjad Hussain said that Qatar remains at the forefront of the firm's priorities.

"Our global management has expressly reaffirmed its unfettered commitment to the Qatar market by encouraging the hiring of further lawyers and the continued expansion of the reach of our Qatar team. As other firms reduce headcount and exit Qatar, K&L Gates has continued to grow its local practice," Hussain said.

"We have recently promoted one counsel to partner in the Doha office and continue to add more associates to service increasing client demands. As we enter our 10th year in Qatar, we look to the future with huge levels of optimism and will continue to deepen our presence in Qatar so as to meet the needs of the local economy and our valued clients," he added.

Amjad Hussain said that the construction sector has witnessed the highest number of disputes. Construction disputes do dominate in the region. Some of those may be "traditional" construction disputes: delay and prolongation claims. Other claims are often payment-related claims that emerge from the 'supply chain' - whether it is pure materials or labour suppliers who have not been paid, or sub-contractor (or sub-sub-contractors) who have not been paid because of payment delays further up the contractual chain, he said.

"In terms of the knock-on impact, we have seen claims related to bonds; or cases relating to arbitrations where parties are looking to enforce," he said. "In other sectors, there remains a steady stream of employment-related cases as well as 'general commercial' disputes - the latter may cover a range of commercial relationships, such as a dispute under franchise agreements, or perhaps a dispute relating to a hotel management agreement. However construction-related claims are - by far - the ones we



Amjad Hussain, Senior Partner, K&L Gates, receiving the award for the Best Law Firm from Yousuf Mohamed Al Jaide, CEO of Qatar Financial Centre, at the second annual Qatar Business Awards.

that we have particularly seen a COVID-19 related 'spike' in disputes at present. Equally, if disputes or differences existed pre-COVID, those disputes still remain," he added.

About the growing importance of environmental, social, and corporate governance (ESG) he said that ESG factors affect every company of every size in Qatar, the Gulf Region and globally. ESG is no longer a secondary consideration, it has become imperative that businesses and their investors take a proactive approach to their role as global citizens, not only out of ethical considerations but also because it is in their financial interests and increasingly top of mind for clients.

Amjad Hussain added that companies focusing on ESG are improving their longevity, financial standing, and relationships with internal and external stakeholders, which carries enormous value in today's market. This is driving investors and executives alike to reorient their focus on ESG.

In a fast changing global ESG environment, the K&L Gates integrated approach is designed to help our clients navigate evolving ESG standards and add value to their operations.

"Our lawyers across the globe have decades of experience in key ESG areas, including asset management, corporate governance, and sustainability, and offer a full range of tailored services," he said.

"K&L Gates is committed to helping clients not just to understand but embrace the growing importance of ESG in Qatar and



areas of employment and foreign investment.

From an employment perspective, efforts have been made to modernise the law through the introduction of a minimum wage scheme, making Qatar the first country in the region to do so, and the abolition of the kafala system - all of these are aimed at providing greater protection to employees.

Significant reforms have also been made to foreign investment laws over the last few years, which include allowing foreign investors to participate in all sectors of the local economy and increasing foreign ownership limits in listed companies. In 2020, the government further expanded the list of locations where foreign investors are permitted to invest in real estate.

"These changes are important steps in the right direction towards meeting Qatar's National Vision 2030 of economic growth and social development," he added.

K&L Gates is consistently recognised for providing clients with sophisticated tailored solutions to legal challenges around the world. Legal directories such as Legal 500 and Chambers regularly recognise K&L Gates and its lawyers among the world's leading practitioners, nationally and regionally, in the U.S., Europe, Asia, Australia, and the Middle East.

For a 10th consecutive year, K&L Gates was recognised amongst the top 20 strongest U.S. law firm brands in legal market research company Acritas' U.S. Law Firm Brand Index 2021. Globally, K&L Gates has also been recognized among the world's 20 leading global law firm brands in Acritas' Global

Elite Law Firm Brand Index.

An example of the awards won by the Doha office includes: "Property & Construction Team of the Year" for the third consecutive year, as well as "Highly Commended" in the categories of "International Law Firm of the Year", "ADR Team of the Year" and "Corporate & Commercial Team of the Year" in the Qatar Business Law Forum 2020; "Best Law Firm" in the Qatar Financial Centre's Qatar Business Awards 2019; and "Private Equity Firm of the Year in the Islamic Finance News Awards 2019".

Amjad Hussain said the growth of any economy is not purely dependant on economic factors. The legal system plays a key role: understanding how laws and regulations will be enacted and interpreted by the judiciary is crucial to the normal functioning of any economy. Disputes can be costly and time-consuming, they have the potential to impact companies, individuals, society at large, the government and the economy.

"Dispute resolution (as well as dispute prevention) can benefit the economy greatly but requires trust in the dispute resolution mechanisms available to the parties. Qatar has its own arbitral institutions. The Qatar International Centre for Conciliation and Arbitration was established in an attempt to create an efficient mechanism to settle disputes among Qatar based companies and their foreign counterparts," explained Hussain.

"The Qatar International Court and Dispute Resolution Centre is another example of Qatar's attempt to attract international investment and financial services by providing a forum to resolve civil and commercial disputes arising out of transactions concluded under

Qatar Financial Centre Law," he added.

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are the foundation of national economies in developed countries around the world and are at the forefront in the diversification of the economy of Qatar. K&L Gates has the skills and experience to support the development of this crucial component of the local economy.

"We have extensive experience in supporting the SME ecosystem from regulatory and business set-up, business growth and finance through to commercial matters. SME clients have access to K&L Gates' global platform which enables us to deliver agile and cost-effective legal solutions to our clients wherever they wish to conduct business," Hussain said.

"Our full service outlook and seamless global integration means that we are well placed to provide support to SME clients across all sectors locally and globally," he added.

Giving advice to companies dealing with the COVID-19 situation, Amjad Hussain said that businesses need to demonstrate flexibility, nimbleness and resilience so that they are well equipped when normalcy returns. K&L Gates has helped several high-profile businesses in Qatar to navigate the unprecedented challenges brought on by the pandemic and are now helping its clients pivot to a new reality in a stronger and more resilient manner.

Hussain made some general observations for businesses to consider in preparing for the lifting of COVID-19 restrictions. Business leaders should consider:

- How resilient is your business model to ongoing changing business and societal demands on your sector?
 - Are your internal and external facing terms and conditions, policies, procedures and contracts still fit for purpose for the new reality?
 - What lessons can be learned from the impact of COVID-19 on your business, employees and clients which will help you succeed going forward?
 - How are you going to deal with evolving regulatory changes which impact the workspace you have for your employees and customers?
 - What sort of return to work policy will your company adopt and what are the legal and practical risks associated with it?
 - Do you need to revise business interruption or contingency planning policies and procedures?
 - Do you have any ongoing rights/liabilities that need to be revisited in light of resumption of business after lifting of COVID-19 restrictions?
- "These are some general points that will apply to most businesses that are looking to emerge stronger from the pandemic. Of course, the needs of clients will differ and we would be pleased to offer specific input to interested parties," he added.

About the Author: Amjad Hussain is the Senior Partner in the Doha office of K&L Gates. He can be contacted at: Amjad. Hussain@klgates.com

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SOLUTIONS THAT
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BUSINESS.**



Mr Amjad Hussain, Senior Partner, K&L Gates, receiving the award for the Best Law Firm from Mr Yousuf Mohamed Al Jaida, CEO of Qatar Financial Center, at the second annual Qatar Business Awards.

Rankings & Recognitions

The 2020 Global Chambers guide recognizes the firm as a leader in the Qatar in the areas of Construction, Corporate/Commercial, Dispute Resolution: International Firms, and Projects & Energy.

The 2020 Europe Legal 500 guide has ranked the firm among leaders in the Qatar in the area of Foreign Firms.

Our Doha office is located in Qatar's prestigious West Bay. With significant proven reserves of both oil and natural gas, and one of the world's highest per capita production rates, Qatar's economy is one of the fastest growing in the world.

Our team of lawyers has a deep understanding of the Qatari legal, regulatory, commercial, and financial markets paired with substantial Middle East and international experience. Our full-service legal practice in Doha offers legal advice in all areas, including corporate, commercial, regulatory and legislative drafting, projects, energy and infrastructure, aviation, banking and finance (including Islamic finance), telecoms, media and technology, real estate and construction, intellectual property, and all manner of dispute resolution.

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