The U.S.-Middle East Partnership Initiative

Supporting reform advocates throughout the middle east and north africa

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"A vibrant democracy stimulates business; it supports a vibrant NGO sector; it encourages full political participation, and universal freedoms, and respect for the rights of women and for people of all faiths."

- Secretary of State John Kerry

The U.S.-Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) of the State Department offers assistance, training, and support to groups and individuals striving to bring positive change to the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). MEPI works in 18 countries and territories, partnering with civil society organizations (CSOs), community leaders, youth and women activists, and private sector groups to advance their reform efforts. MEPI's approach is bottom-up and grassroots, responding directly to local interests and needs.

MEPI has been active in the MENA region since 2002, contributing over $600 million to more than 1,000 grant projects administered by our offices in Washington, D.C., Tunis, and Abu Dhabi. In the wake of the Arab Spring, MEPI has significantly increased programming in countries undergoing democratic transitions – including Egypt, Libya, and Tunisia – supporting free and fair elections, the expansion of civil society, and a greater voice for citizens in shaping their political, economic, and legal systems.

MEPI alumni, numbering over 11,000, are contributing to the historic changes taking place in the region and include 2011 Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Tawakul Karman (Yemen), Egypt's Dr. Azza Kamel, winner of the National Democratic Institute's 2011 Democracy Award, Egyptian activist "Facebook Girl" Esraa Abdel Fattah, and a number of elected officials dedicated to positive change. In support of their efforts, MEPI recently formed the *MEPI Alumni Network* to encourage this active cadre of reform advocates.

Supporting Democracy Builders

MEPI projects directly respond to needs articulated by the region's democratic reformers.

- Voter and civic education efforts support those in the region seeking to inform fellow citizens about their rights and the democratic electoral process. Election observation projects, like those organized recently in Egypt, Kuwait, Morocco, and Tunisia, promote more transparent processes and strengthen networks of activists and bloggers to monitor and report on elections.

- Media projects assist in building the professionalism of journalists, support the development of the press as an effective and credible watchdog, and help the public learn about the role of media in democratic societies. The *iEarn* project in Kuwait and Oman, for example, provides students and educators training in multimedia reporting based on the principles of independent and ethical journalism, while the *Radio Bokra* project provides Egyptian citizens with vital news coverage of political events in their country.

- Flagship exchange projects like the *Leaders for Democracy Fellowship* and the *Civic Education Leadership Fellowship* bring young civic leaders, lawmakers, and professionals to the United States to learn about and practice the concepts of leadership and democracy.

- MEPI projects also promote citizen engagement in public life. In Yemen, for example, MEPI is helping youth learn how to advocate for their concerns on issues at the core of Yemen's political transition.

Empowering Women and Youth

MEPI prioritizes support for women, youth, and other underrepresented groups, who are often the strongest advocates for reform.

- Innovative projects like *Tune-In Tunisia* and *Citizen Bus* empower young civil society activists in Tunisia to address gender equality, corruption, and freedom of expression by involving youth leaders in get-out-the-vote campaigns and providing hands-on training to help motivated young Tunisians translate their creative advocacy ideas into actionable plans.

- Each year, MEPI's *Student Leaders Program* brings over 100 MENA undergraduate students to U.S. academic institutions where they develop leadership skills and expand their understanding of civil society and the democratic process. Student Leaders alumni often carry out community projects at home, including with MEPI funding.

- MEPI has made a special effort, even before the Arab Spring, to respond to women seeking to play greater roles in their societies. The first four women in Kuwait's history to be elected to that country's Parliament are MEPI alumnae, and we have since increased our efforts to bring women into electoral processes throughout the region. MEPI-sponsored projects in Tunisia encouraged women of all ages and educational backgrounds to vote in the country's recent democratic elections, and the MEPI Arab Women's Leadership Institute is training MENA's female leaders, both elected officials and civil society, in coalition-building and advocacy skills.

Developing Civil Society

MEPI works with fast-growing civil society sectors, the lifeblood of civic participation, to support CSOs' ability to serve their communities and advocate on their issues of concern.

- In Libya, MEPI is providing training to brand new CSOs created after the revolution. In Lebanon, our support is helping a network of women's NGOs that are fighting for women's rights and legal reforms. Across the region, MEPI is linking up young civil society activists through online dialogues and virtual conferences to help them learn from one another.

- Through our regional *Local Grants Program,* MEPI has partnered with hundreds of local, often nascent CSOs, responding to their requests for training and support. Recent projects include: working with local organizations in the Gulf countries to help reduce violence against women and enhance their legal protections; assisting NGOs to address social and cultural challenges; and working with CSOs as they engage policymakers, citizens, and experts in an effort to promote good governance.

Fostering Economic Opportunity

MEPI's economic projects promote entrepreneurship, job skills training, and economic advocacy to help cultivate broad-based opportunities for everyone.

- MEPI is working with the Institute of International Education (IIE) to support a new generation of entrepreneurs in Egypt. The project aims to promote and support entrepreneurship as a viable career choice for youth ages 16-35, helping participants embrace innovation and develop a strong business sense.

- With activities in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, and the West Bank and Gaza, MEPI-funded Education for Employment Foundation projects provide unemployed youth access to high-quality, market-driven training and the skills necessary for entry into the private sector labor market.

- Capitalizing on funding and support from MEPI, the Financial Services Volunteer Corps (FSVC) has developed critical relationships with central banks and ministries of finance in Tunisia and Egypt. Through these partnerships, FSVC provides training and technical assistance to stimulate the flow of credit and financial services to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and improve the legal, regulatory, and supervisory environment of financial institutions.

MEPI is eager to partner with individuals, groups, and organizations striving for change in the Middle East and North Africa.

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