Dania Besher is an architect by profession. Her projects include both residential and commercial developments. She has just finished renovating her family business’s headquarters in Cairo, Egypt. Dania is one of 37 cousins in the third generation of the family firm, and has been one of the leaders of the governance process begun by her family in 2010. She is a member of the family council, and recently became a member of the board of Mac Investments, a holding company of the family businesses in Egypt. The family business was started in the 1950s by Dania’s grandfather Abdulhak and his brother. In 1963,

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one of Abdulhak’s sons, Shaher, founded the family’s trading company in Yemen. In the 1970s other sons gradually joined the business, as it expanded into industrial fields, then beverages, first in Egypt, later in Yemen, and recently in South Sudan. The group has since then seen a major diversification in different sectors and countries.

Denise Kenyon-Rouvinez: Dania, what was the trigger that initiated the discussion on family constitutions?

Dania Besher: As the family has been blessed with many children and has grown steadily we realized that there were a lot of issues we were facing every day that we didn’t know how to deal with, without being emotionally involved or biased towards our own family branch. We decided we needed a constitution to keep family unity. We started in June 2011 and we signed it exactly a year later in June 2012. But we had established the family council in 2010 because we wanted to set the vision and common objective for the family, both inside and outside the family business. We also introduced a family office in 2012 to help us centralize the organization and needs of an ever-growing family.

How did we start? We had been talking about governance for the family business since the mid 1990s, but nobody really followed through. Later, when we realized that we had many members joining the business, we felt it was time to have a proper organization. So, in 2007, I went to the Family Business Network summit in Berlin with my father. That was an eye-opening experience. I listened to and met other families, and realized we were not alone in our situation. In 2010, I also attended seminars on succession and governance and started initiating the process. I felt it was urgent to start putting something in place before the family fell apart.

How often did you meet to work on the constitution?

We had five meetings. We met every second month, usually for two or three days. For the first three modules there were only cousins – 14 of us – plus my father. You had