

The U.S.-Middle East Partnership Initiative *in Tunisia*



“Successful democratic transitions depend upon an expansion of growth and broad-based prosperity... America’s support for democracy will therefore be based on ensuring financial stability, promoting reform, and integrating competitive markets with each other and the global economy. And we’re going to start with Tunisia...”

U.S. President Barack Obama, May 19, 2011

MEPI is an integral part of the United States Government’s committed efforts to support the Tunisian people through the Tunisian transition to democracy. Over the past year and a half, MEPI has supported and continues to support more than 30 projects that respond directly to the expressed needs of the Tunisian people as they continue the transition to sustainable and prosperous democracy.

MEPI’s work seeks to promote sustainable and inclusive economic growth by supporting job creation efforts in the short-term and promoting market-oriented and institutional reform over the medium to long term. MEPI also seeks to ensure that Tunisia’s transition is transparent, inclusive, and credible, and that it consolidates democratic reforms by strengthening civil society and civic participation in the political process; supporting institutionalization of fair and competitive electoral processes; and supporting an inclusive transitional justice process.



EXPANDING ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

MEPI continues to bolster Tunisian efforts to build a strong foundation for economic growth and opportunity. MEPI’s support for economic growth has focused on two areas: increased assistance through market-relevant skills training and job placement programming; and, ensuring access to training and funding for Tunisian start-ups and entrepreneurs.

With MEPI support, the International Youth Foundation launched a demand-driven workforce technical training program for youth throughout Tunisia. An award to Deloitte Consulting is providing demand-driven assistance to Tunisian Chambers of Commerce and Jeune Chambres Internationales to enable these business development organizations to provide support to the growing number of new businesses created since the revolution. Though much of MEPI’s support is focused on support to individuals and the grass roots, two projects in particular are working to reform the system in a top-down fashion: the Department of Commerce’s Commercial Law and Development Program working with Tunisian government counterparts to reform the investment code, revise franchising law, and rewrite government procurement policy while the Financial Services Volunteer Corps is working to help Tunisians reform their financial sector and develop loan portfolios that will better support entrepreneurs.

ENHANCING TUNISIAN CIVIL SOCIETY

MEPI continues to expand its engagement with local civil society organizations through its unique local grants program, which directly supports civic groups throughout the country. MEPI local grants respond to priorities and proposals from local organizations, ensuring that Tunisians remain at the head of their democratic transition and have opportunities to get involved in civic life. Since January 2011, MEPI's Regional Office in Tunis has awarded more than 15 new local grants to advance the role of Tunisia's civil society, specifically by empowering women and youth.

MEPI partners with local organizations such as the Tunisian Association for Management and Social Stability (TAMSS), which is working to strengthen civil society across the country. Larger grants to Catholic Relief Services (CRS), Mercy Corps and Search for Common Ground, provide support and technical assistance to nascent Tunisian grass roots organizations throughout the country to strengthen civil society's ability to advocate effectively for causes and to take an active role in the social and political life of Tunisia. In 2013 activities will begin under MEPI's three-year NGO Training and Organizational Development Response (MENTOR) initiative, conducted by TAAMS in partnership with CRS, which provides training on organizational management to build sustainable capacity for nascent civil society organizations (CSOs) in their communities, while also establishing and promoting networks and linkages among Tunisian CSOs working on similar issues.

EXPANDING FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND THE PRESS

New MEPI projects are empowering citizens, especially women and youth, to defend the public interest and to hold government officials accountable in ways that were unthinkable before the revolution.

The Institute of International Education (IIE) is building the capacity of civil society organizations to effectively use new media— such as Facebook, Twitter, blogging, and other internet-based tools— to strengthen constituent outreach, inform and engage communities, and improve communication with government institutions on social and political issues. MEPI is also working with the Institute of War and Peace Reporting to increase the quality of local news coverage by engaging with members of the media and citizen journalists, focusing on accurate political reporting throughout the country.

ADVANCING RULE OF LAW

MEPI is assisting Tunisians in the development and promotion of a new legal system that is both fair and accessible, and which will protect the rights of all citizens. In partnership with the American Bar Association, MEPI is promoting legal reforms across a range of sectors in Tunisia.

MEPI is working with Freedom House on the Envisioning Justice project to engage local rule of law stakeholders in developing a blueprint for constitutional and legal reform to help Tunisia transition to a state that is accountable and respects human rights. The project also promotes public awareness of human rights and legal protections outlined in the blueprint and revitalizes human rights groups to play a watchdog role.

The American Bar Association is partnering with the Tunisian Bar Association and other legal entities to reform Tunisia's electoral code, address citizen electoral complaints, and improve women's legal rights and participation in the political process. Later this year, ABA will work with its Tunisian partners to organize a national forum on the role of women in transitional processes, focusing on comparative experiences. The forum will discuss women's rights in law and constitutional reform and advocacy for law reform. Participants will include female jurists, rights groups, civil society organizations, and political party representatives, among others.



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