

Remarks by Ambassador Joan A. Polaschik
Global Entrepreneurship Week
November 16, 2015

Your Excellency the Minister of Labor, honored guests, dear colleagues and friends, and especially the Algerian youth, good morning. It is a pleasure a pleasure to be here with you today to launch the fifth annual Global Entrepreneurship Week in Algeria.

President Obama elevated entrepreneurship to the forefront of the United States' policy agenda during his June 2009 visit to Cairo, in which he announced a series of new measures to promote an entrepreneurial environment. In 2010, President Obama hosted the first Global Entrepreneurship Summit and over the past five years, the United States has used the occasion of Global Entrepreneurship Week to support, train, and empower thousands of aspiring entrepreneurs. We have helped small businesses expand into new markets, mobilized new investments, connected emerging innovators with mentors and professional networks, and expanded access to capital.

The United States believes in entrepreneurs because, to quote President Obama, "Entrepreneurship creates new ways to deliver basic services and new ways of seeing the world -- it's the spark of prosperity. A culture of entrepreneurship allows youth to engage in their society and harness the ideas of citizens. It means ownership and self-determination, as opposed to simply being dependent on somebody else for your livelihood and your future."

Through our own experience, the United States has come to understand that in order to create a successful ecosystem for entrepreneurs, governments also have a role in fostering transparency and the rule of law, and promoting the policy environment necessary for entrepreneurs to succeed. It can be hard for entrepreneurs to tap into the networks and access the mentorship that means the difference between a venture that takes off and one that falls flat. Women and young entrepreneurs often face additional barriers to access this necessary support. The United States believes that governments should be doing all they can to create a policy environment that supports entrepreneurs and recognizes their contribution as a critical ingredient of a healthy, dynamic economy.

Of course, the presence of so many representatives from the Government of Algeria is an indication of Algeria's dedication to fostering an entrepreneurial environment for all its citizens. The United States supports your efforts and will stand with with Algeria as it strives to create a more business-friendly environment and develop economic opportunities across a wide range of sectors. Economic diversification is critical for Algeria's future, and the United States is honored to be considered a partner of Algeria in this effort.

Global Entrepreneurship Week is celebrated in more than 160 countries and is the world's largest celebration of the innovators who bring ideas to life, ideas that drive economic growth and promote human welfare. Here in Algeria, Mrs. Fatiha Rachedi and the North African Partnership for Economic Opportunity, (NAPEO), have put together an exciting week of events under the thematic umbrella of establishing and strengthening an entrepreneurial ecosystem. I'm delighted to see American companies and mentors participating in the Global Entrepreneurship Week alongside Algerian business leaders and youth for discussions on critical issues connected to encouraging job creation and economic diversity here in Algeria.

That culture of entrepreneurship was on full display during my a recent trip to Constantine to visit the U.S.-funded TechCamp. There, I met more than 150 youth who were learning how to use technology to contribute to their communities and increase their employability in the future job market. And I want to emphasize that technology is for everyone. We see the keen interest that young Algerian girls have in STEM — science, technology, engineering, and math — through their participation in U.S. State Department sponsored programs such as “Tech Girls,” an international exchange program designed to empower and inspire girls from the Middle East and North Africa to pursue careers in science and technology. The centerpiece of the program is a technology camp in the United States that provides participants with an in-depth examination of technology-related topics and hands-on instruction.

But, as any successful entrepreneur will tell you, it is not enough to simply have skills and a good idea. Entrepreneurship takes business know-how to start and run an organization. The U.S. Embassy wants to help transform young people’s pioneering ideas into sustainable businesses that create jobs and opportunities here in Algeria. In September, the Embassy held an “Entrepreneurship Boot Camp” with a U.S. business development expert to train a group of young Algerians on how to transform their business ideas into real business plans and then implement them. Just last month, I met more than 300 impressive youth participating in a competition for young entrepreneurs organized by Injaz El Djazair, another of our partner organizations. I was truly inspired to see the passion and motivation of young Algerians as they presented their creative yet practical business ideas. The Injaz competition and the World Learning TechCamp demonstrate the economic and creative potential of Algeria’s youth – both of which will be key to Algeria's future economic diversity and development.

I’d like to thank Madame Rachedi and NAPEO for the outstanding program they’ve created for this week, and for their engagement in so many other fora to promote entrepreneurship and a brighter future for Algeria’s youth. The U.S. Embassy is proud to partner with NAPEO in its many activities and I’m deeply honored to be here today. I wish you a successful conference, and I look forward to hearing the outcome of what I am certain will be a fruitful series of workshops and sessions.

Thank you.