

# King opens key projects in Aqaba Port, meets officials, investors

His Majesty urges more development of port city

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His Majesty King Abdullah listens as he inaugurates the new phosphates terminal in Aqaba Port on Thursday (Photo courtesy of the Royal Court)

**AMMAN** — His Majesty King Abdullah on Thursday inaugurated the expansion of the Aqaba Container Terminal and the new phosphate terminal.

During a visit to Aqaba, some 330km south of Amman, the King was briefed on the future work plan of the Aqaba Special Economic Zone Authority (ASEZA) and on the plans of the Aqaba Development Corporation (ADC) prior to a meeting with local, Arab and foreign investors.

While meeting with ASEZA members, the King stressed the importance of team work and coordination among the concerned parties in Aqaba in a manner that serves to implement future strategic projects, draw investments, provide jobs to citizens and improve their living conditions.

King Abdullah called for establishing an advisory board with members from ASEZA and the local community to determine the needs of the local community and engage it in the decision-making process, a Royal Court statement said.

Underlining the economic importance of Aqaba, the King said all concerned parties should work to boost its competitiveness at the regional and international levels through constant development of the investment environment.

The King directed the government to convene a Cabinet meeting in Aqaba as soon as possible to discuss ways to deal with the challenges facing the various sectors there and discuss government plans to boost investment projects and develop the business environment.

Prime Minister Abdullah Ensour said he will implement the King's directives by holding several meetings bringing together ministers, officials and representatives of the local community in Aqaba to become acquainted with their problems and prepare suitable solutions.

ASEZA Chief Commissioner Kamel Mahadin highlighted the authority's future work plan, which comprises improving the infrastructure to serve tourism and investment projects as well as reviewing the law regulating its work.

According to Mahadin, the investment volume at Aqaba International Industrial Estate has so far exceeded \$180 million and generated 900 jobs.

During a visit to ADC offices, the King met with a number of Arab and foreign investors and stressed the need to provide the necessary facilities to attract investors to Aqaba.

The advisory board he called for will include representatives of the public and private sectors who will address challenges facing investors and prepare joint strategies to enhance Aqaba's investment environment.

Jordan is among the leading countries in establishing development zones, His Majesty said, highlighting China's experience in this field.

He added that the government and concerned parties are, therefore, required to work to ensure that the development zones in governorates fulfil the desired goals.

"Our ambition in Jordan is to provide job opportunities and improve citizens' living conditions," the Monarch noted.

For his part, Ensour said the government works to implement Royal directives and provide an investor-friendly environment to help develop Aqaba and support its local community.

ADC CEO Ghassan Ghanem briefed His Majesty on the company's main investments and their role in supporting the private sector to provide a suitable investment environment.

The investors said they believed in the economic feasibility of investing in Jordan, stressing the need to provide more incentives to attract projects that will help develop the city further.

They called for improving the King Hussein International Airport and easing customs procedures.

In remarks to the Jordan News Agency, Petra, Al Maabar Managing Director Yousef Al Nowais commended Aqaba's economic "renaissance", adding that the company seeks to expand its projects in Aqaba and Amman.

The ADC was launched in 2004 "with the objective of unlocking the potential of the Aqaba Special Economic Zone (ASEZ) by accelerating its economic growth and development", according to its website.

The ADC owns Aqaba's seaport, airport and strategic parcels of land as well as the development and management rights for these assets.

It is mandated to develop ASEZ through building new or expanding existing infrastructure.

Jordan has been upgrading its infrastructure through projects between the public and private sectors, under which the state retains land and infrastructure ownership while the private sector undertakes the responsibilities of financing, construction, and development and operational activities.

Projects implemented in line with this approach over the past years included the expansion to the Queen Alia International Airport, the Disi Water Conveyance Project, the new terminals in Aqaba and electricity-generation projects.

The expanded container terminal, which the King inaugurated on Thursday, has seen the berth extended to 1,000 metres from 540 metres and the anchorage upgraded to accommodate three huge ships at the same time. This will provide accelerated logistic services to investors.

After the expansion, the terminal, which deals with 20 major international shipping lines, will be able to handle 1.5 million containers and further expansion is planned in three to five years to raise the handling capacity to 2.2 million containers.

In 2003, the ADC, on behalf of ASEZA, went into partnership to improve the efficiency, capacity and the operational performance of the container terminal in Aqaba.

After signing a Terminal Management Contract with ADC in 2004, APM Terminals (part of the global A.P. Moller–Maersk Group) took over the management and operation of the terminal.

The new phosphate terminal has been set up at a cost of \$240 million with a storage capacity of 240,000 tonnes. Built on a Build, Operate and Transfer basis, the terminal's handling capacity is expected to reach six million tonnes annually. It features a 200-metre berth and can accommodate ships of various sizes, from 5,000 to 100,000-tonne shipments.