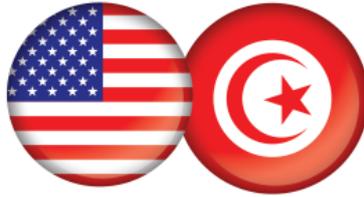


**2012**  
**G8-BMENA**  
**INITIATIVE**



# 9<sup>th</sup> Forum for the Future

12 December – 13 December 2012  
**Republic of Tunisia**

**FINAL DECLARATION**



## G8 Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative | 9<sup>th</sup> Forum for the Future | Final Declaration

### مبادرة الدول الثمانية للشرق الأوسط الكبير وشمال إفريقيا | منتدى المستقبل التاسع | البيان الختامي

1. The 9<sup>th</sup> Forum for the Future, co-chaired by Tunisia and the United States, was convened in Tunis during the period of 11-13 December 2012 with the broad participation of Foreign Ministers and other government representatives of the G8, BMENA, and other partner countries; civil society and private sector representatives; and participants from international organizations. Their efforts, and this Declaration, build upon the foundation established by previous Forums and in particular upon the Declaration from the 8<sup>th</sup> Forum for the Future in Kuwait.
2. Ministers expressed their thanks to Tunisia and the United States for co-chairing the 2012 BMENA process, including hosting the Forum for the Future and organizing its preparatory work through two civil society workshops and a Sub-Ministerial meeting in cooperation with their NGO partners, the League of Women Voters, the Human Resources and Training Managers Association, and the Tunisian American Chamber of Commerce. They also thanked Morocco and Jordan for supporting the two preparatory workshops in El Jadida and Amman. Participants welcomed the preparatory events, which fostered collaborative discussions among governments, civil society, and the private sector regarding concrete actions to advance women's empowerment, the rights to freedom of expression and association, and economic governance and entrepreneurship, in accordance with national efforts and actions of partners to support them.
3. Since the 8<sup>th</sup> Forum for the Future in Kuwait, the BMENA region has witnessed important progress and promise. Ministers welcomed the transfer of executive authority to newly democratic elected governments in Egypt, Libya, and Tunisia through credible and transparent elections that reflected the will of the people, a newly elected President and plans for a new constitution and full elections in Yemen, and the comprehensive constitutional changes in Morocco resulting in a democratically elected government. However, the past year was also marked by challenges and crises. Ministers expressed serious concern about the unrelenting violence, massacres, and human rights violations perpetrated against the Syrian people that followed the regime crackdown on peaceful protests beginning in March 2011 and that should be stopped immediately. They also expressed serious concern about the human rights situation in Iran and called on the Government of Iran to fully abide by its international obligations in this regard.
4. Recent developments in the region have underscored that governments, the G8 countries, civil society, the private sector, and multilateral partners all must expand their collaboration to meet the region's challenges; promote economic growth and stability; reject violence; advance women's full participation in society; achieve sustained progress on economic, political, and social concerns; and advance the values of democracy, human rights, and participation of all citizens in political and public affairs. The long-standing focus of the BMENA Initiative on government-citizen dialogue has never been more relevant or necessary in the region.
5. Consistent with this focus, Ministers reaffirmed their commitment to nationally-based dialogues between governments and their citizens. While each country determines its own form of dialogue, Ministers agreed to strengthen the respect for the rights to peacefully assemble, to associate, and to express oneself freely in accordance with their commitments to universally recognized human rights. They agreed on the need to foster meaningful avenues for all to communicate their interests and concerns to their governments and to

have a voice in decisions that affect their lives. Ministers agreed on the importance of supporting civil society at this crucial juncture in the history of the region and expressed support for establishing, or strengthening existing, regular and routine national mechanisms for government and civil society dialogue, promoting inclusivity and transparency in political processes, and basic freedoms for all. Ministers acknowledged the importance of sound national legal frameworks that are consistent with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and international human rights law and that support a vibrant and unfettered civil society and the enjoyment of universal human rights and fundamental freedoms for all. Ministers affirmed the importance of the continuation of informal dialogue, which has developed within and outside the Forum, including between representatives of civil society, as it provides an important opportunity to exchange views in a constructive environment that builds confidence. They expressed the view that work undertaken within the Forum for the Future will, as much as possible, be reflected at national and international levels, and they reaffirmed their joint understanding of pursuing economic, political, and social development.

6. Ministers reaffirmed the importance of respecting the rule of law, rejecting violence, and protecting all persons living within their territory without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion, and protecting diplomatic missions and personnel. Ministers expressed concern that incidents of racial and religious intolerance, discrimination, and related violence, as well as of negative racial and religious stereotyping, continue to rise around the world, and condemned any advocacy of national, racial, or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility, or violence. Ministers affirmed that violence in response to speech is never acceptable; stressed the need for States to take positive concrete steps to combat intolerance, negative stereotyping, discrimination, and incitement to violence such as encouraging political leaders and civil society to speak out against intolerance, creating networks to build mutual understanding, training government officials in effective outreach, and encouraging representation of individuals irrespective of their religion in all sectors of society; and reaffirmed their commitment to promote tolerance and pluralism, to uphold the rule of law, and to protect freedom of religion and belief. They further reaffirmed the positive role that the exercise of the right to freedom of opinion and expression and the full respect for the freedom to seek, receive, and impart information can play in strengthening democracy and combating intolerance. Ministers acknowledged important steps that have been taken toward these goals since the last Forum, but expressed the continued need for further progress.

7. Ministers agreed that the full and equal participation of all people regardless of race, sex, or religion is critical for political and economic development. Ministers, in particular, recognized the critical role that women play in the transformations underway in the BMENA region, and underscored the importance of progress on long-standing BMENA objectives related to gender equality, with a view to achieving women's full political, social, and economic empowerment. New legislation and electoral procedures in the past year have led to increased women's political representation and participation in several BMENA countries, which Ministers recognized as an important step. They also reaffirmed the ongoing need for further progress in addressing a range of issues affecting the condition of women throughout the countries participating in the Forum, including gender-based discrimination and violence; forced and early forced marriage; low rates of women's participation in economies, public service, and decision-making institutions including parliaments; and barriers to women's access to education. Ministers welcomed the commitment by several BMENA countries to advance the opportunities for women to the benefit of their societies as a whole. Important examples include establishing new or reinforcing existing legal and constitutional frameworks that guarantee women's equality and support women's increased political representation and economic participation, including through the provision of guarantees for equal opportunities or the use of preferences in the public and private sector when appropriate; expanding women's economic opportunities through education, training, including vocational training, mentorship, and other support; combating all forms of violence against women; and increasing education and awareness of human rights with a particular focus on women.

Ministers welcomed in principle the call by the Government of Tunisia for the creation of a regional network of shelters and research center for women victims of violence. Ministers also acknowledged the importance of integrating international commitments into their national laws, including comprehensive national family policies to encourage women's participation in public life.

8. Ministers agreed on the urgent need for increased economic opportunity, job creation, and broad-based, private sector-led growth in the region that focuses in particular on youth and women, who are overrepresented among the unemployed population. They also acknowledged the inter-linkages between domestic and global economic governance and the implications of the latter on the BMENA economic reform agenda. Ministers noted the importance of domestic-led reform efforts in collaboration with the private sector, civil society, and international organizations, including international financial institutions, to improve the business climate, facilitate public-private partnerships, and foster an environment conducive to entrepreneurship and business development for all citizens. Ministers cited as necessary goals greater openness and transparency in economic decision-making; the establishment of fair, clear, and efficient legal and regulatory environments for business; effective whistle-blower protection laws; establishment of independent accountability institutions; e-commerce; and an active, independent, professional, and free media in ensuring the transparency and integrity of public institutions. Ministers welcomed the commitments that a number of Governments had undertaken in these areas, including by streamlining the business registration process, reforming commercial codes, creating dedicated support for small and medium enterprises (SMEs), establishing independent accountability institutions, and increasing access to capital. They took note of the best practice, implemented by a number of countries, of public-private entities facilitating discussion of and informing decision-making on economic and business matters, and the private sector's recommendation to support the establishment and development of public-private SME institutions to provide support for entrepreneurs and SMEs, including entrepreneurship education, apprenticeship and vocational programs, debt and equity funding, banking services, innovation and knowledge-transfer, mentorship, incubation, and government procurement preference mechanisms.

9. Ministers welcomed the important work being undertaken under the Deauville Partnership with Arab Countries in Transition in promoting SME development, open government and anticorruption, and asset recovery, and expressed their appreciation for the contributions of the regional partners. They noted the development by Deauville countries of plans for near-term actions that will bolster the development and sustainability of entrepreneurial activity and SMEs, and encouraged countries to share and publish their near-term action plans, and to work with partner governments and institutions, including international financial institutions, in support of their implementation. Ministers welcomed the cooperation between the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development, which is managing the SME initiative of the Emir of Kuwait and the World Bank, as trustee of the Deauville Transition Fund, to further investments in SMEs across the region. Ministers also acknowledged the need to improve practices in public financial management, and recognized the potential for technical assistance rendered through the Deauville Partnership's Transition Fund and Financial Services Advisory Corps. They stressed the importance of ensuring increased synergy and complementarity between BMENA and the Deauville Partnership as two distinct and mutually reinforcing work streams and emphasized the importance of the G8's support regarding ongoing reforms in the region. In this context, they welcomed the United Kingdom's intention in 2013 to prioritize asset recovery, women's participation and support for SMEs as part of their presidency of the Deauville Partnership.

10. Ministers affirmed their resolve to make fighting corruption a priority at all levels and called for continued cooperation to pursue effective asset recovery, including through follow-up action on the elements of the Asset Recovery resolution of the UN Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) 4<sup>th</sup> Conference of States Parties in Marrakesh. They called upon both requested and requesting States to work together in

accordance with their obligations under Chapters IV and V of UNCAC to act together to recover the proceeds of corruption and other illicit financial outflows, and to take a proactive approach to international cooperation in asset recovery. Ministers noted with appreciation the Stolen Assets Recovery Initiative of the World Bank Group and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. Ministers also welcomed the Asset Recovery Action Plan of the Deauville Partnership, including the Arab Forum on Asset Recovery in Doha September 11-13, 2012, and encouraged further progress on its elements and further coordination among existing initiatives, in order to enhance case cooperation to trace, freeze, confiscate, and return proceeds of corruption, strengthen legislative frameworks, simplify processes to facilitate this progress, and foster capacity building, in accordance with the principles of the rule of law and judicial independence.

11. Ministers took note of U.N. General Assembly resolution 67/19 regarding Palestinian status as an observer state. At the same time while dealing with the aspirations of the peoples of the region, the Ministers reaffirmed their support for the efforts to achieve a just, comprehensive, and lasting peace in the Middle East through negotiations within a specific timeframe and clear terms of reference based on the two-state solution as stated in the Arab Peace Initiative, the Road Map, the Madrid principles, on the basis of land for peace, the relevant resolutions of the United Nations, and the Quartet Statement of 23 September 2011 leading to the establishment of an independent, contiguous, viable, sovereign, democratic, peaceful state of Palestine, living side by side with Israel in peace and security.

12. Ministers welcomed the announcement at the Forum of several new initiatives to support civil society, women's empowerment, and the private sector in the BMENA region, including Milan's Chamber of Commerce Euro-Med Center for the Development of Medium, Small, Micro Enterprises. They welcomed the information offered by some BMENA countries on their national plans and priorities to advance women's empowerment, freedom of expression and association, and economic governance and entrepreneurship, and noted that such information provided a means for governments, regional and multilateral institutions, and civil society to focus their efforts and assistance. In this context, Ministers reaffirmed the importance of full implementation of the Paris Declaration, Accra Agenda for Action, and the Busan Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation. Ministers welcomed in principle the proposal by the Government of Tunisia for a regional Women's Enterprise Fund.

13. Ministers expressed their sincere thanks to the Government of Tunisia and the Tunisian people for their warm reception and hospitality in hosting the 9<sup>th</sup> Forum for the Future, which ensured the event's success. They also expressed their support for the next joint chairmanship of the United Kingdom and Egypt.