

14th ICC MENA Conference on International Arbitration



Dubai | 26-27 January 2026

PROGRAMME

The flagship International Chamber of Commerce Court of Arbitration gathering in the region returns to Dubai for its 14th edition, bringing together counsel, arbitrators, in-house leaders, and state representatives. This edition presents sessions, expert panels, practical skills segments, and networking, while addressing MENA realities, courts and enforcement, state and SOE work, construction and pricing volatility, and a focused look at North Africa.

Tuesday 27 January 2026

08.15 – 09.15 *Registration and welcome coffee*

09.15 – 09.35 **Welcome addresses**

- **Sherif Akl**, Director, Arbitration and ADR, Middle East, ICC Dispute Resolution Services, Abu Dhabi
- **His Excellency Abdullah bin Sultan bin Awad Al Nuaimi**, Minister of Justice of the UAE

09.35 – 10.20 **Inside the latest ICC highlights: a MENA-focused overview with ICC leadership**

This overview offers key updates and insights from ICC's Dispute Resolution Services and the ICC Court, highlighting recent developments and initiatives that enhance arbitration practices and services in the MENA region.

- **Alexander G. Fessas**, Secretary General, ICC International Court of Arbitration; Director, ICC Dispute Resolution Services, Paris
- **Claudia Salomon**, President, ICC International Court of Arbitration, Paris

10.20 – 10.50 *Coffee break*

10.50 – 11.50

Session 1: Courts and arbitration in the Middle East, a recalibration

This panel will explore the role of national courts in arbitration across the Middle East, with a focus on Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Tunisia. This session will delve into **three core legal developments** from recent case law that have shaped the arbitration landscape in the region. Topics may include:

Judicial intervention in arbitral proceedings – evolving thresholds for court involvement.

Enforcement of foreign arbitral awards – trends in recognition and resistance.

Public policy exceptions – how courts are interpreting and applying them.

- **Ahmad Alkhamees**, Managing Partner, Harasani & Alkhamees Law Firm, Riyadh; Former Judge, Ministry of Justice, Saudi Arabia
- **Nabil Omran**, Vice President, Egyptian Court of Cassation, Egypt; President of the Commissioners' panel, Court of Cassation, Dubai Courts, United Arab Emirates
- **Issam Yahyaoui**, Judge, Head of Commercial Chamber, Court of Appeal of Tunis, Tunisia

Chaired by:

- **Sherif Akl**, Director, Arbitration and ADR, Middle East, ICC Dispute Resolution Services, Abu Dhabi

11.50 – 12.10

Discussion

12.10 – 13.30

Lunch

13.30 – 14.30

Session 2: The investment equation in MENA, states, SOEs, and investors in a changing risk climate

With treaty practice evolving and large public programmes advancing, state related commercial arbitration and investor state exposure continue to test counsel. This panel addresses state and SOE contracts and arbitrations that arise thereof, stabilization and change in law clauses, sovereign immunity and execution, transparency expectations, settlement dynamics.

Special Focus: the panel will also examine the growing **India–GCC economic corridor**, where rising Indian investment, particularly in the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar, is generating novel arbitration scenarios. With bilateral trade exceeding \$178 billion and legal frameworks evolving, this dynamic presents new opportunities for dispute resolution involving state interests and cross-border contracts.

- **Rashid El Saad**, Senior Partner, Sharq Law Firm, Qatar
- **Nayla AlObeidli**, CEO, Ghazawi Law Firm, Saudi Arabia
- **Fatima Balfaqeeh**, Managing Partner, Balfaqeeh Advocates & Legal Consultants, Dubai, United Arab Emirates; Vice-Chair, ICC UAE Commission on Arbitration & ADR
- **Niyati Gandhi**, Partner, Shardul Amarchand Mangaldas & Co., India

Chaired by:

- **Roland Ziadé**, Global Co- Head of International Arbitration, Linklaters, France / Middle East

14.30 – 14.50 **Discussion**

14.50 – 15.50 **Session 3: Pricing volatility and risk allocation in commercial contracts**

This session explores the impact of pricing shocks and inflation on commercial contracts across various sectors, with a focus on the use of inflation clauses and risk-sharing mechanisms. Drawing on recent disputes and evolving contract practices in the MENA region, the discussion will offer practical insights into how parties are adapting to economic volatility and safeguarding contractual stability.

- **Zineb Ramid**, Managing Partner, Ramid Law Firm, Morocco
- **Alain Farhad**, Independent Arbitrator, Dubai, United Arab Emirates
- **Kirsten O'Connell**, Partner, A&O Sherman, Dubai, United Arab Emirates
- **Dietmar W. Prager**, Partner, Debevoise & Plimpton LLP, United States

Chaired by:

- **Nadine Debbas Achkar**, Independent Arbitrator; Judge, Supreme Court, Kingdom of Bahrain; Visiting Professor, New York University, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates; Alternate Member, ICC International Court of Arbitration

15.50 – 16.10 **Discussion**

16.10 – 16.40 **Coffee break**

16.40 – 17.50 **Session 4: Awarding costs: pitfalls and best practices in Drafting costs decisions**

Many awards struggle to articulate a clear and thorough approach for reaching decisions on costs by contrast to decisions on jurisdiction, liability and damages. What are the most common pitfalls that should be avoided and what best practices should be considered to write better reasoned and more predictable cost allocation decisions?

This two-part panel will start with a live mock session of the ICC Court scrutinizing a draft final award on costs. Following the mock session, panelists will discuss modern practices, emerging trends and an array of approaches to improve cost allocation decisions in international arbitration.

- **Rozana Altayyar**, Independent Arbitrator and Mediator, Taswea, Saudi Arabia; Member, ICC International Court of Arbitration
- **Karam Farah**, Counsel, ICC International Court of Arbitration, Abu Dhabi
- **Samaa A. Haridi**, Partner, King & Spalding, United States; Vice-President, ICC International Court of Arbitration
- **Sami Houerbi**, Principal, Houerbi Law Firm, Tunisia/France/United Arab Emirates; Member, ICC International Court of Arbitration
- **Rasem Kamal**, Managing Partner, Kamal & Associates, Palestine/Saudi Arabia; Member, ICC International Court of Arbitration
- **Stella Leptourgou**, Counsel, ICC International Court of Arbitration, Paris
- **Claudia Salomon**, President, ICC International Court of Arbitration, Paris

17.50 – 18.00 **Closing remarks**

- **Mahmood Hussain**, Founding Partner, M&Co Legal, Dubai/Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates; Chair, ICC UAE Commission on Arbitration and ADR; Member, ICC International Court of Arbitration

18.00 – 20.00 *Cocktail reception*