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Kuwait signs information security agreement with NATO

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Kuwait signed an information security agreement with NATO on 12 December, allowing greater co-operation between the emirate and the alliance.

NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, who signed the agreement with Sheikh Ahmad Fahad al-Sabah, President of the Kuwaiti National Security Bureau, described the agreement as a "facilitating instrument" for co-operation between Kuwait and the alliance under the Istanbul Co-operation Initiative (ICI).

The ICI, a co-operation programme aimed at the six-nation Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, was launched by NATO leaders during their Istanbul summit in June 2004. Kuwait was the first country to join the ICI in December 2004, followed by Bahrain and Qatar in February 2005 and the United Arab Emirates in June 2005. Saudi Arabia is negotiating joining the programme, after which Oman is expected to follow suit.

As the first ICI member, Kuwait hosted a conference entitled 'Facing Common Challenges through ICI' on 11-12 December. The conference was attended by senior Kuwaiti officials and NATO ambassadors.

De Hoop Scheffer pointed out that NATO and Kuwait face the same global challenges. GCC Secretary General Abdulrahman Bin Hamad Al-Attiya told the conference that practical co-operation under ICI could include: combating terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction; the illegal trade in drugs, arms and people; disaster preparedness; participation in NATO exercises; and military co-operation. De Hoop Scheffer said the information security agreement would allow Kuwaiti officers to attend courses like those given by the NATO School in Oberammergau, southern Germany, which require a security clearance.