

Creating A Connected World

An Interview with Sam Darwish, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, IHS Towers

EDITORS' NOTE Sam Darwish has more than 25 years of experience in the telecommunications industry and co-founded IHS Towers in 2001. Under his leadership, IHS Towers has grown from a start-up infrastructure company in Nigeria to one of the leading emerging market communications infrastructure businesses. Previously, he served as the Deputy Managing Director of CELIA Moto-phone Ltd, Nigeria's first Global System for Mobiles (GSM) operator.



Sam Darwish

He was also the Vice Chairman and Director of Projects at Lintel, an international GSM operator, responsible for global project implementation in West Africa and the Middle East. Before that he was the Network Chief Engineer for Libancell (currently Touch), Lebanon's first GSM network operator. Additionally, Darwish founded Singularity Investments, a private investment firm with a focus on technology, media and telecommunications companies with investments in the United States and the emerging markets. He is also the Founder and President of DAR Properties, a property investment company, and DAR Telecoms, a telecommunications consulting company. He was awarded the CNBC Africa Business Leader of the Year Award for West Africa in 2016 and the TowerXchange Lifetime Achievement Award in 2017 for his founding and continued leadership of IHS Towers. Darwish is a member of the Wilson Center Global Advisory Council and frequent speaker at telecommunications industry events. He is also a Trustee of the Intrepid Sea, Air & Space Museum. Darwish is a graduate, with distinction, of the American University of Beirut with a bachelor's of engineering degree in computer communications.

COMPANY BRIEF IHS Towers (ibstowers.com) is one of the largest independent owners, operators and developers of shared communications infrastructure in the world by tower count and is one of the largest independent multinational tower companies solely focused on emerging markets. The company has nearly 40,000 towers across its 11 markets, including Brazil, Cameroon, Colombia, Côte d'Ivoire, Egypt, Kuwait, Nigeria, Peru, Rwanda, South Africa, and Zambia.

What was your vision for creating IHS Towers and how do you define its mission?

I co-founded IHS Towers in 2001 to address a gap in the telecoms market. Over time, this evolved and solidified. Today, we operate nearly 40,000 towers across three continents with a combined population of approximately 780 million people.

Our mission is to provide our customers, predominantly mobile network operators (MNOs), with the infrastructure to enable the

widest, most efficient and reliable networks. Our growth story has been underpinned by a vision to create a connected world, where communication promotes continued economic growth and social development.

Will you provide an overview of IHS Towers' services and capabilities?

We strive to provide best-in-class services to our customers and respond to their increasingly sophisticated data demands. We capitalize on our engineering expertise to help them achieve their connectivity goals via six main solutions: colocation and lease amendments; new sites; inbuilding solutions known as distributed antenna system (DAS); small cell; fiber connectivity; and rural telephony.

In our largest markets, Nigeria and Brazil, we are increasingly focused on our fiber capabilities. In rural areas, we also continue to expand our rural telephony solutions. Launched in 2020, our solar-powered radio telephony program uses 100 percent renewable energy to connect rural villages. As of September 30, 2023, we have approximately 600 rural sites in Nigeria and Cameroon.

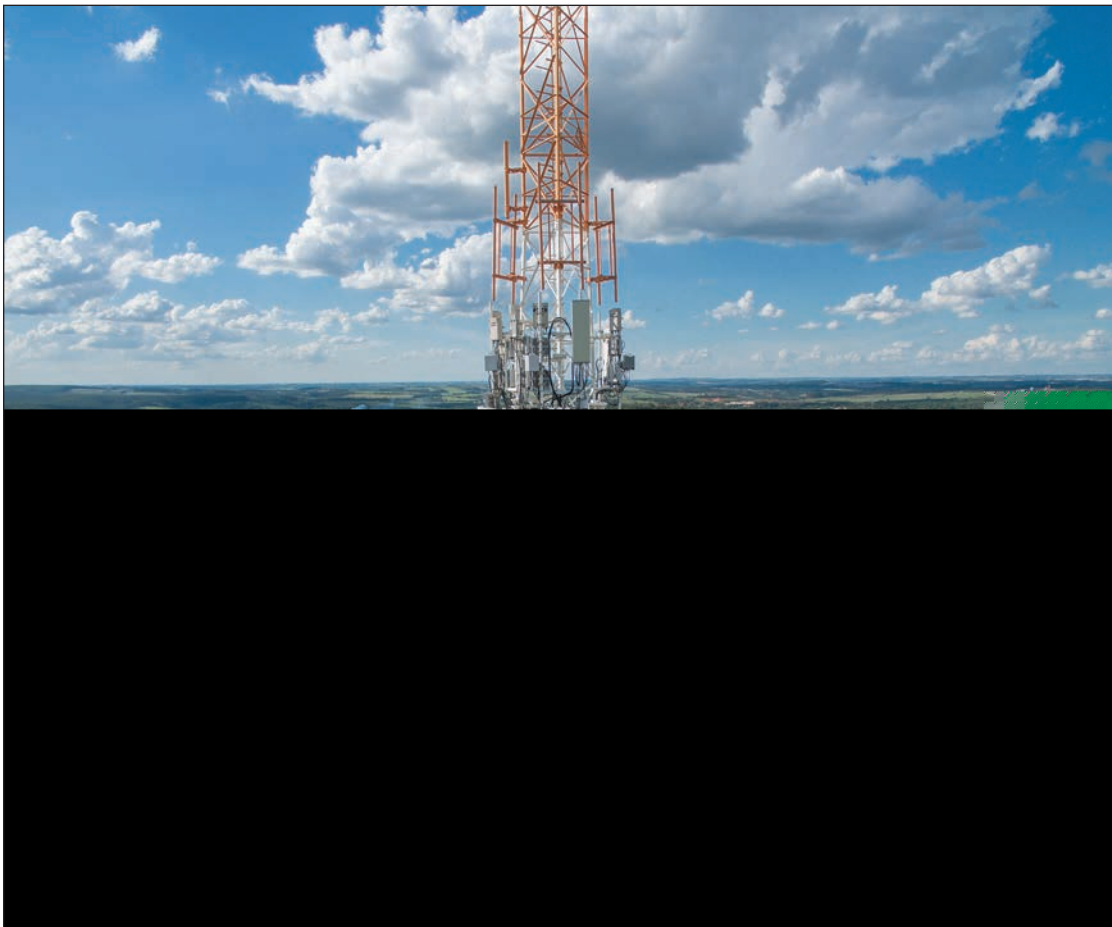
What have been the keys to IHS Towers' growth and how do you define the IHS Towers difference?

We have a well-defined organic and inorganic expansion strategy, focusing on emerging, growth-oriented markets that have a healthy and robust telecom ecosystem. We seek to grow in our current markets with existing and new customers and enter carefully selected growth-oriented markets with compelling underlying fundamentals.

I believe our competitive advantages are our engineering mindset and local expertise. Even in our newer markets, such as South Africa, we install in-country management teams with local expertise. Our founder-led status is also key. I started IHS with William Saad and Mohamad Darwish in 2001 and we continue to lead the business today. Mohamad is CEO of our largest market – Nigeria – and William is our COO, and together we share our employees' passion and drive.



An IHS tower in Gatenga, Rwanda



An IHS tower in Itu, São Paulo, Brazil

Will you discuss IHS Towers' commitment to sustainability and how this is a part of IHS Towers' culture?

Sustainability is one of our five core values and a central tenant to our business approach. Our business model is inherently sustainable, given we enable infrastructure sharing, but we are also driven by the mantra that better connections means better opportunities. We apply a four-pillar sustainability strategy: Education and economic growth; Environment and climate change; Our people and communities; and Ethics and governance, and in 2022, deployed over \$7.5 million on community-focused initiatives. This was 6 percent higher than in 2021 and brought the total spend to more than \$22 million since 2017.

How critical is it for IHS Towers to build a diverse and inclusive workforce?

We believe it makes us stronger, more innovative, and better able to deliver for our customers and communities. We operate across 11 countries in three continents and draw on our diverse culture that represents over 55 nationalities. We are an equal opportunity employer, and we strive to create an inclusive working environment for all.

Gender equality is a key focus. I am personally committed to expanding training and leadership opportunities for our female employees. In 2020, we launched our Women in IHS Network (WIIN) mentoring program which currently has more than 170 pairs as part of it. We also continue to increase the number of female employees in management

positions. At the end of 2022, 24 percent of our employees and 25 percent of managers across the Group were female, up from 23 percent and 24 percent, respectively, at the end of 2021. At the Board level, currently more than 30 percent of our directors are female and we hope this encourages our female employees to continue striving upwards.

What do you see as IHS Towers' responsibility to be engaged in the communities it serves and to be a force for good in society?

We provide our communities with a critical service and operate with two key responsibilities in mind – firstly, through mobile connectivity, we believe we offer significant economic and social value to those communities, and secondly, through our community-focused sustainability strategy. Our local sustainability teams undertake assessments to identify community needs and work to implement projects that positively impact this stakeholder group. Projects range from improving access to education, to helping deliver vital healthcare and protecting the local environment and ecosystems.

What do you feel are the keys to effective leadership and how do you describe your management style?

Passion, commitment, innovation, and integrity are key. I strive to demonstrate these qualities and emulate our core values of customer focus, innovation, integrity, boldness, and sustainability.

As a co-founder, I think I'm more "in the weeds" than some CEOs might be. I am a strong proponent of open, honest dialogue and encourage colleagues to share their opportunities, successes, and challenges. In October, at our annual CEO Conference in Lagos, I chaired an open-floor discussion where I asked colleagues to bring their challenges to IHS' Executive Committee. Together, we debated logical and tangible solutions and left with outcome-orientated strategies.

Did you always know that you had an entrepreneurial spirit and desire to build your own company?

I trained as an engineer, therefore, my focus was always on fixing and finding a solution. So no, I didn't set out to be an entrepreneur. I saw an opportunity. In 2001, Nigeria had a population of approximately 150 million people, but only 8,000 mobile phones. Today, it has a population of 221 million and a mobile cellular subscription rate of 95 percent (per 100 people). While I did not anticipate this level of growth, I knew Nigeria had potential.

What's kept me at the helm is my colleagues – the passion and dedication they demonstrate daily, our collective desire to innovate and our shared ambition of bringing mobile connectivity to even the most remote communities.

IHS Towers has accomplished much since its founding. Are you able to enjoy the process and take moments to reflect on what you have built?

Growing up in Lebanon, I never imagined I would be Chairman and CEO of a company with a Nigerian heritage listed on the New York Stock Exchange.

Over the years, IHS has enjoyed multiple markers of success – from that first tower in 2001 to our expansion into Cameroon and Cote d'Ivoire in 2013, Rwanda and Zambia in 2014, and more recently, our expansion into Kuwait, Latin America and South Africa. However, listing on the NYSE in 2021 has been my greatest moment. To stand on that podium and ring the NYSE opening bell 20 years after I co-founded IHS was momentous. Through the IPO, we raised over \$350 million and became one of the largest Africa-related IPOs on U.S. capital markets.

What advice do you offer young people beginning their careers?

Ask questions, be curious and don't be afraid to take risks. Starting IHS in 2001 was a risk – a risk which ultimately paid off, but not without hard work, persistence, and a willingness to think outside the box. Be prepared for setbacks, failures, and don't be deterred when these happen. Step back, take a moment to pause, recalibrate and return to the drawing board. Whatever sector your career is in, the need to innovate and think creatively will always be there. Finally, lean on the advice and expertise of others. IHS would not be the success it is today without the colleagues who sit on the Executive Committee and Board, or without the hard work, dedication and commitment of all employees. ●