The 6th World Chambers Congress was held in Kuala Lumpur on 3-5 June under the theme “Leading sustainable growth and change.” The Congress focused on global trends in demographics, migration and industrialization and analyzed the stress they are placing on vital resources including food, water, and energy.

The Congress brought together business and chamber of commerce leaders from around the world to exchange ideas and experiences on how they are working with business and governments to meet the challenges of the global recession, climate change, and other pressing issues.

Organized by the International Chamber of Commerce’s World Chambers Federation and hosted by the Federation of Malaysian Manufacturers, the biennial Congress is the only international forum for chamber leaders to share experiences and best practices, develop networks and address the latest business issues affecting their community.

“This Congress serves as a valuable reminder of the vital role chambers of commerce play in their communities, supporting local economic development and facilitating trade,” said Rona Yircali, Chairman of the World Chambers Federation.

The Congress was inaugurated by Malaysian Deputy Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin. Former US President Bill Clinton taped a special video message to delegates from over 90 countries.

Other participants included:
- Victor Fung, Chairman of Li & Fung and Chairman of the International Chamber of Commerce
- Mike Mack, CEO, Syngenta, Switzerland
- Andrea Tomat, President and CEO, Lotto Sport Italia
- Marcus Wallenberg, Chairman of Skandinaviska Enskilda Banken, Sweden

Panellists participating in the plenary sessions addressed issues including how governments, business, and civil society can best support a global climate regime and whether a connection exists between economic growth, trade liberalization, environmental protection and sustainable development.

Leaders of the global chambers of commerce community issued a statement at the Congress identifying the current global economic crisis and the impacts of climate change as two major challenges that transcend national borders and require concerted international cooperation.

In a main plenary session on the economic implications of climate change Carlos Busquets, Policy Manager, Environment & Energy, at the International Chamber of Commerce and the moderator of the plenary, stressed that climate change presented opportunities for companies and chambers and that the political decisions that would be reached by the UNFCCC in Copenhagen in December would not be an end, but rather a beginning to new ways of doing business.

In addition to the plenary sessions there were over 20 workshops divided into three tracks – business, development, and chamber issues. They addressed the key challenges faced by businesses today, from the effects of globalization on small to medium-sized enterprises to corporate governance, counterfeiting, and empowering women in business.

The workshop on women in business saw women corporate figures and activists including Selima Ahmad, President of the Bangladesh Women Chamber of Commerce and Industry and vice-chairman of the Nitol-Niloy Group. Irene Natividad, President of the Global Summit of Women, also participated.

In the area of business one workshop examined how cities around the world are building strategic alliances to find sustainable solutions to the effects of sprawling urbanism. Another looked into the different types of partnerships that are being created between port authorities, chambers and local municipalities to support economic development and sustainability for their communities.

In the area of development, workshops focused on helping young people become entrepreneurs; maximizing the use of modern technology to improve the communication between members and partners; how business leaders should use the current crisis to transform their organizations and shape their futures; and the benefits of corporate social responsibility.

The Congress workshops discussed how chambers are helping businesses adapt to the challenges of climate change and the techniques to help chambers improve customer services.

One workshop showed the film ilicit: The Dark Trade, highlighting the links between intellectual property theft, counterfeiting and other illicit activities. There were four workshops dealing with various trade documentation issues including ATA Carnets and Certificates of Origin.

More than 30 organizations from the United States, Australia, the United Arab Emirates, Mexico, Luxembourg and Malaysia booked space to showcase their products and services. The exhibition space was sold out far in advance of the Congress.

Michael Chai, a council member of the Associated Chinese Chambers of Commerce and Industry and the chairman of the Congress’ sub-committee on exhibitions, noted that local companies need not go overseas to promote their offerings. “Foreigners are coming here to see for themselves what we have to offer. This is the best way to make ourselves known,” he said. In addition to keynote addresses and sessions, participants also had time to network.
to network and relax at the welcome reception, a dinner hosted by the Mayor of Kuala Lumpur, and a royal gala dinner.

A special event at the Congress was the announcement of the winners of the 2009 World Chambers Competition. Organized by the International Chamber of Commerce World Chambers Federation, the Competition is the only global awards programme to recognize the most innovative projects undertaken by chambers of commerce and industry from around the world.

This year the contest attracted 48 entries from 31 countries, with 19 finalists in the four categories - Best Unconventional Project, Best Small Business Project, Best International Project and Best Networking Project – announced in April.

All the finalists were invited to present their projects to the international judging panel, and the winners were announced at a special ceremony on the last day of the Congress.

For the first time in the history of the Competition, the winners received US$1,000 in prize money, and this was donated by Avijit Mazumdar, Honorary Chairman of the World Chambers Federation and Chairman of this year’s World Chambers Competition Jury.

Other prizes for this year’s Competition included a week’s accommodation from the Anguilla Chamber of Commerce and Industry in one of their members’ resort hotels and a vacation package at the Phinda Private Game Reserve secured with KZN Tourism by The Durban Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

About the World Chambers Congress
Organized by the World Chambers Federation, which is part of the International Chamber of Commerce, and hosted by the Federation of Malaysian Manufacturers, the Congress brings together the global community of over 14,000 chambers of commerce.

World Chambers Congresses are held every two years and are organized by the World Chambers Federation, a specialized division of the International Chamber of Commerce.

Since the inaugural World Chambers Congress in Marseilles in 1999, the event has established an enviable reputation as the place where chamber of commerce and business leaders get to know international peers and share experience and best practice on issues that have a direct impact on the chamber of commerce community.

More workshop than talk shop, the World Chambers Congress offers practical, hands-on solutions to support the development of small- and medium-sized enterprises and provides chambers of commerce an opportunity to learn best how to deal with the myriad challenges facing modern business.

The World Chambers Congress is the only international forum devoted to the global community of over 14,000 chambers of commerce.

Delegates come together from as far as Afghanistan, Algeria, Australia, Costa Rica, Cuba, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ecuador, Fiji, Ivory Coast, Madagascar, Mongolia, Nepal, Philippines, Saudi Arabia, and Uganda.

The next World Chambers Congress will be held in Mexico City in 2011. For more information visit: www.kl2009.org

About ICC
Celebrating its 90th anniversary in 2009, the International Chamber of Commerce is the world business organization, representing enterprises from all sectors in every part of the world. The fundamental mission of ICC is to promote trade and investment across frontiers and help business corporations meet the challenges and opportunities of globalization.

A world network of national committees keeps the ICC International Secretariat in Paris informed about national and regional business priorities. Experts drawn from ICC’s member companies feed their knowledge and experience into crafting the ICC stance on specific business issues.

The United Nations, the World Trade Organization, and many other intergovernmental bodies, both international and regional, are kept in touch with the views of international business through ICC.

For more information please visit: www.iccwbo.org

The opening ceremony took place in the presence of 1,000 delegates from over 100 countries