

2012 G8-BMENA Forum for the Future Fact Sheet

The Forum for the Future is a unique platform bringing together governments, the private sector and civil society groups from throughout the Broader Middle East and North Africa (BMENA) region with G-8 states to work together toward political, social, and economic progress. The United States and the Republic of Tunisia co-chaired the 2012 Forum.

On December 13, U.S. Deputy Secretary of State William J. Burns and Foreign Minister Rafik Abdessalem of Tunisia hosted over 100 ministers and senior government leaders from the G-8 and BMENA region, as well as 45 civil society and private sector regional leaders, at the 2012 Forum for the Future to discuss the year's themes: women's empowerment, economic governance and entrepreneurship, and freedom of expression and association. The parties engaged directly on these critical issues, all central to the success of ongoing efforts for stability and prosperity across the region. Additionally, by integrating private sector leaders and entrepreneurs into the BMENA process, participants were able to address the regional imperative to expand economic opportunity and growth.

The 2012 Forum for the Future Declaration, which was adopted by consensus for only the second time in BMENA's history, is a strong endorsement of key goals and principles for advancing reforms, particularly around the year's BMENA themes. It includes strong and substantive commitments to advance: gender equality and greater political, social, and economic rights and opportunities for women; freedom of expression and association and increased operating space for civil society and the private sector to engage their governments; religious tolerance and rejection of violence; and more open and transparent governance and improved regulatory environment to promote entrepreneurship and economic growth.

Commitments by the MENA region's governments through the 2012 Forum for the Future Declaration included:

- Expanding collaboration with the G-8 countries, civil society, the private sector, and multilateral partners 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.
- 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.
- 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, promote tolerance and pluralism, uphold the rule of law, and to protect freedom of religion and belief.
- 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.
- 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 towards increased economic opportunity, job creation, and broad-based, private sector-led growth in the region.

We believe citizens in the region should be aware of the Forum Declaration and all it represents, and we encourage civil society, private sector representatives, and governments within each country to engage together and discuss how they can realize the goals espoused in the Declaration.

Furthermore, the United States applauds the many initiatives launched by Forum participants. At the 2012 Forum for the Future, the United States announced a number of initiatives in line with the principles of the Declaration, subject to the availability of appropriated funds:

- The United States will support the launch of the MENA Partnership for Democracy and Development (MENA Partnership). The MENA Partnership will provide an international clearinghouse of service providers, experts, and experienced practitioners to those in the region working for progress. Civil society organizations, advocacy groups, business associations, and public institutions will all be included. The United States is happy to work with our partners in supporting this initiative.
- The United States will establish a new Journalist Response Fund to provide training to at-risk journalists, bloggers, and citizen journalists, and to offer emergency assistance to journalists facing difficulties or repression.
- In honor of Ambassador Christopher Stevens, the United States has established the Christopher Stevens Youth Network, a youth exchange program to promote peace, conflict resolution, and community building in the Middle East and North Africa. The Network will connect high school students and educators in the region with their peers in the United States to reach approximately 10,000 students and 400 educators in 20 countries.