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MENPI

MIDDLE EAST
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FREEDOM AGENDA HIGHLIGHTS

Forum for the Future: Secretary Rice joined ministers from the broader Middle East and North Africa, the G8, and other European nations at the second Forum for the Future in Bahrain November 12, 2005 to discuss progress toward reform in the region. Reflecting the notable progress that civil society groups have made since the first Forum in Morocco, the agenda of the Bahrain Forum focused on civil society and democracy. Also at the Forum for the Future, the Secretary joined other governments and civil society to launch the Foundation for the Future and the Fund for the Future. The Foundation responds to calls from regional civil

society for an independent institution to support grassroots NGOs working for freedom and democracy. The Fund will provide much-needed capital to small-and medium-sized businesses to help develop a strong middle class. Both institutions will help develop individuals, organizations, and companies that will work toward more open, democratic, and transparent societies.

Forum: For the first time, members of civil society organizations sat at the table as full participants in the Forum's proceedings. Secretary Rice spoke at the ministerial opening session praising the participation of a much larger number of civil society representatives than attended the 2004 Forum. (continued on page 5)

Secretary's Op-Ed Stresses that Promoting Freedom Is "Only Realistic Path to Security"

In a December 11, 2005 op-ed in "The Washington Post", Secretary Rice wrote that "democracy is the only assurance of lasting peace and security between states, because it is the only guarantee of freedom and justice within states."

<http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2005/57888.htm>



The Foundation for the Future, announced by the Secretary, will provide funding and expertise to regional civil society. (U.S. Embassy Manama photographer Osama Hasan, Nov. 12, 2005)



Democracy Promotion

MEPI Supports Political Participation in the Middle East: In historic elections during 2005, citizens have gone to the polls in Lebanon, the Palestinian territories, and Egypt. In Kuwait, women secured the right to vote in the 2007 elections, and Saudi Arabian officials have indicated that women will vote in the next cycle of local elections. In 2006 and 2007, citizens of Algeria, Bahrain, Jordan, Morocco, Oman, the Palestinian territories and Yemen will return to polling stations for new rounds of municipal and parliamentary elections. The President of the United States has promised that the United States will stand with citizens seeking to exercise fundamental democratic rights.

During the quarter, MEPI continued its work with the Independent Committee for Election Monitoring (ICEM), a coalition of Egyptian NGOs under the leadership of the Ibn Khaldun Center. In advance of the November-December elections for the People's Assembly, ICEM expanded to a total of 16 NGOs and, in conjunction with the Egyptian Association for Supporting Democratic Developments, fielded over 5,000 monitors nationwide for the 2005 parliamentary elections. As with the September presidential election monitoring efforts supported by MEPI, the parliamentary monitoring programs covered the period prior to and after the actual voting day, including monitoring of the registration process, media coverage, the campaign, and the ballot count.

As the situation deteriorated over the course of Egypt's parliamentary elections, MEPI support was instrumental in keeping the monitors in the field reporting on the conduct of the elections.

Economic Reform

Sector-wide Activities Aim to Strengthen Social Partners: For economies to thrive, collaboration among economic partners ranging from labor to entrepreneurs must be developed. MEPI therefore convened a major regional alumni conference in Bahrain in November for the graduates of the Middle East Entrepreneur Training in the U.S. (MEET U.S.) program. More than 100 graduates from 16 regional countries and territories met to learn from each other's business successes, to discuss economic reform and democracy, and to strategize on how to expand their networks and the MEPI message across the region.

Similarly, MEPI brought together high-ranking labor delegates from Oman, Egypt, Iraq, Kuwait, Qatar, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates, and Yemen for a regional labor dialogue in Muscat December 11-13, 2005. The dialogue was designed to focus attention on the role of labor in a democracy and to raise awareness of the importance of meeting international labor standards that are fundamental to concluding free trade agreements with the United States. The conference recapped the experience of Bahrain, Jordan, Morocco, and the United States in negotiating and

implementing the labor provisions of their FTAs. (The United States has recently concluded negotiations with Oman on an FTA.)

Another sector being strengthened is banking facilities for small-and medium-sized businesses (SME). During this quarter, the Financial Services Volunteer Corps provided technical assistance to a Moroccan bank on internal ratings systems for SME credit, organized a seminar in Egypt on removing obstacles to SME leasing, and worked with Jordan's government to implement the new FSVC-developed SME blueprint. In December, the Commercial Law Development Program trained Tunisian judges on how to handle SMEs in financial difficulty.

In the Gulf, the INJAZ/Junior Achievement group, which teaches high-school students the basics of entrepreneurship, economics, and personal finance, has been broadening and deepening its programs. INJAZ began instruction in schools in the UAE and plans to have programs in as many as 10 Emirati schools in the spring.



Quality Education

EDUCATION

Partnership Schools Work to Achieve MEPI Goals: The U.S. Embassy in Algiers and Algeria's Ministry of Education signed a agreement articulating the goals and parameters of MEPI's Partnership Schools Program (PSP). With innovative pilot projects, the program will demonstrate effective solutions to some of Algeria's primary education challenges, such as:

- 1) *improving the effective teaching and learning of English as a Foreign Language;*
- 2) *enhancing the use of information and communication technology (ICT) in education; and,*
- 3) *increasing opportunities for partner- ships between education institutions.*

Following a competitive solicitation, the School for International Training (SIT), Rubicon, and Michigan State University were awarded sub-contracts to provide technical expertise in the execution of the pilot projects. A team, led by Creative Associates, is traveling to Algeria in January 2006 to launch pilot projects.

News from Regional Offices

The MEPI Regional Office (RO) in Tunis underwrote the translation into Arabic of an election monitoring guide by an Egyptian NGO United Group. To view, click on www.ug-law.com. Fifty-eight organizations were trained in strategic planning in Algeria, Egypt, and Morocco through RO Tunis.



Women's Empowerment

Empowering Women – A Cornerstone of President Bush's Freedom Agenda: Recognizing that active and engaged women are key to the development of a stable, free and democratic Middle East and North Africa, the women's pillar is sharpening its focus to provide assistance in four areas where women encounter cultural, legal, regulatory, economic, and political barriers. They are:

- women and the law,
- women in democracy,
- women's economic empowerment, and
- women's rights.

Women and the Law: The reform of arbitrary legal systems that discriminate against women is an important step in improving the situation of women in the Middle East. The Arab Women's Legal Network brings together women lawyers, judges, and other legal professionals to exchange expertise and information, promote women as decision makers, help to secure women's rights under the law, and provide professional training and mentoring. The first judicial conference of the AWLN took place November 25-26 in Beirut. Fifty women judges from Bahrain, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, the Palestinian Territories and Yemen attended issue-based workshops on judicial independence and integrity, money laundering and domestic violence.

Women in Democracy: Women's participation in political and civil society is a cornerstone of building open pluralistic societies. In support of this goal, in December the Solidarity Center held the first of three workshops to develop the skills of a cadre of 21 Jordanian trade union women who will lead local workshops training other union women for larger political and leadership roles. Also in December, in Egypt, the South-East Consortium for International Development held its third Leadership Training Workshop in Alexandria, reaching a total of 150 people trained thus far. This project brings together Egypt's corporate and civil society sectors in partnerships for local development.

Women's Economic Empowerment: Women's access to the expanding markets and economic opportunities of the Middle East is crucial to the region's economic growth. The second group of 40 young Middle Eastern women in MEPI's Business Internship Program arrived in the United States in mid-November. After a four-week MBA-level academic program at Emory and Duke Universities, they will undertake three month internships at top American businesses. A new MEPI program, Women in Technology Yemen, launched its website www.wityemen.org and is soliciting applications for the first 250 women participants. The women will learn marketable, cutting-edge IT skills in order to more fully participate in the local economy.

Women's Rights: The struggle for women's equal rights and human dignity is a fight for freedom and liberty. MEPI is supporting various initiatives dealing with reforms of the family law. In early December, the Demos Institute organized a regional consultative meeting for the start of the Family Law Advocacy Model project attended by 27 women from 13 countries who are working on reforming the family code in their countries. MEPI is underwriting the production of a manual that describes the successful strategies and tactics of "how" the Moroccan women worked toward successful Moudawana reform and how their methods can be modified to fit other countries.



G8 BMENA Initiatives

For U.S. participation in BMENA, see
<http://www.bmena.state.gov>

(cont from 1st page)

Foundation: Initial contributors to the Foundation include the United States, the European Commission, Denmark, Bahrain, Qatar, Jordan, Greece, Spain, United Kingdom, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Turkey, Italy and Hungary, totaling more than \$56 million. Supporters met in Jordan in mid- December to discuss next steps, which include selecting a board and a chair. For updated announcement of selection committee, see <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2006/60297.htm>

Fund: Egypt, Morocco, Denmark and the United States are the initial contributors to the Fund that remains open “to all states that choose the path of economic liberty and reform,” said Secretary Rice. The work of the fund will start in Egypt and Morocco, which have shown a commitment to remove barriers to private-sector-led growth.

Civil Society Plays Important Role at Second G8/BMENA Forum for the Future: With the greater access to the Forum process that civil society has gained over the course of the year, the agenda of the Bahrain Forum featured substantive participation of civil society leaders. They articulated specific recommendations and action plans to advance the rule of law, the role of women and employment, transparency and human rights in the BMENA region. The Bahrain Forum also included presentations from the Yemeni, Turkish and Italian partners in the Democracy Assistance Dialogue (DAD), who outlined their work to date in the areas of advancing political pluralism and promoting women’s empowerment in the BMENA region. Secretary Rice pointed out that more than 40 civil society groups participated in the Forum, nearly ten times the civil society participation at the Rabat Forum. Many regional NGOs also participated in a parallel civil society conference in Manama from November 9-10, 2005.

In addition, through the BMENA Democracy Assistance Dialogue (DAD), hundreds of civil society leaders, along with their government counterparts, have been meeting and developing action plans on topics including election reform and the development of political parties. One result of the DAD’s first year has been the creation of a new and ongoing mechanism for dialogue and increasing cooperation between civil society leaders and officials.

BMENA Entrepreneurship project launched: In pursuit of society-wide progress, another BMENA initiative made notable headway. The Center for Entrepreneurial Excellence in Bahrain, a G8 sponsored endeavor, was launched in Manama, Bahrain, to a crowd of 200 entrepreneurs and regional press; the Center was announced at the Forum for the Future earlier in the week. MEPI, the Government of Bahrain, and the British Government have announced contributions to the Center, which has established an office in Manama. The Beyster Institute is managing the implementation of the project, which already includes entrepreneurship courses for several hundred local business people.

Getting the message out!

Secretary's Remarks at the
Opening Session of the Forum for the Future,

<http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2005/56814.htm>

Secretary Rice Announces
the Foundation and Fund for the Future,

<http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2005/56812.htm>



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and new information pages, please visit the
MEPI homepage at <http://www.mepi.state.gov>