



The decision to host this year's FTTH Council MENA conference in Kuwait was strategic. Under the theme 'FTTH, The Evolution to the Digital Society', it matched with recent initiatives in the State of Kuwait to develop the telecommunications and broadband infrastructure in relation to FTTH and national plans. Just recently, the Kuwait government successfully achieved the speed of 10Gbps upstream over a single fiber during lab tests of Nokia's XGS-PON fiber technology. This is the first time such a speed has been achieved in the GCC region. Hosted at The Regency, Kuwait, from 7-9 November, the 8th FTTH Council MENA conference highlighted progress being made in FTTH throughout the MENA region.

With its mission and continuous efforts, the FTTH Council Middle East and North Africa addressed connectivity concerns at its 8th annual conference and exhibition. The Council plays an important role in creating awareness and promoting the benefits of FTTH

to communities. Those communities are now embracing this technology due to the latest innovations, smart and virtual applications, using the solid fiber infrastructure.

Despite its efforts, there are always many barriers facing successful rollout of FTTH in Kuwait, as well as any nation within MENA. Kuwait has been making headway as a connected nation in the MENA

region. The government of Kuwait was the first to rollout GPON (Gigabit PON) in the GCC region in 2006 and it maintains its position as a pioneer in fiber-to-the-home (FTTH) technology.

Topics discussed at this year's event included how to ensure efficient and high quality planning and design of FTTH networks, the national broadband network policies, the

infrastructure sharing both presented by the council consultants and members, as well as smart city transformation with a presentation by Ericsson, neXgen Consulting Group and Etisalat.

Also discussed was how to transform economies through digitization; the role of government and regulation in creating the right environment for successful investment into new networks; and the benefits of FTTH in the digital society including challenges, benefits and solutions provided by fiber connectivity.

Speaking to Telecom Review, Dr. Safa Nassereldin, acting chairperson of the council, said the Council studies in advance to determine where the conference should be held, looking at the connectivity situation in the country. It is important for the Council to determine how the people of the elected country can make use of the conference through its awareness and opportunities for networking.

"This year, we saw that Kuwait is making efforts in broadband, but they don't have a national broadband strategy. The Ministry of Communications is working towards building better infrastructure, and there is a regulatory authority that is working to advance more applications, but they are not really working together," Dr. Safa told Telecom Review.

His Excellency Salim Al-Ozainah, chairman and CEO of Kuwait Communication and Information Technology Regulatory Authority (CITRA), touched on this issue in his opening speech, highlighting the fact that Kuwait as a nation likes to be confident in its decisions and therefore often appears to be moving slow. But nonetheless, Kuwait is making significant progress.

Oman was also praised for its efforts in FTTH technology. During the NBN panel discussion, Auf Al-Bulushi from Oman Broadband, said: "There is no doubt that spending on fixed line telecommunication infrastructure



is expensive. The return on value is more than the return on investment. But at Oman Broadband, we were optimistic and we tried to balance the equation. For example, we considered how we could build a high-class advanced network, considering the future challenges and addressing whatever comes, and how to offer that at an affordable price to the marketplace."

The key to success, he said, is how you can engage service providers and address their needs. "You need to create a diversified product portfolio. FTTH is a social economic development, but there might be alternatives that providers could focus on."

Christine Beylouni, director-general of FTTH Council MENA, said: "Both Oman Broadband and Etisalat UAE are platinum members of FTTH Council MENA and we are proud to have such important and valuable operators within the council showing the lessons learnt of their successful FTTH technical and business deployment and being part of the leaders position in the global ranking of the FTTH penetration rate, the case of the UAE during the last years."

From an operator's perspective, Zain Kuwait's chief technical officer, Nabeel Mohammed, told Telecom Review that the company wants to align its plans for next year with the direction of the Kuwait authorities and regulators, hence why the FTTH Council MENA conference was an important showcase for Zain Kuwait to attend.

"At the moment we are only a mobile operator. We aren't yet in the FTTH business. Our mobile revenue is going down, so the whole telecom industry is looking into new revenue streams," said Mr. Nabeel. "Our alignment with CITRA and FTTH MENA brings great potential for consumer and business. FTTH is something we are looking to in the future, being at this conference, the most important thing for us is the alignment opportunities," he said.

Ms. Beylouni concluded by saying: "We are happy to continue our efforts through our active committees working on developing the FTTH activities, education, and awareness in the region and we are moving to Tunisia next year for the 9th edition of the Council's annual conference and exhibition." ■