

IHAF leads a discussion on ways to resolve global halal trade challenges from on-site to remote audit assessment

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/EINPresswire.com/ -- • New normal now requires halal accreditation and conformity assessment practises and procedures to move away from on-site inspection to digital evaluation

- The key factors to developing long-term solutions for halal trade include digital transformation, industry collaboration, and clear guidance from scheme owners
- IHAF gathered together major stakeholders from different parts of the world to discuss measures on how to turn COVID-19 crisis into an opportunity for the halal industry.



H.E. Dr. Rehab Al Ameri, Secretary-General of IHAF (top left), with the panelists of the webinar

The International Halal Accreditation Forum (IHAF), an independent, non-government network of accreditation bodies aimed to harmonise accreditation practices in halal, has led the conversation on how to resolve the challenges faced by the halal trade industry today.

In the recently concluded webinar organised by IHAF, “The Future Perspectives of The Halal Industry”, industry leaders discussed how the traditional business models of on-site assessment had become severely restricted by the COVID-19 pandemic. It also tackled how digital transformation, such as the move to remote assessment, can ensure safety and quality in the future.

Conformity assessment is vital to national economies, suppliers, consumers and government regulators because it enables producers to demonstrate that their halal products meet the relevant specification and safety standards, thereby giving consumers more confidence.

In the light of the pandemic, which saw the reduction of staffing levels, modification of working practises and disruption supply chains, accreditation bodies had to immediately make a significant shift from on-site to remote assessments and audits of halal products and systems.

Underscoring the importance of digital transformation in enabling virtual assessments, Her Excellency Dr Rehab Faraj Al Ameri, Secretary-General of IHAF, said: “Various accreditation bodies currently drive the global halal industry, recognition bodies and conformity assessment bodies from the public and private sectors. It is IHAF’s objective to harmonise halal accreditation and conformity assessment practises and procedures, which will inadvertently facilitate and ease international trade in the field of halal.”

“These practises and procedures have been heavily reliant on on-site assessments, which need to be changed drastically to remote assessments to adapt to the future,” Dr Al Ameri added. “IHAF is pleased to gather accreditation, certification and conformity assessment experts from different parts of the world to discuss measures on how to turn this crisis into an opportunity. By sharing expertise and experiences, we will be able to collectively improve the global control system of halal and, as a result, enhance customer confidence in halal products.”

From on-site to remote assessment

The restrictions brought about by the pandemic has impacted major halal producers and accreditation bodies (ABs), certifying bodies (CB) and conformity assessment bodies (CAB) as it disrupted the way halal products are being authenticated and certified. Before the onset of COVID-19, assessments and audits used to be done on-site, with the assessor or auditor personally inspecting the products to evaluate their authenticity.

Muhammad Sabir Hussain, Lead and Technical Assessor and Accreditation Specialist at Emirates National Accreditation System (ENAS), said: “Is the risk of not doing an assessment less than doing an assessment using remote auditing techniques? We believe that not doing assessments puts halal products at the risk of fraud and potential liability due to extending certification without oversight.”

“While the demand for halal products has been increasing during the pandemic because of consumers’ preference for safe qualities, halal certification bodies continue to face the challenge



H.E. Dr. Rehab Al Ameri, Secretary-General of IHAF

on how to do remote audits and halal accreditation,” said Aldin Dugonjić, CEO of Croatia’s Centre for Halal Quality Certification.

Mufti Zeeshan Abdul Aziz, CEO of International Halal Certification (Pvt) Ltd, said the difficulty includes assessing critical halal scopes like slaughterhouses and food manufacturing sites. He noted that it was challenging to convince food producers to submit their requirements online, mostly due to the company’s confidentiality policies—such as not allowing cameras or video recording inside their sites.

Abdul Aziz added that certification bodies found it challenging to assess slaughterhouses remotely because of the complexity of their processes. “The certification bodies used to go to the site, watch the entire process, and interview people tasked to do the slaughter. Now, it’s a challenge to prevent any manipulation while doing the audits virtually,” he added.

According to Reinaldo Figueiredo, Senior Programme Director of Product, Process, and Services Accreditation Programme at American National Standards Institute (ANSI)- National Accreditation Board, many certification and assessment bodies are not equipped with the necessary tools that will help them be prepared towards digital transformation.

Besides, there is a lack of clear information from some of the scheme owners (or entities responsible for developing and maintaining a certification scheme) which translates to confusion among accreditation and certification players. A scheme owner can be a CAB itself, a governmental authority, an industry association or another body.

Collaboration: The need of the hour

Al Ameri stressed that collaboration with all the stakeholders in the halal trade would help address these challenges and thrust solutions forward.

“We’re very pleased that IHAF was able to gather together a group of experts across the halal ecosystem—from ABs, CABs, to certifying bodies— in one event. Leading this conversation among all stakeholders will help us arrive at progressive and long-term solutions that will largely benefit the global halal industry,” she said.

Figueiredo added: “IHAF plays a major role in enhancing the competencies of accreditation body assessors and certification body auditors on the halal process. Through IHAF, accreditation body assessors globally can learn the halal certification process and regulatory requirements. IHAF can also create online training to support emerging accreditation bodies.”

As the first international accreditation entity in the UAE, IHAF aims to facilitate international halal trade through harmonising global halal standards and establishing greater cooperation among organisations to ensure that the industry remains stable and responsive to the needs of consumers worldwide. Proving further its crucial role in the success of the sector, IHAF currently

has 38 accreditation body-members from 35 countries across six continents.

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