

Table of Contents

Our Thanks	2
World Affairs Councils of America.....	3
What is a Leadership Mission.....	5
WACA Delegation.....	7
Program	8
Overview of Tunisia.....	10
Discussion Reports	
Meeting with the Association Sauvegarde de la Medina de Tunis.....	12
Mr. Oussama Romdhani, Director General, Tunisian External Communication Agency.....	13
Ms. Mongia Souihi, Professor of Koranic Interpretation	14
Tunisia’s Approach to Terrorism with the Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Justice and Human Rights, Ministry of Education and Training.....	16
Mr. Abdelwaheb Abdalah, Minister of Foreign Affairs	17
Mr. Tijani Haddad, Minister of Tourism	19
Lunch with distinguished Tunisian women at Villa Didon, Carthage.....	21
Mr. Nouredine Boutar, General Director Radio Mosaique.....	22
Mr. Nouri Jouni, Minister of Development and International	23
Chamber of Advisors	24
Chamber of Deputies	26
The Honorable William Hudson, US Ambassador to Tunisia.....	27
Pole El Ghazala, Subcom Institute, and Tunav.....	29
Mr. Montassar Ouaili, Ministry of Communication Technologies.....	29
Mr. Moncef Barouni, Chair, Tunisian-American Chamber of Commerce.....	30
Mr. Omar Ben Mahmoud, Secretary of State for the National Solidarity Fund.....	31
Mr. Habib Haddad, Governor of Nabeul	32
Contacts	
Tunisian Contacts.....	34
American Contacts.....	37
Photos.....	38

Our Thanks

The World Affairs Councils of America wishes to express its deepest gratitude to the Tunisian Embassy in Washington, DC, especially Ambassador Mohamad Nejib Hachana, Mr. Riadh Dridi, and Ms. Aida Khalil for their support of this Leadership Mission to Tunisia.

We would like to thank Ms. Bochra Malki of the Tunisian External Communications Agency for planning an informative and productive mission and Jamil Bellakhel, our interpreter, for his exceptional talent and for sharing his insights.

Lastly, we would like to thank Bill Lawrence Director, Maghreb Affairs (NEA/MAG), U.S. Department of State for his assistance in preparing the delegation for their visit.

Our first leadership mission to Tunisia was a huge success. The breadth and depth of the meetings could not have been better, and we very much appreciate the candor and openness that was demonstrated in all of our encounters. We have gained a great insight into the Tunisian government's achievements and future challenges, and we look forward to deepening our relationship with long-lasting partnerships and projects for future cooperation.

The members of our delegation have pledged to disseminate locally what they have learned, to try to return to Tunisia either as another high-level delegation or as individuals in the future, to encourage follow-up trips to Tunisia by our 84 world affairs councils around the country, and to seek to raise the level of programming on Tunisia throughout the world affairs council system.

They are pleased to put forward this trip report as a statement of thanks to the sponsors of this trip. Many thanks!

Jerry W. Leach
President
World Affairs Councils of America



World Affairs Councils of America

Engaging Grassroots America in World Affairs

World affairs councils are non-profit, non-partisan organizations open to all who wish to join. Started in 1918, the council system has 484,000 members and participants, 84 councils, and 26 affiliates. Councils operate on membership dues, corporate sponsorships, grants, in-kind donations, fundraising events, and fee-for-service activities. Over 2,000 corporations, foundations, and individuals support council work.

The council system has the biggest international affairs speakers' program in the country with over 2,500 events each year. Councils also run international exchanges, school programs, teachers' workshops, model UNs, foreign policy discussions, national opinion polls, travel programs, young professionals' programs, conferences, corporate programs, journals, newspaper columns, and local radio and television programs. The system has five flagship programs: *World in Transition*, *Great Decisions*, the NPR radio program *It's Your World*, *Travel the World*, and *Academic WorldQuest*.

The national association organizes an annual conference, leadership missions abroad, a speaker referral system, international speaker exchanges, people-to-people diplomacy missions, educational workshops, book tours, subscription discounts, operations workshops, research papers, videoconferences, and national publications. It also runs national program series such as *Two Koreas*, *the EU*, *American Security*, *UN Reform*, *The People Speak*, *Breaking the Oil Addiction*, and *The World's Rising Powers*.

The 2006 Washington conference in January 18-21 was on *The World's Emerging Powers*. The 2005 conference was on *Tackling the World's Toughest Issues* and 2004 on *The US and Europe: Rivals or Partners?* The council system holds a national high school world affairs knowledge competition called *Academic WorldQuest*. Councils reach over 20 million people every year with their programs.

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WORLD AFFAIRS COUNCILS OF AMERICA

Leadership Missions

What is a leadership mission?

A leadership mission is an overseas fact-finding visit to a city, country, or international organization by a national leadership delegation of the World Affairs Council movement.

The World Affairs Councils of America is the largest non-profit international affairs organization in the United States with 84 councils around the country, 26 national and international affiliates, and 484,000 members and participants.

What is the purpose?

The main purposes are to get to know the people, the issues, and the problems of the city, the country or the organization first-hand and to establish a much greater connection between the country and a well-informed and influential part of the American public. These trips are for meeting and discussion purposes, not for sightseeing.

Better knowledge of the host country and its issues means better programs back home at the local council level. These include country-specific information channeled through more speaker invitations, radio and television programs, council publications, curriculum materials, teachers' workshops, business roundtables, conferences, and travel programs.

The world affairs council movement prides itself on independence. It wishes to confront the world's issues directly, not through the prisms of official foreign policy, interest group ideology, or the national media. The movement strongly believes in people-to-people diplomacy and is one of the preeminent organizations of its kind in the United States.

Who goes?

Delegations are generally made up of 10 national leaders of the council system, i.e. presidents of councils, national board members, local chairpersons, program directors, and local board members. Trips usually last between 7 and 10 days.

Who pays?

The host government or organization covers the expenses inside the country. The hosts sometimes pay the international airfare to the country as well. Hosts have been the ministry of foreign affairs, the national information service, local foundations, or local non-profit organizations.

What do the delegations do?

Delegations hold a wide variety of discussions and make numerous site visits. Typically, discussions include a session at the foreign ministry and often with defense, education, economics, privatization, and other field experts as well. Commonly, delegations meet with the media, business associations, think tanks, foundations, and universities as well. Sessions are largely short briefings followed by extensive question-and-answer periods.

Site visits often include industrial facilities, military installations, development projects, and rural settings. Delegations are usually hosted once by the American Embassy and sometimes pay a courtesy call on the national president.

How do the hosts benefit?

What the delegation learns is communicated to the members throughout the United States through a trip report, local programming, and council conferences and workshops.

Local programming on the host country has increased through 80 world affairs councils as a result of each tour. Perspectives gained on tours appear in publications, on radio and television, at conferences, in national foreign policy discussion publications, and in educational materials which we prepare for classrooms.

These visits also lead to the development of long-term working relationships between counterpart organizations in the host country and the World Affairs Councils. The working relationships produce joint projects, conferences, professional exchanges, speakers' visits to the United States, intern exchanges, publications, or the like. The tours sometimes lead to increased business interest from some of the 2,000 corporations that financially support the world affairs council movement around the country.

National delegation visits often then lead to follow-up by local councils. Many local councils have educational travel programs for their members. Leadership missions often start a series of trips from around the council world. For local trips, the travelers normally are paying their own way.

What countries or organizations have hosted study tours?

Over the last ten years, the world affairs council system has taken leadership delegations to China, Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Vietnam, Singapore, the Philippines, India, Turkey, Jordan, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Israel, Morocco, Lebanon, Brazil, Canada, NATO, the European Union, Poland, Kuwait, Egypt, and Tunisia. Several countries have issued repeat invitations.

WORLD AFFAIRS COUNCILS OF AMERICA

National Leadership Mission to Tunisia

February 4 – 12, 2006

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**Program of the Delegation of the
World Affairs Councils of America
February 5-12, 2006**

Sunday, February 5th

11:00 pm: Arrival and check in at hotel “the Residence” Gammarth

Monday, February 6th

10:00 am: Visits of the Zeitouna Mosque and the Medina of Tunis
Meeting with the Association Sauvegarde de la Medina de Tunis

11:00 pm: Meeting with Professor Mongia Souaihi, Teacher of Koranic
Interpretation

1:00 pm: Lunch with Mr. Oussama Romdhani, Director General, Tunisian
External Communication Agency

6:00 pm: Meeting with officials from the
Ministry of Interior
Ministry of Justice and Human Rights
Minister of Education and Training

8:00 pm: Dinner at the Hotel

Tuesday, February 7th

10:00 am: Meeting with Mr. Abdelwaheb Abdalah
Minister of Foreign Affairs & Senior Staff

11:30 am: Meeting with Mr. Tijani Haddad
Minister of Tourism

12:30 pm: Lunch with distinguished Tunisian women in Carthage
Bochra Malki,
Alifa Chaabane Farouk, Member of the Political Bureau
Salwa Tarzi Ben Attia, Deputy in Parliament
Imen Bakhoucha, business owner/entrepreneur
Hela Nafti Bergaoui, Ministry of Education and Training
Sonia M'barek, international music teacher/copywrite protector
Dora Bouchoucha, film-making/production.

3:00 pm: Visit to Radio “Mosaique”, first private radio station in Tunisia
Mr. Noureddine Boutar, Director General

5:00 pm: Free Time

Wednesday, February 8th

- 8:30 am: Meeting with Mr. Nouri Jouni
Minister of Development and International Cooperation
- 10:00 am: Meeting with counselors at the Chamber of Advisors
President Abdallah Kallel
- 11:00 am: Meeting with Chamber of Deputies
Mr. Salah Tebarki
- 12:00 am: Visit to the Bardo Museum
- 1:30 pm: Lunch at “Sheraton”
- 2:00 pm: Meeting at US Embassy with Amb. William Hudson
- 4:00 pm: Visit to the technological pole “El Ghazala”, “Subcom Institute” and
“Tunav” software corporation
- 8:00 pm: Dinner in Sidi Bou Said at the restaurant “Dar Zarrouk”

Thursday, February 9th

- 9:00 am: Coffee at US Ambassador’s Residence
hosted by Mrs. Mary Hudson
- 10:00 am: Meeting with Mr. Montassar Ouaili
Minister of ITC at the Ministry
- 12:30 pm: Lunch with the Tunisian-American Chamber of Commerce
Mr. Moncef Barouni, Chair
- 3:00 pm: Meeting with Mr. Omar Ben Mahmoud,
Secretary of State for the National Solidarity Fund
- 5:00 pm: Departure to Hammamet
Overnight at Hammamet at the hotel “Hasdrubal”

Friday, February 10th

- 8:45 am: Departure to Nabeul
- 9:00 am: Meeting with Mr. Habib Haddad, Governor of Nabeul followed by a
guided visit of a project financed by the National Solidarity Fund
(26-26)
- 10:00 am: Visits to the villages of Nabeul and Hammamet
- 1:30 pm: Lunch at the restaurant “El Pomedor” at Hammamet
- 3:00 p.m. Free Time (visit Medina)

Saturday, February 11th

- 10:00 Visit Kairouan Mosque
And Aghalbite Pools
Visit of Roman amphitheater, El DJem
Visit to port city of Sousse
Dinner at Le Mediterranee, Port El Kantaoui

Overview Essay
By William Boudreau

Tunisia is impressive. While some individual members expressed some concerns with certain aspects of the government's policies, all ten members on the National Leadership Mission to Tunisia concluded that Tunisia is both modern and progressive. The North African country is well situated geographically. It has the advantage of a long coastline along the Mediterranean Sea, the desert in the south and mountains in the northwest. Tourism is a major industry with considerable potential for further development. Resort areas are reminiscent of such locations as Cancun and Las Vegas.

Tunisia is a small country with limited natural resources, and yet has maintained a 5% economic growth rate over the past ten years. It is a country rich in history that has influenced its people, now a population of 10 million. Earlier state control of the economy has been gradually replaced by liberalization and economic reform. The government proudly proclaims that 80% of the population is middle class as it moves to eliminate pockets of poverty. Another statistic announced with some satisfaction is home ownership; some 80% of Tunisians are said to own their own homes. Education is most important, with 25% of the budget committed to this activity. Literacy is at 77% and life expectancy is at 74 years. Administratively, the country is divided into 24 governorates, with each governor appointed by the President.

The government is promoting free trade and is looking forward to an even closer relationship with Europe. An agreement was signed in 1996 with the European Union that will remove many remaining barriers to trade by 2008. In all discussions, it was emphasized that Tunisia seeks to expand its economic and business contacts with the United States. It invites American business to visit the country and see the great opportunities available.

Tunisia is closely aligned economically with the other Maghreb nations. The government is espousing the country's location as the crossroads to Europe, Africa and the Middle East. Both public and private sectors are increasing their appeal to businesses in other nations, citing Tunisia as a practical and viable base of operations. Telecommunications skills and applications are available and rapidly expanding. With free education, Tunisia has a large workforce prepared to enter the various sectors of the economy. A looming problem for the government is to satisfy the new graduates with meaningful employment. The government is engaging the private sector in this effort.

Under the pragmatic leadership and guidance of former President Habib Bourguiba, Tunisia attained its independence from France in 1956 with an agenda for social reform. Tunisia's first president was a strong advocate for women's rights, religious tolerance and education. He was subjected to criticism from other Arab countries, but he persisted. His accomplishments and efforts have continued and have been enhanced under President Zine El-Abidine Ben Ali's leadership.

Tunisia is an evolving democracy. Questions remain on human rights and political prisoners. The delegation received contradictory reports in this regard. The extent of human rights violations and imprisonments on strictly political grounds could not be determined. The government expressed denials that either existed and assured the delegation that foreign human rights organizations were welcome to visit and conduct inspections.

Visually, Tunisia is modern with an infrastructure that is keeping pace with the times. The population appears content with their lives and the government's role. The delegation observed Tunisians going on with their daily lives with no indication of protest, demonstration or any other contrary manifestation. For example, the uproar in other Arab/Muslim countries, reacting to the cartoons depicting the prophet Mohammed, was non-existent in Tunisia. The government, with the support of the people, has taken a strong stance against fundamentalism over the past two decades. It is ardently anti-terrorist and is an ally of the West and the United States in this regard.

As the country progresses in developing its concept of democracy, it is hoped that political parties will be allowed greater liberties to challenge in open elections. Moreover, although there are non-governmental media outlets, there appears to be a degree of self-censorship to conform to government policies. There can be no doubt that the Tunisians are content with President Ben Ali's leadership. He looks after their economic and social needs and there exists no noticeable sign of discontent. The government is progressive, the country is an example of what is possible in the Arab world, and there is a genuine reaching out to all peace-loving nations of the world. A common theme mentioned throughout the visit was: "We know who we are; we know where we want to go". Tunisia resists pressure and moves at its own seemingly deliberate pace. All Tunisian officials, with whom the delegation met, insisted that bilateral relations between Tunisia and the United States are very good.

The delegation received favorable publicity from the media during its visit. Some members were interviewed on camera, which then appeared on national television in its news coverage. Also, delegation members were interviewed for the print media and Tunisian officials issued statements, all of which were carried in the newspapers. The thrust of these stories was the positive observations on the extent of development undertaken by Tunisia, along with the continuing friendly relations between the United States and Tunisia.

Meeting with the Association Sauvegarde de la Medina de Tunis
Monday, February 6, 2006
By R. L. Berry

In 1967, under an agreement from the Tunisian Home Ministry, an NGO was set up with the mission to restore, renovate and preserve the Medina, or old city, of Tunis. The relatively small, walled City of Tunis dates from the sixteenth century. Early engravings have been used to show the changes and development that have taken place in the Medina during the past 300 to 400 years. However, the vast majority of the houses and public buildings of the historic central areas of the Medina date from the last 250 years.

The current Association managers met with our delegation in a magnificent, restored mansion of the Medina that serves as their headquarters to review the work the Association has accomplished in recent years. Tunis today is a modern city of about 1.5 million persons. The work of the Association in preserving and restoring this central, historic part of the city is important for the social and aesthetic as well as the cultural heritage goals.

The restoration, renovation and preservation activities have an annual budget of about one million dollars per year. Revenues come from an annual subsidy from the Municipality of Tunis and from the Home Ministry. They receive additional support from grants made by the World Bank and the Euromed Heritage Program. While the Association work has continued since the late 1960s, a new phase of restoration started in 1990. The programs had additional emphasis with the World Bank support for the phases in 1992 through 1995. The recent phases have focused on multiuse renovations including vocational schools, multifamily residences, playgrounds, office buildings and facilities for community activities

The Association has worked to sponsor private ownership in the Medina including the sponsorship of loans for homeowners. Such loans may be used to restore, renovate and acquire residences in the Medina area. The area has actually grown in population during the past 16 years from about 100,000 to over 130,000 persons. As a result of the highly successful efforts to date, the Medina has been designated a "World Heritage Site".

Tunis has shown awareness of the need to protect and enhance this historic area, particularly the important architecture developed in the 19th and 20th centuries. The Association is carrying out an important mission with this historic urban project. Because of these efforts, the Association and the Medina area have been selected as part of the Euromed Heritage II Program and the Association is receiving funding and recognition from that program.

**Meeting with Mr. Oussama Romdhani,
Director General of the Tunisian External Communication Agency
Monday, February 6, 2006
By Jon Fox**

A lovely morning through the ancient Medina found us strolling down a quiet street with large double doors painted yellow. A few tries and our guide, Jamil, finds the right door and into a lovely, very large old home, now a very upscale restaurant. Our host, Oussama Romdhani, Director General of the Tunisian External Communication Agency, is perfectly charming. With several stays in the U.S., both as a student and working for a Tunisian newspaper, he returned to Tunisia to join the government.

He reviewed the government's fight against terrorism and radical Islam. Tunisia first faced the terrorist threat in 1987 with bombings and acid attacks. At that time the decision was made to fight the problem at its very roots, poverty and a lack of education. Government programs offering universal and mandatory education has brought the country to a very high literacy rate by any global standard and poverty has been reduced to a low 4 percent level. This fight against the terrorist threat was a constant thread running through his and other presentations.

At independence in 1956, women were granted equality with men and free access to education. The results are impressive: today women make up almost 58 percent of university students; by law, 25 percent of the parliament is also female. A very interesting effort is being made to ensure university graduates find productive employment through government sponsored micro-finance fund. A graduate can take his proposed project to a special government bureau and, if approved, receive up to \$10,000 at low interest rates to pursue his idea. This project has proven very successful, with many young Tunisians going to the sub-Saharan countries of Africa where their skills and new found projects help both the local economy and provide them with opportunity to grow rapidly as opposed to the competition they would find in Europe. These loans have been paid back at a high rate. Perhaps this is an idea that could be expanded globally.

As lunch progressed, he covered key topics of Tunisian policy. For instance, he explained how Tunisia is trying to be a moderate voice in the Arab world and a bridge to the West, when all too often we only hear the shrill voice of the extremes. He mentioned that Tunisia played a key role in the early stages of the secret Oslo agreements and implied that they are playing an ongoing, but quiet, diplomatic role today. He stressed the concept, Tunisia long ago realized, that the only way for a lasting Middle East peace was through dialogue and negotiation and an acceptance of all the parties as equals.

If the world had more thinkers and voices like Oussama Romdhani, I feel certain it would be a better, more peaceful place.

**Meeting with Ms. Mongia Souaihi,
Professor of Koranic Interpretation
Monday, February 6, 2006
By Michael Carnahan**

In a small room, dense with elaborate, colorful tile work, off the courtyard of a building being carefully restored to its original Ottoman style by the city of Tunis, the council delegation met with a professor of religion to hear her explanation of Islam as Tunisians practice it.

Islam has been in Tunisia since 647 when Arabs defeated the occupying Byzantine armies and established Kairouan, the first great Islamic city in the North Africa. It has evolved into a uniquely modernized version, however, with Tunisians proud of their moderate approach and its significant economic and social benefits. Women are fully in the work force and on the street, and the hejab and head scarves are infrequently seen. We also rarely heard the call to prayer in Tunis. Still, Islam is the state religion, however relaxed, and Tunisians feel themselves an integral part of the Muslim world.

Ms. Souaihi teaches Images of Women in Islam, Human Relations in Islam and The Relations of Islam with Other Religions. She indicated that her orientation is to explain the virtues of her religion but at the same time to remain open to the ideas of other faiths. “There is no harm in, or proscription against, considering thoughts not in the Koran”. Her courses cover the Koran and its interpretation, the Hadith (or Sayings of the Prophet), Akidah (creeds or doctrines), and dogma. Her school also teaches Arabic as a language; as well as French, English, German, and Hebrew, and the ancient languages of Persian and Latin.

A primary objective of her instruction is to teach students to think critically, in general, and in the evaluation of their own and other religions. “If you want your religion to be respected, you have to respect other religions.” The religion taught at her institution is based on both faith and reason. “This is our approach and methodology: belief plus ‘gumption’ (sic)”.

Mr. Falk asked if there were many foreign students. Ms. Souaihi said there were at the Institute of Islam and Culture, but that the Institute of Theology matriculated mostly Tunisians, providing degrees up to the Ph.D. level, and that there was also an Islamic Studies Institute devoted mainly to research. Falk noted that there were seven Tunisians captured in England in terrorist cells, and wondered if they had come from the university here. She indicated these students were not from the School of Theology, but possibly from the school of engineering. “The true principles of the Koran do not support fundamentalism; if you use your intelligence in reading the text, you can never be a fundamentalist”.

Delegate Jon Fox: “In the West we hear about the 72 virgins as a reward for martyrdom; this seems contrary to Islamic principles. Another interpretation suggests a reward of white

raisins. Can you comment on this?” “This is not within our imagination. Self-suicide is alien to our religion”.

Regarding fundamentalists, Souaihi said, “Some engage in violent activities for their own purposes; some do this to secure their rights, for example for confiscated land. The solution is to address the source of the conflict. The notion of a paradise with 72 virgins is entirely within some deluded imaginations. Only God knows what fate awaits those who pass on, and the Koran does not specify a reward. Virgins? Raisins? No”.

Anne Hoiberg asked if there were multiple versions of the Koran, as there are with the Bible. Ms. Souaihi said there is universal agreement about there being only one central text in Islam, and it is always the same, wherever printed.

Falk: Does Tunisia’s moderate approach generate problems with the rest of the Arab-Islamic universities? Ms. Souaihi affirmed with some sadness and exasperation that this was the case. She cited examples of a Ranush in the U.K. calling her a heretic; and threats coming from a critic in Washington D.C.

Do students question your moderate approach, given the influence of Al-Jazeera? Yes; because of the new, belligerent approach of some TV channels, students are increasingly questioning the methodology and content of our courses. She suggested the West could help with this by setting up its own TV stations to help propagate the idea of peace-oriented activities as central to the message of the Koran.

A discussion ensued about the furor following publication of cartoons considered disrespectful of Mohammed and Islam. Ms. Souaihi felt the pictures, as mean-spirited caricatures, distorted the subject matter of her work. She believes the incident reinforces the need for cross-cultural dialog. She said that, according to her reading of the Koran, if Muslims defamed Christians or Jews; they could no longer be considered true Muslims.

Why have there been no demonstrations in Tunisia? “Tunisians, as a matter of culture and training, do not believe in demonstrations, violence, or burning as a tool of expression. It is not our way; it solves no problems.” She suggested that the historical confirmation of the correctness of this policy was that Mohammed himself did not kill his critics.

Mr. Fox commented that we in the West do not hear a moderate Muslim voice: the most frequent voice is fanatical. He added that one of the objectives of the council tour is to learn about and hear from moderate Muslims. We also want to learn about potential spokespersons we can invite to our cities for further learning and dialog:

Ms. Souaihi said that for the moderate Muslim voice to be heard, moderates need help from the West.

How much influence does your moderate approach have on other Islamic universities? “From my experience; it has very limited influence. For example, I was invited to Yemen to explain the rights of women, but I was not taken seriously”.

How can we help inform our publics about your successes with a moderate approach? “This is a big problem. I am asked the same question by many journalists. You cannot negotiate with fundamentalists. Change starts with a small group”.

You mention that the West negotiating with fundamentalists undermines your work. What do you mean? “The EU recently initiated dialog with fundamentalists”. Do you mean with Hamas?

Anne: When I was in Iraq, a woman said polygamy was OK because there are so few men, due to both the ravages of the war and the previous sanctions. What are your thoughts about this? “People can find excuses for everything. The Prophet never allowed his daughters to enter into such arrangements”.

Given your progressive, liberal policies toward women; why are more young women wearing the veil? “It is a result of the influence of satellite television” and suggested this is partly just fashion.

Although there was some bristling dialog in the course of the discussion, particularly when speaking about Muslim response to the controversial cartoons in the Danish press, it was clear that Ms. Souaihi was interested principally in presenting Islam in a positive way through the Tunisian filter of moderation and respect for others.

Tunisia’s Approach to Human Rights Reform and Terrorism
Monday, February 6, 2006
By Anne Hoiberg

Mr. Taher, Fellow Ministry of Interior

Since 1987, Tunisia’s approach to human rights and human rights reform centers on an axis grounded in the State of Law that guarantees human rights to all while ensuring an equal partnership with civil society in this commitment to human rights. As a result, Tunisia is party to all human rights international laws, including the major human rights conventions and the twelve terrorism resolutions. These international treaties and resolutions have been codified into state legislation, thereby setting up mechanisms and approaches within Tunisia. Mainstreaming human rights is made possible through a network of cells across almost all governmental ministries.

Mr. Habib Cherif, General Coordinator in Charge of Human Rights

Since 1990 and the first Gulf War, all efforts of the General Coordinator’s office are directed at addressing citizens’ complaints on human rights violations and terrorism from which recommendations are made to the relevant ministries. Working jointly with an ombudsman, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and civil society, this collaboration increases public awareness about human rights and terrorism. The proliferation of NGOs from 2,000 in 1987 to 8,500 in 2006 reflects Tunisia’s dedication to involving civil society

in the Government, all working together in the State of Law and in the framework of the Government to provide Tunisia's citizens with their civil liberties.

This approach has now led to a mobilization to combat terrorism. During the last 20 years, Tunisia has faced two periods of increased terrorism. In the first phase, there were two incidents aimed at resort hotels where tourists were targeted that wounded seventeen Tunisians, perpetrated by people who claimed to be members of an Islamic movement. Other even more serious acts followed after 9/11, including the throwing acid as well as attacking members of the ruling party and imams. Why were religious leaders targeted? The authorities had a clear idea of what these terrorists wanted: the practice of the "true precepts" of what they believed Islam should be, not the Rule of Law or the world of democracy, but a core foundation for promoting Islam or a Caliphate. Terrorism hides behind the name of religion. To better understand the terrorists, officials met with them, with some terrorists being offered amnesty and others granted all rights, such as a fair trial and appeals, only to flee the country.

Throughout the world, networks of terrorists were dismantled while others operated in Europe or sent members for training in Afghanistan. Those remaining in Tunisia had difficulties surviving because they were frequently identified as members of a fundamentalist party and such religious political parties are prohibited.

Prevention is one component of the solution to terrorism, starting with talk and discussion, followed by police training, information and intelligence gathering, and intervening.

Mr. Nejjib Ayed, Ministry of Education and Training

The Minister began his presentation with a quotation from UNESCO, which is paraphrased: "Wars begin in the minds of man; therefore, it is in the minds of man that peace will be achieved." Education, therefore, is another major component in preventing and combating terrorism—and creating peace. The Code of Personal Status, a republican society, and free and compulsory education all form the basis for ending terrorism. Also quoted was a statement by Abraham Lincoln that not providing education to the people leads to unintentional consequences.

In Tunisia, 99.1% of all six-year-old children are in school, with a 50:50 ratio of boys to girls in gender-mixed classes. Across Arab countries, with Tunisia leading the Council of Home Ministries, a strategy to combat terrorism is being implemented, primarily because all countries have had terrorist acts.

**Meeting with Mr. Abdelwaheb Abdalah,
Minister of Foreign Affairs of Tunisia
February 6, 2006
By Joseph Melookaran**

Ambassador Abdalah served as ambassador to the UK in the early 1990s and he recalled his visit to the US in October 2005 as memorable. He indicated that he was received with

warmly at the White House, Departments of State and Defense. He also felt he had good meetings with leading Congressmen and Senators, where he was able to talk to them directly about Tunisia and international terrorism. He stressed that the relationship between Tunisia and US is very solid and has a long history. This relationship is a strategic partnership that is cherished by the people of both countries and that visits such as the one by the World Affairs Council will strengthen the relationship between the two countries.

Before addressing foreign policy he wanted to highlight some facts about the economic and political accomplishments of Tunisia. Since 1987, Tunisia has had free trade agreements with regional powers. In 1995, Tunisia was the first country on the southern shore of the Mediterranean to initiate free trade relationship with the European Union (EU). This has enabled full exchange with the EU and brought better understanding and investment relationship between the EU and Tunisia. Tunisia has an open economy and allows full competition, which is in line with the EU standards.

He detailed the progressive privatization of various segments of the Tunisian economy: railroad, post office, banks, social services, etc., which is leading to a complete economic association with the EU, “just like a member state of the EU, with the same advantages and the same liabilities.” As Tunisia strengthens its relationship with the EU, they are also initiating strategic partnership with Maghreb nations, towards achieving a goal of economic integration.

Tunisia’s economy is rated well by various rating agencies and research institutes. For instance, Harvard School’s Global Competitiveness Report of 2005-06 classified Tunisia 35th out of 116 developing and emerging countries (ahead of Greece and Italy). As Tunisia approaches the 50th anniversary of its independence, it enjoys a growth rate of 5%. A significant reduction in the birthrate helped to break the cycle of poverty and increased per capita income. He reiterated that 80% of the population is middle class and owns their home and only 4.2% of the Tunisian population live below the poverty line (down from 22% in 1975). This has certainly contributed to increased economic and social stability.

On foreign policy, Ambassador Abdalah stressed the nation’s balanced policy of openness and commitment to moderation. He said that Tunisia “is tangible proof that Islam can be tolerant.” They support international legitimacy and always call for a dialog to resolve international conflicts instead of using force. Their relations with their neighbors is now good with frequent contact among the other countries forming the Maghreb Union, i.e., Libya, Algeria, Mauritania, and Morocco.

The Foreign Minister highlighted Tunisia’s involvement in international conflict by citing the example of the first Israeli-Palestinian dialogue in Tunis which preceded Oslo. Tunisia’s diplomats have consistently worked to promote a comprehensive and peaceful settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Although Tunisia does not have an official diplomatic relationship with Israel, they have a “discreet rapprochement” and maintain high level contacts with Israel’s political leadership. For instance, the Israeli foreign minister attended the ICT summit in Tunis in November 2005. Tunisia encourages moderation in dealing with the Hamas government.

He pointed out that Tunisia has called for moderation and dialogue in response to the Danish cartoons which have fueled riots and protests in many countries by Muslim communities. He stressed that the government has requested that the Imams in all mosques in Tunisia preach tolerance and understanding in the wake of these riots. On terrorism, he noted that Tunisia was the first country to call for a conference on terrorism prior to 9/11. They proposed an International Code of Conduct in combating terrorism. On nuclear energy, they support acquisition of nuclear capability for peaceful purposes but reject any proliferation of nuclear weapons. Tunisia has long encouraged Muammar al-Qaddafi of Libya to abandon his pursuit of nuclear weapons.

In response to the first question concerning Senator McCain's visit last year and a concern on alleged human rights violation, he answered that the issue is based on a misunderstanding. He assured us that there are only a few dozen radical extremists in prison and they were not imprisoned for their opinions but tried and convicted of terrorism charges. He challenged us to identify a single example of a Tunisian jailed solely because of their opinion. He added that the International Red Cross has visited the prisons and submitted a report to the Tunisian government. Also, Human Rights Watch was permitted to hold a press conference in Tunisia in 2005.

Responding to a question regarding the independence movement by the Polisario in the Western Sahara, he said this is an ongoing complex challenge to the region; one even the UN and former U.S. Secretary of State Jim Baker was unable to resolve.

**Meeting with Mr. Tijani Haddad,
Minister of Tourism
Tuesday, February 7, 2006
By Jim Falk**

Blessed with some of the world's most scenic beaches, Punic and Roman archaeological ruins, important Islamic and Jewish religious sites and desert oasis, it is no surprise that Tunisia attracts annually several million tourists.

Tijani Haddad, the minister of tourism, brings a unique perspective to his position as, in addition to his government position, he is also a hotel owner. Lacking significant natural resources such as oil, Tunisia has relied on its geographical advantage to build its robust tourism industry. Beyond the impact on its economy, tourism has also served to keep Tunisia open to the world, particularly Europe and the West. Tunisia traces its origins back to the Berbers and to the number of other peoples that have invaded, settled and left their imprint on the country today.

While one thinks first of Tunisia's beaches (1,300 kilometers of coast), the country enjoys a rich topography ranging from the mountains in the north, to the desert and oasis of the south. During the last decade there has been even a greater emphasis on tourism with

privatization of the hotels and related industries. Many who visit the country first as tourists have returned as investors.

There are throughout the country 800 hotels and 225,000 beds. In 2005, the country received 6,500,000 tourists bringing in a total of \$2.5 billion. Tourism contributes 7% to the country's GDP. This number struck us as being low but then it was explained that it does not account for the impact that tourism has on agriculture, transportation and other sectors that support and benefit from tourism. As noted elsewhere, Tunisia's population is young and finding employment presents a continual challenge. Creating jobs in a service industry such as tourism is less expensive than other sectors. The announced goal is to reach 600,000 beds by 2013.

The last several years, after 9/11, have not been easy ones. Moreover there was softness in the market even before the terrorist attacks as the economy weakened in Japan and Europe. Beginning in 2004, there has been noticeable improvement and last year approached record levels. An interesting statistic shared with us was that Egypt receives 8 million tourists a year or 74 for each 1,000 of Egypt's population. Using the same scale, Tunisia welcomes 655 tourists per 1,000.

One of the many challenges facing Tunisia's tourism industry is competition from new destinations such as Libya, Algeria and, even, Saudi Arabia which has increased its outreach to its Arab neighbors. As a result, Tunisia is now seeking to develop niche markets like ecotourism, desert treks, as well as sports including automobile rallies and golf. It also hopes to leverage the notoriety received from being the shooting location for Star Wars and The English Patient.

The largest number of tourists come from France (1 million in 2005). This is followed by Germany, Italy, and the UK. The United States sent 15,000 which fell behind Canada. Tunisia hopes to continue to present itself as a "safe" country and one that can present a moderate image of a predominantly Islamic country.

As we concluded our conversation with the Minister, it was suggested that Tunisia might open more tourism offices and seek to promote some of the important World War II battle sites like Kasserine and visits to the American Cemetery.

In conclusion, it is clear that tourism has strengthened Tunisia's open perspective to the world. Yet, one realizes how strong the competition is for the tourist dollar and that to remain competitive requires a continued and large investment in infrastructure. One also realizes that any instability would sharply impact the country's economy and society.

Luncheon Meeting at Hotel Villa Didon, Carthage
Tuesday, February 7, 2006
By William Boudreau

Tunisian women issues was the topic discussed over lunch in Carthage. The delegation's Tunisian coordinator, Bochra Malki, hosted the event, which included six distinguished Tunisian women: Alifa Chaabane Farouk, Women's Ombudsman, Member of the Political Bureau; Salwa Tarzi Ben Attia, Deputy in Parliament; Imen Bakhoucha, business owner/entrepreneur; Hela Nafti Bergaoui, educator/curriculum developer, Ministry of Education and Training; Sonia M'barek, international songstress/music teacher/copywrite protector; Dora Bouchoucha, film-making/production.

All speakers stressed the existing equality of men and women in Tunisia. Beginning in 1956 under President Bourguiba, who eliminated polygamy, through the presidency of Ben Ali, women's rights were incrementally increased over the years. In 1987, a convention was adopted declaring all forms of discrimination against women illegal. Today, there is full equality in the workplace, with no gender differences in salaries and opportunities. Women are engaged in all fields of endeavor, which is obviously a source of great pride. Among the examples of women empowerment given were the first judge of the Appellate Court, airline pilots and engineers, 27% of the practicing attorneys, 31% of the dentists, an unspecified large presence in the medical profession, approximately 1/4 of the deputies in Parliament, and 57% of the current university graduates.

Mrs. Chaabane Farouk and Mrs. Ben Attia, in particular, are activists for women causes. They are sensitive to any abuses of women's rights anywhere they might occur within the country. They noted that Tunisian women have been involved in politics since before independence. Their agenda also includes encouraging greater involvement of women through their participation in the political, economic and social life of the country. There was also a brief discussion of the slight increase in the wearing of "foulards" (headscarves) by young women. The ladies at our meeting expressed no concern, attributing this limited trend to fashion statements influenced though seeing them worn elsewhere.

Regarding education, there is total gender equality. Free and compulsory education applies to all Tunisians between the ages of 6 and 16. Tunisia is placing great emphasis on computer literacy, training teachers on computer applications. The Education Ministry is developing an interactive "whiteboard", using the computer as a learning tool for students. It is also promoting "long life learning" for all Tunisians to use beyond school. Tunisia is an active member of the International Education and Resource Network, which reaches out to students around the world. The primary message being stressed is tolerance for each other regardless of ethnicity. Concerns with the environment are also highlighted. Mrs. Bergaoui also noted with a sense of pride that English is being taught on par with French at the primary grade level in the schools.

In the arts and business sectors, the women expressed their satisfaction that a comfort level exists for women's involvement. The speakers insisted that gender equality had been

achieved and there exists no distinction between Tunisian men and women who aspire to become business entrepreneurs. The same holds true for the arts.

Visit to Radio Mosaique
Tuesday, February 7, 2006
By S. Todd Culpepper

On the fifth floor of a nondescript white building in the heart of Tunis is one of the country's most provocative and progressive innovations: its first private radio station. There is not even a sign out front to point the way, but the station is known nonetheless by a wide and ever-growing portion of the country's population.

Boutar Nourddine, director general, is a trendy-dressed Tunisian man who is quick to let you know that his station began airing 7 November 2003 – the very day President Ben Ali announced a change in law that would allow private broadcasts. Nourddine's 20 years as a broadcast and print journalist gave him the vision to predict and prepare for this important day, so when it finally came, his role as Tunisia's first private radio station director came with the simple push of a button.

Nourddine was eager to return to radio, his first love, from print journalism. In those first weeks and months his staff was lean and is not much bigger today. But everyone is young, ambitious and resilient. They fully realize they are making history, and don't take it lightly. But they do have fun.

What is amazing is that Mosaique has cornered 75 percent of Tunisia's radio audience, with a staggering 55 percent of the entire population listening at least once per day - statistics tracked by Sigma and Media Sky, two private research firms. The target audience is vast – ages 12 – 50 – and Nourddine and his team realize that any competition that enters the market will require them to further narrow their target market.

For now there is only one other private radio station in the country – in Sousse, to the south. There are six public (government run) stations in Tunis and three stations with a national reach. But none of these come close to the following of Mosaique.

The station's web site is the most visited of any in the entire country, with an average of 40,000 visitors per day in January 2006 – 65 percent of whom are Tunisian. Like the station itself, the web site is the first to launch in Tunisia following the change in law.

The station has a varied format but plays mostly music for a young audience. Of the many artists it showcases, 30 percent are Tunisian while the rest represent an international scope, including American artists such as Beyonce and Missy Elliott. The station has special programming throughout the day, including news that is compiled and read live every hour; a two-hour daily call in discussion forum that probes controversial topics such as HIV/AIDS, unemployment, and homosexuality, and general social issues such as consumer protection, pedestrian rights, and the fiscal responsibilities of husband and wife;

a hit music program that airs three hours every afternoon and features artist interviews and the latest in hip music; and a call-in show that allows listeners to share problems and concerns that will be soothed with just the right song.

None of the station's shows deliberately criticize elected officials, and no official would ever be invited nor would accept an invitation to be on the show – still, one conversation recently outlined disappointment with the work of the Minister of Health. He was annoyed – even angered – but sought no retribution. The broadcast continues.

The station receives no government subsidies, so its livelihood hinges on the sales of advertising – led by four young salespeople. So far, the station has had no trouble selling its 6 minutes of ad time per hour at a cost of 700 Tunisian Dinars per minute (higher during drive time). While these fees are modest compared to nearly every other country in the world, Nourddine realizes that “we are in Tunisia” and that his station cannot command the fees achievable in other major markets. But what they get is plenty to pay staff, keep equipment updated, and cover other overhead such as rent. In fact, Nourddine plans to move his staff in the next six months to a larger office that will better accommodate their growing need for space. They cannot run ads for politicians, doctors or lawyers.

To date no competition has emerged to take a portion of Mosaique's 90 percent of the city's radio advertising market share, although Nourddine believes it is only a matter of time. The public stations could choose to sell air time but are comfortable receiving their subsidies and therefore find no need.

What is certain is that Mosaique has a large degree of freedom in planning broadcasts, and is reaching – and influencing, for better or worse – the country's key demographic: its leaders of tomorrow.

**Meeting with Mr. Nouri Jouni,
Minister of Development and International Cooperation
Wednesday, February 8, 2006
By Alan McCabe**

The Minister stressed Tunisia's good relations with U.S. This ministry, which defines economic policy and maintains offices in the 24 regional government centers to implement policies, is one of the oldest departments in the Tunisian government. The Office of International Cooperation centers on attracting foreign investment and tracking international trade. An independent institute collects all economic data according to IMF standards.

It was noted that trade development and attracting international investment are priorities and that the Ministry was working with the U.S. government and industry partners to stimulate trade. With this goal, Tunisia and the U.S. have set up a working group to define areas of trade and investment that should be developed. The majority of trade centers on Europe although Tunisia is trying to diversify with its US initiatives. This effort with U.S.

continues to be challenged by lack of frequent contact and will take time according to the Minister. Mr. Jouni expressed belief that communications, technology and tourism are the sectors most ready for expanded trade. The World Summit on International Technology held in November 2005 highlighted Tunisia's strengths and, hopefully, will lead to increased investment and trade opportunities.

Key Economic Statistics:

Tunisia has been a member of the WTO since March 1995. Exports are nearly 50% of the GDP. Growth rate has averaged 5% for the last 10 years. Per capita income is \$3,000 per year. GDP is currently around \$40 billion.

- 55-56% of GDP is services
- 22-23% of GDP is manufacturing
- 12-13% of GDP is agriculture (Tunisia is 4th largest producer of olive oil)
- 7% of GDP is tourism

Tunisia signed a trade agreement with the E.U. in 1996 which demands all of the economic reforms as full E.U. nations but requires none of the political reforms. This agreement calls for the elimination of tariffs with Europe, which currently are 4-5% to zero by 2008. Average tariffs for all trade are 25-28%. Currently, subsidies are limited to basic staples for living (bread and energy) and are given directly to consumers.

**Meeting with the Tunisian Parliament Chamber of Advisors
Wednesday February 8, 2006
By Kathleen Lennard**

The Chamber of Advisors was recently established and held its first plenary session in August 2005. We were hosted by President Abdallah Kallel and eight members of the Chamber.

The President made opening comments in which he reviewed the long relationship with the United States and the progress that Tunisia has made since independence in 1956 and particularly since Nov 7, 1987. He commented that Tunisia is now "reaping the fruits of reforms enacted by President Ben Ali" and cited the lower poverty rate (3.8%), increase in per capita income, high rate of home ownership (80%), enhanced life expectancy (74yrs), availability of medical care, and complete school enrollment as evidence of their progress. He also noted significant strides in gender equity, improvements to infrastructure and increased technology and the prominent role that Tunisia played in hosting the World Technology Conference.

Mr. Kallel described the structure of the Tunisian parliamentary system as legislative with clear powers delineated by the constitution. One third of the Advisors are elected by local municipalities, one third by professional organizations and the remaining third are appointed by the President. There are eight political parties operating legally within Tunisia and the seven opposition parties have representation in both chambers of parliament. The Chamber of Advisors has two opposition members who have been appointed to serve by

the president. Ms. Emma Soula represented one of the opposition parties and reported that the opposition is able to express themselves freely. She explained that there is generally unanimity in voting, as consensus is usually reached in debate. The opposition was also represented by Mr. Abdelwaheb El Bahi, President of the Tunisian Bar Association, who commented on a healthy civil society involving journalists, doctors, and lawyers.

Jim Falk asked for a description of opposition party issues and the President said they play a similar role as in the US without giving any specific examples.

Mohammed Fartan, Minister of Education, Culture and Youth, spoke passionately about how President Ben Ali has reached out to the opposition. He claimed that the current opposition parties do not have a coherent platform but that if Islamist opposition were allowed to emerge, it might send Tunisia “back to the Middle Ages”.

The Chamber of Advisors also includes an appointed member of the Jewish community, Mr. Roger Bismuth who is also the founder of the Tunisian-American Chamber of Commerce. He encouraged the group to “see for themselves what is going on in Tunisia” He also noted that while the Tunisia market might not be big enough for U.S. companies by itself, it might be useful given its association with the European Union.

President Kallel noted three major challenges that Parliament will be addressing:

1. Employment: They have 50,000 new graduates annually so they will have to find jobs for the educated work force. They are currently working on a plan to address employment through 2030.
2. ICT modernization: The Information World Summit highlighted Tunisia’s progress in technology and they are ranked higher than other Arab countries in this field, but they have a long way to go in keeping up with new advances in digital technology.
3. Globalization: They see a problem with the big nations (US) respecting the needs of small nations like Tunisia. They mentioned the end of US AID money as a limiting factor in their development and urged the US to consider long term relationship with friends instead of short term interests. He asked “Why not a small Marshall Plan for Tunisia?” and stressed that the Tunisian model needs to be supported.

In response to a question on progress toward free elections, Kallel reiterated that they are in the early stages of a multi-party system and that they need to move slowly to make it work, that in order to fully digest the new system, “they have to chew first.”

Joseph Melookaran closed the session by thanking the Chamber of Advisors for hosting the delegation and citing the similarities between economic progress made in Singapore and Tunisia, calling Tunisia the “miracle of Africa”, which received front page coverage in the *La Presse de Tunisie* the following day.

Meeting with Chamber of Deputies Delegation
Wednesday, February 8, 2006
By R. L. Berry

Our team was welcomed by the head of the Chamber delegation, Mr. Salah Tebarki, President of the Commission of Political Affairs and Foreign Relations for the Chamber of Deputies or Majlis al-Nuwaab. The Chamber delegation was composed of 10 members. The Chair noted that it was an official visit.

Jim Falk, the WACA delegation leader, thanked the Chamber members for their hospitality and of our appreciation for this opportunity to learn more about the Tunisian governing process and their progress as a democratic Republic. He described the role of WACA and that our organization has half a million members throughout the U. S. Our delegation will make reports of our findings for the US Congress, for foreign policy groups and for all local councils.

The Chamber delegates hoped we will learn by observing and experiencing the many changes that have taken place in the economic, political and social sectors of the Republic of Tunisia. The Tunisian political sector has been multiparty since 1994 and now has five parties including the majority RCD (Constitutional Democratic Rally) (92% of 2004 votes) represented in the Chamber. The Chamber has 189 seats with the RCD holding 152 and opposition parties hold 37 or 22.7%. The government has a goal of building a multiparty system. Deputies are elected for five year terms and elections are held at the same time as the presidential elections. Next election will be in 2009. The Chamber meets for regular sessions from mid-October until July 25 with committee work only continuing after July. The Chair introduced the main committees and the representatives from each committee present at our meeting.

The conversation then turned to elections and campaign funding. The Tunisian government provides equal campaign funding; the rates, media time and coverage are the same for each party. 15 days are allocated for the campaign and they are looking for ways to increase use audio/visual means so information can reach more citizens. The 1987 amendments to the election code (minimum 20% other parties; maximum 80% to majority party) are to promote multiparty participation. Today there is democracy at local levels, regional levels and in the Parliament. All social and economic elements have to be considered as governments try to achieve responsible democracy.

There were other questions from the WACA delegation:

- Is there any personal or foreign funding involved in election campaigns?
- How do ideas get turned into laws?
- This is the UN's 50th anniversary for women—will Tunisian women be in attendance?

There is no foreign, personal or illegal funding at any level of elections and only public monies can be used by all parties. All parties can voice their own ideas and bring these to Parliament. There are new elements at local and regional levels and these are being heard.

The President or the Parliament can initiate laws which are enacted by a majority vote. The role of women is very important in the campaigns and there is a partnership between men and women in Parliament. Women must hold 25% of the seats in Parliament and 30% in next election. Women's rights are recognized at all levels and are a reality in Tunisia. There are 7,060 NGOs in Tunisia. Tunisia is a model of what Muslim countries should be like and democracy is established by law.

One member of the delegation voiced dislike for current US actions and policies. The WACA response was that democracies can disagree. The Chair noted that there are differences within the Parliament. He closed the meeting saying that Tunisia is thankful for US support and hopes for continued good relations.

**Meeting with The Honorable William Hudson,
US Ambassador to Tunisia
Wednesday, February 8, 2006
By Michael Carnahan**

Moved to a new location in 2002, the U.S. Embassy in Tunis is located in the Berges du Lac area, farther out from the central city than its physical predecessor. It is a handsome blend of Tunisian and Islamic architectural design and modern materials and security. It is organized around a series of courts, with an inner section admissible only to staff with certain security clearances.

We were ushered into a medium-sized conference room where we met with Ambassador William Hudson, a veteran diplomat with previous postings in Paris, Belgrade, Tehran, Lome, and Lubumbashi, and several members of his staff. Present also were Deputy Chief of Mission David Ballard; Political Advisor and Economics Counselor Elizabeth Hopkins, who had been instrumental in setting up the visit; Peter Mulrean, Director of the Middle East Partnership Initiative; Chief Operating officer Alan Greenfield; and Thomas Moore, Director of the Arabic Language School.

The Ambassador provided a brief overview of the situation in the country. Tunisia is comparatively well developed; women are not veiled; there is healthy economic activity. This general health derives from decisions taken after independence in the 1950's. Full rights were given to women. Resources were devoted to education and health. The country opened economically to the West, moving away from the prior socialist experiment. Tunisia has done a great job on the socio-economic front. It looks like a secular, modern country, not so different from Europe.

U.S. relations with Tunisia have historically been very positive. There is in the embassy a copy of the treaty signed by John Adams in 1799, one of our country's first international agreements. The U.S. was also very supportive at Tunisian independence, which they remember. At one time, the U.S. provided to Tunisia the largest USAID funds per capita in the world. The Tunis airport was also built largely with USAID money. This very

extensive assistance all ceased in the mid-90's when Tunisia graduated from underdeveloped-nation to developed-nation status.

Tunisia has been a very good friend and supporter on the war on terrorism, motivated partly from its own experience. The second first Al-Qaeda attack after 9-11 took place here in Tunisia when an old synagogue in Djerba was attacked, killing 25 German tourists.

They have also had very long and extensive military-to-military relations with us. They buy substantial U.S. military equipment on a concessionary basis. There are frequent military exchanges and they have been an important help to us in the war on terror. (U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld visited Tunis and President Ali when our delegation was there). Security cooperation between Tunisia and the U.S. is also strong. We have helped them acquire, for example, six big new ships. They have five port security teams and, candidly, evaluations by our own people conclude their port security is better than in the U.S.

Peter Mulrean spoke to the delegation about MEPI, the Middle East Partnership Initiative. One of U.S. priorities, post 9-11, has been to promote democracy across the region. Previous policies have not afforded us the stability we wanted, and have been no favor to the region's peoples either. MEPI is an attempt to "put in place the building blocks for democratic change". It is different from traditional U.S. aid: very much foreign policy with assistance attached. It is an attempt to put our money where our mouth is, to reach beyond governments to assist people. We do not seek to impose, but to respond to reformers and their needs. This is MEPI's third year, and it spends about \$100 million per year. We have produced 350 projects in the region in four reform areas: politics, economy, education and women's empowerment. It is an uphill battle, with much skepticism encountered because of past problems, but we can see some changes taking place, as in Lebanon and Egypt, where we were able to help people before their elections.

Tom Moore, Director of the Arabic Language School, spoke about their program. He indicated that the School is now in its second year, and has replaced the school in Beirut as the premier school of Arabic language instruction in the world. Arabic is one of the two most difficult of foreign languages for English speakers (along with Korean). Although the State Department as a whole may train 100 per year in Arabic language, the instruction and language "take" in only one-third to one-half of the students. The school in Tunis had 15 students in 2003, 20 in 2005, and is anticipating 45 in 2009. A component of a successful effort to increase the number of officers with Arabic language competence is having them continue in the region, and DOS is putting in programs to encourage retention.

**Pole El Gazala des Technologies de la Communication
(Technology Industry Office Park)
Wednesday, February 8, 2006
By Jon Fox**

We entered a gated 160 acres ultra modern office complex. As background, the Ministry of Communication Technologies decided years ago in a country with virtually no natural resources, their one strength was a highly educated young population. To capitalize on this resource in a highly competitive global market, Tunisian engineers, computer experts, scientists etc. would just have to run that much faster. High-tech global companies (Alcatel, Ericson, Solarcom) have established research operations on the property, so students get hands on experience with the world's best. They are encouraged to do both pure research as well as practical projects. Today many European and Asian companies use the facilities for problem solving.

When a student or group develops a new concept, they may borrow up to \$10,000 from the government at very low rates to develop their ideas. Because of Tunisia's geographical location, the country is making a major effort to export their high tech concepts throughout the rest of Africa and have established a credible reputation as the source for new technology.

We later had a presentation by TUNAV, a company developing very accurate instantaneous tracking systems applicable to the shipping, travel, and service industries, again doing very well in Africa. Another interesting project was small, solar powered or hand powered computers needing no hard wiring, which is ideally suited for areas with little or no infrastructure for telecommunications.

A very exciting concept generating good jobs for a rapidly growing educated population

**Meeting with Mr. Montassar Oualili,
Minister of ITC at the Ministry of Communication Technologies
Thursday, February 9, 2006
By Anne Hoiberg**

Tunisia has initiated an ambitious program promoting knowledge through education, thereby hoping to develop a knowledge-based economy. Although it is a long way from innovation to production, Tunisia is on its way with ICT or information and communications technologies as a top priority. The Government's objective is to raise the ICT sector's contribution to the GDP from 3.7% in 2001 to 7.0% in 2006 and 9% in 2009. The goal is to reach 12%, which will require lots of work and assistance from foreign investors.

Many countries, such as India, have chosen outsourcing as an important component of their economy. With higher costs associated with India's outsourcing, other locations are being considered. Strong language skills in French, Arabic, Spanish, Italian, and now

English as well as a location well-suited for Europe and Africa, make Tunisia ideal to play a greater role in this area.

Today, 10% of the nation's population is connected to Internet, the goal is to reach 16% in 2009; the telephone is accessible to 68% of the population today, with a goal of 80% by 2009.

Many corporations have visited Tunisia to pursue business interests and investments: Cisco, Oracle, Microsoft, Siemens, and Intel. While the Tunisian economy depends on tourism and textiles, it now can add ICT to its economic base.

**Meeting with Tunisian American Chamber of Commerce
February 9, 2006
By Joseph Melookaran**

The WACA Delegation met with Tunisian-American Chamber Commerce where the members of the Chamber and WACA Delegation had mixed seating to facilitate better dialogue. Kathleen Lennard led the discussion with Mr. Moncef Barouni, the President of the Chamber. Mr. Barouni introduced the key individuals of the Chamber and made opening remarks. He highlighted the importance of the recognition of the enhanced interest in expanding Tunisian market to USA. Tunisia, until now, had been concentrating on their trade relations with the European countries. He described the necessary variables they are working on to do business with USA as follows:

- Advanced marketing that caters to the US market.
- Ability to supply larger orders and ensure consistent supply
- More networking with potential buyers and distributors
- Education of the US consumers of the products from Tunisia
- Assistance from Trade organizations and Export organizations.

He expressed interest in the export of food products such as oranges and olive oil – both are produced in large quantities and have differentiating quality. These produces are being exported through the middlemen from Italy and Spain. For example, olive oil is shipped in bulk from Tunisia to Italy. The companies in Italy or Spain processes and packages the produce and sells under their label to US and other countries.

Mr. Bruno Poisson was involved in assisting Tunisian businesses to enhance their networking and marketing ability in USA. He indicated that the U.S. market is so big that to get shelf space for the produce and products, it will take very concentrated and high profile effort. The ability of the Tunisian producers to consistently supply such large quantities may be a challenge, he said. He is consultant for the Chamber and they are in the process of identifying the areas that Tunisian exporters need to address before they begin an aggressive marketing campaign.

Among the attendees were the representatives from U.S. embassy and U.S. Commercial Liaison Office (US Department of Commerce). Ms. Rashida Petersen was there to assist the Tunisian businesses with information about the commercial service available to exporters to USA. She encouraged Tunisian businesses to promote their products and services that can be exported to US at the trade fairs that take place in the region from time to time.

Ms. Kathleen Lennard indicated that the council leaders who are part of the delegation will educate the communities including businesses in their respective cities about Tunisia which will complement the efforts of the Chamber.

**Meeting with Mr. Omar Ben Mahmoud,
Secretary of State in charge of the National Solidarity Fund (26-26)
Thursday, February 9, 2006
By Jim Falk**

On December 4, 1992, President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, who is known for making surprise, unannounced visits to various towns and government offices, stopped in two isolated villages, Zouakra and Berrama. Located just 120 kilometers from Tunis, he was struck by the area's isolation and abject poverty. Lacking navigable roads, potable water, electricity, schools and medical services, the inhabitants had little resources to ameliorate their situation. Four days later, the National Solidarity Fund was born. Other points of poverty called "shadow areas" were then identified with the purpose of providing special assistance to approximately 200,000 families.

26-26 refers to the bank account number where Tunisians and others can make personal financial donations to provide funds to assist vulnerable areas. Now, each year, there is a National Solidarity Fund Day when Tunisians make their pledges and/or contributions. Payroll deductions are even encouraged. In fact, donors from around the globe can log on to www.26-26.org to make donations and VISA is accepted! Certain taxes (for instance, on cigarettes, playing cards and gunpowder) supplement the voluntary contributions.

It is worth noting that none of the Fund's resources are spent on overhead. The salaries of the Fund's staff are paid by various "hosts". For example, Mr. Mahmoud's salary is paid by the Presidency; the deputy-director's is paid by the Ministry of Health. During our meeting, Mr. Mahmoud made a special point of noting that our refreshments were paid by the Presidency. The national office has a lean staff of only twelve employees which are supplemented by regional teams.

In 1993, 280,000 Tunisians contributed approximately 5 million dinars. In 2005, over 3,700,000 Tunisians had contributed in excess of 20 million dinars or approximately \$15 million dollars. In Mahmoud's words, "This is now part of the national culture and credibility."

The program's success is well-documented. Poverty, which was 22% in 1975, has dropped today to less than 4%. Five thousand kilometers of roads and railroad tracks, 43,000 new homes, 138 healthcare centers and 103 schools have been constructed. Close to 80,000 households have been connected to potable water and given electricity. While one objective is to help the poor, there is the additional purpose of elevating more people to the middle-class, now estimated to represent 80% of the population. The government believes that a confident and economically-secure citizenry is less likely to fall prey to the temptations of Islamic extremism.

In October 1999, the government of Tunisia added another fund, called, the National Employment Fund 21/21. This one focuses its efforts on education and helping young men and women improve their employability by providing specialized training in such fields as computer science or electronics. To encourage entrepreneurship, the Tunisian Solidarity Bank provides low interest loans for start-up small businesses.

With the encouragement of President Ben Ali, Tunisia is justifiably proud that its model was adopted by the United Nations on December 20, 2002. To spur international participation, Tunisia contributes one-tenth of the donations received by the National Solidarity Fund to the World Solidarity Fund, a special UNDP Trust Fund

**Meeting with Mr. Habib Haddad,
Governor of Nabeul,
Friday, February 10, 2006
By William Boudreau**

The governorate of Nabeul is one of 24 that administer to the needs of the people of each region. All governors are appointed by the President. Nabeul region consists primarily of the Cap Bon peninsula, directly south of Tunis. For the most part, the region is a mere 15-45 minutes removed from the national capital and all of its facilities. The area, consisting of 83 communities, has a population of 800,000. It is a vibrant economic area with varied activities that include agriculture, tourism, fisheries, pottery, embroidery and food-processing.

The Governor said in his welcome that he viewed our visit as a further testament of the strong relationship enjoyed between our two countries. He then explained how the different regions interacted with the federal government. The Governor noted that initiatives are developed within the region and submitted to the national government for approval and implementation. He discussed parallelism, the focus of his region and the national government in dealing with economic development in conjunction with social and human progression. The Nabeul region has one of the lowest percentages of poverty in the country. Where it does exist, the needs of these people are being addressed through programs of the national government, complimented by projects funded through National Solidarity Fund (26/26). As such, this entails all elements of society working together. He pointed out that the delegation would be visiting a housing and medical project funded through Solidarity following our meeting with him.

The region is one of the country's main producers of citrus fruit, which is exported in quantity to Europe. Other agricultural products include vegetables, tomatoes and grapes. The fisheries industry is focused primarily on four ports along the peninsular coastline. The region's capital of Nabeul is the nation's pottery center. The major economic activity of the region is tourism. The great beaches of the Hammamet and Nabeul area, located at the southern edge of the peninsula, serve as a magnet luring foreign visitors for a leisurely vacation. Elaborate hotels and spas are equal to any in more prosperous nations. The delegation's expressed concerns on over-saturation of hotel capacity and its attendant problems but these were dismissed by the Governor. Presently, occupancy varies greatly between winter and summer months, which seemingly would have an impact on hotel staff. The northern area of Cap Bon is primarily industrial with food processing as its main activity. It represents 10% of the country's production with its close access to Tunis and a pool of skilled labor. The Governor emphasized that he welcomes foreign participation, particularly the United States. He spoke of the highly technical capabilities of the population.

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