



Maria Luisa Navarro, Panama's vice minister of multilateral affairs, says Dubai can help with development. Alex Atack for The National

## Panama wants partnership with Dubai International Humanitarian City

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March 23, 2016 Updated: March 23, 2016 07:43 PM



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Panama wants to collaborate with Dubai International Humanitarian City as it builds the first humanitarian hub in the Americas.

The Central American country is also looking to build up infrastructure around the widened – canal to meet an expected increase in trade volumes.

While in Dubai, Maria Luisa Navarro, the vice minister for multilateral affairs and cooperation of Panama, also met various UAE businesses ahead of the opening of the expanded Panama Canal, scheduled for the week of June 16.

"The areas in which there are natural connections would be development of ports, the energy sector, tourism, infrastructure and real estate," she said during a visit to Dubai.

"With the Dubai International Humanitarian City, we exchanged possibilities of training capabilities, of protocols, development and other areas where we can collaborate."

The US\$16 million facility, which would be spread over 12,000 square feet in its first and second phases, would house United Nations agencies such as the United Nations Humanitarian Response Depot along with Red Cross

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and Red Crescent, and the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation. The third phase would cost \$8m. The hub would be funded by the Panama government.

The much-delayed expansion will cut time and costs by allowing larger vessels with a capacity of 13,500 standard container units to pass through the waterway. The current capacity is for 5,000-unit vessels.

The Panama Canal, which accounts for about 10 per cent of the country's GDP, is expected to double its contribution after the expansion, according to Ms Navarro. It generated \$2.61 billion in the 2015 fiscal year ending September in revenues, according to the Panama consulate in Dubai.

DP World manages about 65 marine terminals around the world, including Argentina, the Dominican Republic and Peru.

"We don't have any immediate plans to set up anything near the Panama Canal at this stage," said a DP World spokesman. "We are always looking at opportunities that are available at attractive prices, so should something interesting become available, we would look at it."

Next month, the Minister of Economy, Sultan Al Mansouri, is to lead a UAE delegation to Panama. This month, Panama expects to open its embassy in Abu Dhabi. The UAE has said it will open an embassy in Panama in 2017.

Emirates had planned to begin flights to Panama City on February 1. At 17 hours and 35 minutes westbound, it would have been the world's longest regularly scheduled route, but delays in securing codeshare permissions from regulators in the Americas mean the route might not happen until early 2017.

The 102-year-old Panama Canal has been undergoing a \$5.2bn expansion since 2007. Panama's economy is expected to grow at 6.7 per cent this year.

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