

*Cercle Diplomatique* Interview

**Mr. Suleiman Jasir Al-Herbish**

OFID Director-General

Curriculum Vitae,

**Mr. Suleiman Jasir Al-Herbish**

Place and Date of Birth: Ar-Rass, Saudi Arabia, November 6th, 1942. Marital and Family Status: Married with 4 children.

Education:

B.A. in Economics and Political Science, University of Cairo - 1966 Masters in Economics, Trinity University, San Antonio, Texas, USA - 1974 Course in "The Economics of Oil Transportation"

- London - 1978 Current Position: Director-General of the OPEC Fund for International Development, Vienna, Austria, as of November 1, 2003. Previous Experience: Joined the Ministry of Petroleum and Mineral Resources in 1962. Served as Economic Advisor and held a variety of accounting and economic consultancy positions. Assistant Deputy Minister 1982-1990 Appointed pursuant to Council of Ministers Resolution, dated 10th February 1990, as Saudi Arabia's Governor (Deputy Minister's rank) at the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). Board of Director Position: Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Arabian Drilling Company, a joint venture Company between Petromin, Saudi Arabia, and Schlumberger, engaged in drilling oil wells in the Kingdom and the Arabian Peninsula. 1990 - November 2003. Chairman of the Executive Committee of Saudi Arabian Texaco Inc., a Delaware Company, currently operating an oil and gas concession in the onshore partitioned neutral zone in northeastern Saudi Arabia. 1995 - end of 2003. Chairman of "National Shipping Company, Saudi Arabia (NSCSA)" A joint stock company owned jointly by the government through public investment fund (PIF) and the public. NSCSA paid-in capital is 2 billion Saudi Riyals (US\$533.3 million); 28.17% is owned by the government and the remaining 78.13% is owned by the public. 2002-2004. Director, the Arabian Maritime Petroleum Transport Company (AMPTC). AMPTC is owned by member countries of OAPEC. 1982 - 1992. Director, Saline Water Conversion Corporation. 1987 - 1990. Director, Jeddah Oil Refinery Company. 1988-1991. Director, the Saudi Company for Precious Metals, a joint venture company between Petromin and Boliden of Sweden, operating the Sukhaibrat Gold Mine. 1985 - 1995.

**CD: Mr. Al-Herbish, please tell me about your career and when did you visit Austria for the first time?**

**DG:** I have been in Saudi Arabia's Ministry of Petroleum for more than 30 years now. My first assignment was on development issues in 1968 and subsequently, I attended other conferences. Then I came to Vienna later that year, which was also when I received my first impressions of the country and its people. These impressions have remained unchanged in my mind and my heart over these years. I am still impressed by the culture and the people's respect for other cultures. As for my career, while working for the Ministry, I finished my studies in Cairo, Egypt and took my master's degree in the United States from 1971-1974. In the course of my duties, I travelled a lot, mostly in connection with OPEC (the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries), but I also undertook many other assignments. For example, I held the chairmanship for three companies. Also, in 1999, I was nominated for the post of Secretary General of OPEC. However, I could not get it. This was mainly because of the rule of unanimous agreement. The rule requires that in the appointment of OPEC Secretary General, there should not be a single dissention.

**CD: Mr. Al-Herbish, since when have you been the Director-General of OFID?**

**DG:** I have occupied the position since 1st November, 2003. To be precise, I was appointed Director-General on June 11th 2003 during the 24th Annual Session of the Ministerial Council of OFID in Abu Dhabi, UAE. The Council is OFID's highest policy-making body. The job I have now is very stimulating and challenging. Having served in the Saudi Kingdom's civil service for over 30 years, this job is like an award. It is an honor for me to lead this noble mission, which is giving soft loans, assistance and grants to developing countries all over the world. This is something that I am very proud of.

**CD: Will you have to be re-appointed for this job?**

**DG:** Well, obviously, I was appointed for five years in 2003. So, at the next conference, which will be held in Isfahan, Teheran, one of the agenda items of the Council will be the appointment of the next Director-General. Naturally, my appointment could be extended. However, I cannot predict the Council's decision. These are the rules in our main Agreement.

**CD: Why and when did you change the institution's name from The OPEC Fund to OFID?**

**DG:** We did not change the name of the institution. OFID still remains the OPEC Fund for International Development. OFID is simply the proper acronym, rather than the nondescript

“Fund“. In other words, we have de-emphasized the “Fund“ in favour of the proper abbreviation, OFID. This is mainly to upgrade the institution, fostered by a new logo to establish an “own identity“ to communicate our aims

**CD: OFID is considered to be the “human face” of OPEC. What does this mean?**

**DG:** Well, let me regard this description as referring to the fact that we work in development; that we are engaged in the noble task of helping the poor and the downtrodden. However, notwithstanding the general perception, our sister institution OPEC, as the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries, is doing the world a great service. OPEC is managing a vital world resource. It is channeling huge amounts of investment financing towards capacity building in developing countries around the world; it is making sure that there is adequate supply of oil to feed the engines of growth, progress and prosperity across the world; and OPEC is ensuring that there is some level of stability in the market. If this, in itself, is not a “human face,” then I am not sure what else is. Nevertheless, OFID is doing all it can to deliver development financing to the world’s poor.

**CD: When was OFID founded and what were and are now its major projects?**

**DG:** The Sovereigns and Heads of State and Government of OPEC Member States held a Summit in March, 1975, in Algiers, Algeria. They, inter alia, set in motion a process which, roughly one year later, in January 1976, culminated in the establishment of an OPEC Special Fund. Later, this was changed to the OPEC Fund for International Development (OFID) and its mandate widened and strengthened. That is our genesis. At first, we concentrated on balance of payments financing. We then moved slowly towards funding major projects and programs to drive social and economic development in cooperating countries. We are still funding these vital projects and programs, often via co-financing with other institutions. However, in recent years, we have given greater attention to schemes in the social sectors directly targeted at fighting poverty and deprivation. We are doing this through our Grant Program, Public Sector Lending, Private Sector Facility and the Trade Finance Facility. These are the instruments that enable us carry out our mission. We are currently engaged in 121 developing countries across the world. Our projects include building of infrastructure such as bridges, roads, schools, hospitals and utilities. OFID is also involved in financing of research in several areas of human endeavor. Furthermore, we established a HIV/AIDS Special Grant Account and a Special Grant Account for Palestine. Other areas of our activities include working in partnership with several international organizations to battle disease and bring humanitarian relief to troubled societies. For example, we built a road from Burkina Faso to Ghana. It is really gratifying that OFID’s activities are helping the poor, especially when we see farmers using these roads. What we are currently working on is the promotion of ourselves. We have established an Information Campaign and other schemes including a

scholarship program. Therefore, OFID is trying to empower children to participate and ask how they envision the planet in 2025. Also, we are starting an OFID Annual Lecture, later this year. The speaker will be Dr. Muhammad Yunis, the renowned promoter of the microfinance project.

**CD: Has the amount of development assistance contributed by OFID increased throughout the years?**

**DG:** Yes, indeed. We have seen a progressive rise in the extent of our financial assistance delivery. The needs of our cooperating countries are not diminishing. On the contrary, they are increasing. Our Member Countries are, themselves, committed to doing all they can to assist poorer countries, thus, demonstrating their continued support for the mandate of OFID. You may not be aware, but in Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, last November, OFID was encouraged by the Sovereigns and Heads of State of our Member Countries to continue with its noble work, which the countries recognize as vital to what we can call international peace and understanding. Certainly, OFID has grown through the years. In line with that progress, over the next three years (fiscal 2008-2010), all programs and windows considered, OFID will be providing some US\$3 billion to support the countries we cooperate with. Effectively, the amount will double our commitment. This is considerable growth for which I commend our Member Countries and my OFID colleagues

**CD: What changes have you made since becoming Director-General?**

**DG:** You will agree that this is a difficult question for me, as an individual, to answer in view of the fact that it is always best to leave all judgment to others. But suffice it to say that over the past five years, we have sought to keep OFID on a trajectory of positive growth and progressive development. We have worked to increase OFID's activities in both quantity and quality. In addition, we have tried to give the institution a fresh, new image and raise its profile somewhat in the international system. We have a new Corporate Plan and corporate image; we now possess have official observer status at the United Nations. This has upgraded our participation in international conferences. OFID is increasingly being referred to as a partner of choice, to many cooperating partners and countries. Furthermore, human capital management has become a key component of OFID's policy initiatives. Accordingly, we are working to improve our premises and enhance the quality of the headquarters building. Also, we are responding to external challenges, in terms of the need to enhance our resources. Doing so will enable us to accommodate the massively growing demand of the international community. It will also allow us to cater to the emerging new needs of our partners, in the areas of the private sector, trade financing, as well as those of energy and the environment.

**CD: It is a great honor for Austria to host OFID in Vienna. How do you consider the relationship between OFID and potential Austrian partners?**

**DG:** You took these words right out of my mouth. OFID is thankful and proud of its relations with the Government and people of the Republic of Austria. These have been excellent relations over 32 years. In fact, part of the “asset“ and attraction of our institution is the very location of our headquarters in Austria. On various occasions, I have spoken of the fact that OFID finds itself in a most friendly environment and in the midst of a people who understand and cherish the ideals of humanitarianism. Austria is a key donor of development assistance; you run such charities as SOS Mitmenschen, Nachbar in Not and others; and thus understand what it means to be considerate. This helps to facilitate our operations from Vienna. Indeed, we have cooperated many times with Austria-based NGOs to channel assistance to the needy. Also, on various occasions, we have communicated our deep appreciation of the hospitality of the Austrian people and institutions towards us, to the Austrian Federal and Regional Governments. They always provide us with all that is needed to hold our annual Ministerial Council and quarterly Governing Board meetings. For these and other friendly gestures, we remain grateful to the Austrian authorities. It is noteworthy that on a number of occasions, we have also been invited to hold our Ministerial Council meetings outside Vienna in the Bundeslaender of Carinthia and Tyrol.

**CD: How many employees are working for OFID in Vienna?**

**DG:** We have 145 people working for us in Vienna, but what I am proud of, is, that our staff composition has 24 different cultures. This can be called an amalgam of civilizations and it is beautiful, because the mixture of these cultures produces a new culture of understanding, synergy and team work. We are trying to bring people together, whether it is Ramadan or Christmas. Whenever I go out and see people from different cultures chatting and having fun, I feel elated and really proud of what we are achieving.

**CD: What are your activities and sponsorships in Austria?**

**DG:** As it is, Austria is itself a donor country and, thus, does not need the type of products we deliver. As I mentioned earlier, however, OFID has cooperated with several Austrian agencies to jointly deliver assistance where needed. I remember CARE Austria; the Vienna Institute for Development; the Bruno Kreisky Foundation; Women without Borders and SOS Kinderdorf. Several years ago, we joined the entire Austrian nation in delivering assistance to Austrian citizens and residents affected by massive floods. Let me also add that, today, we are doing more to make ourselves better known in the neighborhood. For example, this year, we are co-sponsors of the Annual Vienna City Marathon. Again, we are working with Austria not to

assist Austria as a nation, but to jointly deliver humanitarian assistance to needy people elsewhere around the world.

**CD: Finally, having been linked to Austria for so many years, do you have any personal wishes or suggestions for the future?**

**DG:** Not as such, but I would like to wish the country many, many more decades of accomplishments and progress. In the meantime, I wish your federal government well and hope they manage to overcome divisions and differences. This is a tolerant, considerate and accommodating country, where dialogue and companionship loom large. I wish the Austrian people a future that will be as bright as their present. Austria is a model European nation; many in the world look up to Austria for exemplary leadership. I am confident this will remain the case for centuries to come. The OFID Member Countries are: Algeria, Gabon, Indonesia, Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, GSP Libyan AJ, Nigeria, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates and Venezuela.

