

Dubai

globally connected

Why our team in Dubai is becoming
a key hub for the Firm.

There are few more dynamic
locations in the world than Dubai.

The United Arab Emirates city is a major hub for the Middle East, with strong connections to other global markets in Europe and Asia.

White & Case has been present on the ground in Dubai since 2013 when we established a small satellite office in the city.

In 2015, we expanded to a full operation and now have around 70 people, including 49 lawyers and 21 Business Services professionals.

Office Executive Partner Abdulwahid Alulama says: "Dubai was an obvious location for the Firm because it's a centre of excellence for the service industry and has strong logistical connections to other countries in the region and further afield.

"We started late in the market compared to our rivals, but we've been quick to make up for lost time and our growth has been phenomenal.

"We've built a great team of lawyers, mainly through lateral hires and internal movements, and the depth of our bench is as good, if not better, than every other firm in the market.

Our biggest challenge currently is that we're running out of office space."

Momentum has continued in recent times and, following a brief lockdown at the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, the team has been extremely busy.

Abdulwahid says: "All the major business drivers in Dubai are good, with many businesses and entrepreneurs relocating here. Interest in the region is accelerated by major international events such as Expo 2020, the Dubai Airshow, and tech conference GITEX.



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**ABDULWAHID ALULAMA,
OFFICE EXECUTIVE PARTNER**





"Business confidence in Dubai is at a 10-year high and real estate prices are also on the rise."

Another source of potential work could come from the Dubai government's ongoing privatization drive as several government-owned entities are considering IPOs.

Our Dubai team is well placed to take these opportunities, with a broad depth of expertise across several practice areas, including Capital Markets, Disputes, M&A, Corporate and Banking.

Current clients include Abu Dhabi Developmental Holding Company (ADQ), Centerbridge Partners, QIA, Global Fintech Investments, Mubadala Investment Co., ASMA Capital, DP World Limited, Etihad Etisalat, Citigroup, Basalt Infrastructure Partners, LLP, Alpha Bank, Oman Airports, Facebook, Amazon and Goldman Sachs.

Recent transaction highlights the team has been involved in include:

- Advising DP World on its US\$1.2 billion acquisition of syncreon, a logistics provider with 91 sites in 19 countries
- Representing Abu Dhabi holding firm ADQ on its financing and purchase of a 45 percent share in holding company Louis Dreyfus Group
- Working with Muscat Airport on resolving several high-profile construction disputes
- Advising on Global Fintech Investment Holdings' acquisition of global payment platform Finabl for US\$1

Dubai in numbers



365

days of sun annually



17%

of Dubai's 3.45m residents are from the United Arab Emirates



828m

the height of the Burj Khalifa – the world's tallest building



1588m²

the area of the Dubai metropolitan area

According to Abdulwahid, success in the Dubai market requires a meaningful commitment to the region and dedication to building close client relationships.

He says: "You need to spend the time getting to know people because trust and respect is even more important to clients in the Middle East than in other regions.

"They value legal partners who show a long-term commitment to the area and they want to see diversity on our team, preferably with a good mix of lawyers from this region and others from overseas.

"Stability is also important to clients and one of our advantages is that many of our team have been with the Firm for a long time.

"Retaining talent in Dubai is a challenge, but we make a big effort to engage our people and share strategy. They can see the growth and, as a result, they believe in our story."

Opportunities in the Dubai market are strong with growth expected in areas such as financial regulatory, corporate governance and compliance. Real estate is another growth area as the region continues to invest in new and exciting projects, from hotels to theme parks. Commercial litigation and investigations are also driving growth in the region.

Abdulwahid says: "The government has announced a new international strategy to build relationships with all neighbouring countries based on economic ties, which could open up opportunities in even more jurisdictions."

Competitors in Dubai include the Magic Circle and big US firms. Abdulwahid views Allen & Overy as the only rival to offer a comparable service to the Firm in terms of the diversity of their team and longstanding relationships.





“Living and working in Dubai is fantastic, though. It’s a mix of people from all over the world and a great place to have fun and enjoy life.”

“Our competitors vary depending on the project,” he says, “but I see us as being neck and neck with Allen & Overy, which is incredible considering they’ve been in the market for around 40 years.

“We started from scratch and climbed sharply up to this level. The progress we’ve made is unbelievable.”

Abdulwahid is excited about the Dubai office’s potential to continue its growth story and to play an even bigger role in the Firm’s strategy.

He says: “I’d like to see us continue to establish Dubai as another centre of excellence and it’s great to see an increasing number of European transactions being routed to the office.

“We’re highly integrated within the international network and the bulk of our projects are cross border and involve collaboration with offices across the Firm.

“We’re currently hosting secondees from France and we hope to send some of our people to London and Stockholm to get private equity and corporate experience, so there’s a stronger connection into the wider Firm.”

Abdulwahid’s priorities for the office are to continue improving engagement and diversity.

He says: “I want to make sure the team are in an environment where they can work hard, but enjoy themselves.

“I’d like to see more women partners because we have some fantastic associates. We also need more UAE and regional nationals to join and rise through the levels.

“There is a lot of young talent in the region, but we need to continue to attract them.”



Abdulwahid is also focused on the Firm's 2025 Strategy and its commitment to delivering a differentiated client experience.

He says: "The client experience is everything. Of course, performing well in the legal rankings is important, but it's less important than giving our clients a unique experience and being seen as a trusted advisor."

"Our clients want to know that, if they ask us something, we'll do all they ask and more. We also need to understand their businesses and markets inside out, be good human beings and build long lasting relationships, particularly in the Middle East."

When asked the best and worst aspects of working in Dubai, Abdulwahid says: "The best thing is the weather... and the worst thing is the weather!"

"For eight months it is wonderful, but the remainder of the year is too warm and humid."

"Living and working in Dubai is fantastic, though. It's a mix of people from all over the world and a great place to have fun and enjoy life. "There is so much to do. I don't think there's a better place to live globally. Anyone who spends a bit of time here finds it very difficult to leave."

The Dubai team is heavily committed to pro bono work, including working with SOS Children's Villages and Hedayah, an initiative that aims to build a world without violent extremism.

Abdulwahid says: "We do a lot of this work in partnership with our clients and we also have a very active diversity and inclusion committee, women's network and hold regular get togethers to promote engagement."

"We have a fantastic team of people, a deep bench, and broad expertise. We're in a great position to keep growing and to contribute to the Firm, both regionally and in partnership with teams across the world."

