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Oman: Importance of sustainable development highlighted

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MUSCAT -- The Muscat Green Days Conference on 'Education for a Sustainably Built Environment' began here yesterday under the auspices of Sayyid Salim bin Musallam al Busaidy, Under-Secretary for Administrative Development Affairs, Ministry of Civil Services. The two-day conference has brought together 40 speakers from the construction, energy, environment and research sector who began discussions on ways to save energy today without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

In his wide-ranging presentation Dr Saif bin Rashid al Shaqsi of the Ministry of Regional Municipalities and Water Resources, said Oman has limited water resources and 30 per cent of what it gets in terms of rainfall is lost in deserts and sea.

To meet the deficit in the water supply, the government is working out an integrated water resources management strategy, involving best practices based on the principles of sustainability. He said agriculture accounts for the largest consumption of water in Oman. Some of the deficit in water supply is met by virtual water imports.

Virtual water content of a product (a commodity, good or service) is "the volume of freshwater used to produce the product, measured at the place where the product was actually produced. For example, it takes 1,300 cubic metres of water on average to produce one metric tonne of wheat and even more to produce rice. So import of such products means import of virtual water, Al Shaqsi explained.

Other speakers said, "Sustainable Green Building strategies refer to technologies and applications achieving efficient levels of energy and water consumption, as well as a healthy living and working environment for today's and future generations."

In his speech Hussain al Salmi of GUtech University said, "We are keen on generating awareness and promoting sustainable building practices in Oman for the benefit of our future generations". He also focused on sustainable urban development in Oman.

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Ahmed al Jahdhami, General Manager Policy and Strategy, Public Authority for Electricity and Water, gave a presentation on "Government Initiatives in the Field of Renewable Energy", and stressed the

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need for using energy sustainably and exploring renewable energy sources. He shed light on Oman's solar energy projects, which

are expected to be launched soon.

The speakers stressed that sustainable and green building practices go beyond energy and water conservation. "They incorporate environmentally sensitive site planning, resource efficient building materials and superior indoor environmental quality", said Richard Lisker, an architect consultant.

The Muscat Green Days Conference is complimented by a workshop that will include today a USGBC LEED Training Course (US Green Building Council Course in Leadership, Energy and Environmental Design). The course includes an understanding of the Building Design and Construction LEED Rating System, a course on sustainable lighting strategies and a session on Sustainable Company Management Policies.

By Hasan Kamoonpuri

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