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U.S.-ARAB CHAMBER SUPPORTS TUNISIA _PARTI FORUM IN WASHINGTON, DC

First Event of its Kind Brings Together Government Officials and Leaders to Promote Economic Growth in Tunisia

The National U.S.-Arab Chamber of Commerce (NUSACC) today helped to convene the first-ever Tunisian-U.S. public-private initiative to encourage economic growth and job creation in the Republic of Tunisia. The meeting was held in the Department of State, the day-long meeting focused on three areas of particular promise in Tunisia: energy, information & communications technologies (ICT), and trade & investment.

David Hamod, President and CEO of the U.S.-Arab Chamber, characterized the gathering as "a historic event in the promotion of the new Tunisia as a trade and investment destination for U.S. companies." He went on to explain that bringing together sector and private sector leaders from both nations together under one roof helps to open doors and create solutions. "Over time, generate win-win opportunities that will benefit Tunisians and Americans alike."

The National U.S.-Arab Chamber of Commerce served as a supporting organization for the meeting, representing the United States side in the discussions. The event was inaugurated by the Hon. Michael Hammer, Acting Assistant Secretary for Energy, and Business Development for the U.S. Department of State, the event was inaugurated by the Hon. Jose Fernandez, Assistant Secretary for Energy, and Business Development for the U.S. Department of State.

President Littlefield noted, "Tunisia can set an economic example for the region, and OPIC is ready to support this development. OPIC has approximately $50 million to invest in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Tunisia. Tunisia's economic prospects, its location, and its business-friendly environment make it an attractive destination."

The Government of Tunisia was represented by H.E. Mohamed Tekaya, Ambassador to the United States, who pointed to the role of the U.S. in supporting Tunisia. He said, "Support from the United States was crucial in bringing Tunisia to a stable, democratic society. The U.S. has been a steadfast supporter of Tunisia's transition to democracy."

Tunisia is widely credited for sparking the "Arab Spring" nearly one year ago, and last month, that transition continued with a fully democratic election in the country's history. According to Tunisia's electoral commission, over 54 percent of registered voters participated in the election, which was generally viewed by international observers as free and fair. The Ennahda Party won 89 of the 217 seats in Tunisia's new constituent assembly, and Ennahda is part of a coalition government. The first meeting of the new constituent assembly is scheduled for November 22. The constitution is expected to be completed next year.

Earlier this year, the National U.S.-Arab Chamber of Commerce hosted the first two private sector delegations to Tunisia that nation's revolution. The first delegation was composed of civil society representatives, a
One of those delegates, Mr. Mondher Ben Ayed, participated in the Partnerships Forum as a panelist. He explained reasons why Americans should invest in Tunisia. The best antidote to terrorism is creating productivity. Tunisia must consolidate the successes of its democratic experience, and create the best way to attract American investment.

The Tunisian American Chamber of Commerce (TACC) has a long affiliation with the U.S.-Arab Chamber of Commerce (NUSACC). TACC was represented by its President, Ms. Amel Bouchamaoui Hammami. She stated, “We need to increase awareness of investment opportunities in Tunisia. It is through partnerships with organizations like the National U.S.-Arab Chamber of Commerce that we can increase American investment.”

According to recent research conducted by NUSACC, U.S. merchandise exports to Tunisia are expected to reach $3.3 billion by the year 2013. This is about double what the United States exported to that North African nation. The top five exporting states to Tunisia, in descending order, included Texas, Virginia, Louisiana, Wisconsin, and California.

The United States and Tunisia have signed a Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA) in 2011. In 2011, Tunisia grew to $571.2 million, an increase of 13.8 percent over the previous year. U.S. imports from Tunisia increased by 24.5 percent to $405.5 million.

This is the first-ever Partnerships Forum hosted by the Secretary of State's Global Partnership Initiative investment conference for Tunisia following that nation's recent elections. In September 2011, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Tunisian Foreign Minister Mohammed Mouldi Kefi signed a new framework for the U.S.-Tunisia Joint Political and Economic Partnership. Today's Forum initiates one of the main objectives of this framework: to link potential investors to the Tunisian diaspora.

The closing session at today's Forum included Hon. Gayle Smith, Special Assistant to the President and National Security Council, Hon. William Taylor, Special Coordinator for Middle East Transitions, and Global Partnerships, Kris M. Balderston. Mr. Balderston, summarizing the optimistic spirit of the conference, said, “We are excited about the Tunisian Partnerships Forum as a new model to convene government, private sector, and civil society to grow markets and create job opportunities at home and abroad. There is a greater sense of enthusiasm for partnerships forum than now to celebrate the new opportunities in Tunisia following their revolution. We are excited about working with U.S. businesses and investors to encourage American investment in Tunisia.”

The National U.S.-Arab Chamber of Commerce (NUSACC), established over 40 years ago, is an organization dedicated to U.S.-Arab business. NUSACC is widely regarded as the voice of American business in the world and the premier portal to the United States for Arab commercial enterprises.