Turkish Embassy Podcast Series

**Interview with Mr. Muhtar Kent, President and CEO of The Coca-Cola Company**

**Q: Can you give us a brief overview of how your Coca-Cola journey began?**

**Muhtar Kent:** After university and a stint in the Turkish military, I moved to New York City in the late 1970s to live with my uncle while I was looking for work. I wish I could say my path to Coca-Cola was a glorious journey, but the reality is I got my first job with the company after responding to a classified advertisement in the newspaper. It's true, classified ads really do work! I started in sales and service and really got to know the business from the ground up. It was a great starting point for me and the experience was invaluable to my career.

**Q: Are you a member of any Turkish-American organization here? Do you get a chance to attend social or business endeavors?**

**Muhtar Kent:** I belong to several Turkish-American organizations and was privileged in the past year to speak in front of the American Turkish Council, the American Turkish Society, the Turkish-American Friendship Society and the Center for Strategic and International Studies' Turkish program. For both personal and professional reasons, I believe it is important to keep in touch with my homeland. Turkey is important to not only me but to The Coca-Cola Company as it is one of our most important growth markets.

**Q: How often do you visit Turkey and what kind of reactions do you get there?**

**Muhtar Kent:** I get back to Istanbul and to my summer home on the Aegean several times a year. Not as much as I would like, of course, but I do make a point to reconnect with friends, family and business associates every time I get back home. The warmth and hospitality of the Turkish people mixed with the sunshine and the blue Aegean Sea never fail to inspire and refresh me.

**Q: Your father, Ambassador Ismail Necdet Kent, is a hero to the international community for his noble efforts to rescue Jews from Nazi persecution. Accordingly, in 2001, he was given Turkey's Supreme Service Medal as well as a special medal from Israel. How has his legacy reflected upon you?**

**Muhtar Kent:** Well, as you can imagine, I am extremely proud of my father and my mother. They shaped who I am today and gave me the foundation to succeed in life. I feel as though I am standing on their shoulders.

**Q: What are some of the nuances between the Turkish and American business environment? What’s the most important real-life advice you can give to a Turkish entrepreneur?**

**Muhtar Kent:** Turkey and America both have rich and powerful traditions of entrepreneurship. This is core to the respective psyches of the two nations and I think will serve both well in the years to come. Turkey and American have both been through their share of business and financial crises and have used their innovative and enterprising spirits to come out of these crises better prepared for the future. In terms of advice to Turkish entrepreneurs, I would say that "respecting cash" is something that every business leader needs to embrace. I interact with college students quite a few times every year and they always ask what it takes to get ahead in a large corporation like Coca-Cola. I tell them to go out and find small business experience first. Learn what it takes to be an entrepreneur. Learn the value of cash. Once you've mastered that, you will succeed beyond your wildest dreams. And that's truer today than ever.

**Q: How do you evaluate the future of Turkish-American relations, political or economic, under the Obama administration?**

**Muhtar Kent:** I think the President has done an outstanding job so far in rebuilding America's image abroad. For at least the next 20-30 years, the world is going to need a strong Brand America. Turkey is definitely going to need a strong Brand America. America, in return, will need a strong Brand Turkey. This bilateral relationship is among the most important in the world, and I think President Obama expressed that quite eloquently during his trip to Ankara this past year. I feel very good about the future of both nations and our relationship.