

March 24, 2014

The Honorable John F. Kerry
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Kerry,

In January 2014, Tunisia passed a landmark constitution and undertook the first peaceful transfer of power in an Arab democracy. Successful consolidation of Tunisia's democratic gains will set an important example in the region, but recent successes will remain at risk unless the country's transition maintains momentum. You recently said, "We're hopeful that Tunisia is going to succeed, and we're going to help... We're going to try to do all we can in this age of constrained budgets and difficult choices." As you prepare to launch the Strategic Dialogue with Tunisia, we urge you to follow through on and deepen U.S. commitments to help build an enduring Tunisian democracy by bolstering support for its economic, political, and security needs.

Tunisia faces serious obstacles despite recent successes. Its struggling economy — a root cause of the revolution — remains unable to generate jobs for its well-educated population. The country's weak security apparatus has failed to address burgeoning extremist threats and has increasingly targeted human rights and political activists critical of its conduct. To maintain momentum, Tunisian leadership must make important decisions to avoid exacerbating political polarization.

Despite these challenges, Tunisia has become a touchstone for democratic reform in the Middle East and North Africa, and these gains must be preserved and strengthened. With a dynamic and active civil society, capable government leaders, and a constitution that embraces unity and pluralism, Tunisians have a genuine opportunity to establish strong, responsive institutions. The United States can continue to play a constructive role in assisting the development of a successful and democratic Tunisia as a key regional ally and a bulwark against negative developments elsewhere in North Africa.

Tunisia's leadership has publicly expressed its desire to work with the United States throughout its transitional process, putting the U.S. in a strong position to contribute to its political development. As you prepare to enter the Strategic Dialogue with Prime Minister Jomaa, we urge you to consider the following recommendations:

- **Reevaluate security restrictions on U.S. government personnel in place for Tunisia and the language of the State Department's travel warning.** The travel warning currently in place neither fits Tunisia's political realities nor reflects the experiences of the millions who visit Tunisia every year as business people and tourists. Security restrictions on U.S. personnel living in and traveling to Tunisia severely limit U.S. government operability and impede efforts to support the transition. The language and policies related to Tunisia's real security threats certainly deserve careful attention as threats to American citizens and officials remain of concern worldwide. As the U.S.-Tunisia partnership deepens, it is important to remain vigilant, but restrictions disproportionate to the realities on the ground inevitably undermine confidence in the country, damaging the prospects for economic recovery.

- **Increase the economic aid package for Tunisia:** Prior to the revolution, Tunisia did not receive a significant bilateral assistance package. Since 2011, Washington has spent more than \$450 million, primarily drawn from multi-country accounts. The administration's FY15 budget request includes only \$30 million for Economic Support Funds (ESF) to Tunisia, the same as in FY14. The administration has indicated publicly that it will give additional funds to Tunisia, implying that it will continue to draw from other accounts. It is important that the administration considerably increase the ESF allocation for Tunisia, enabling greater predictability and strategic planning in assistance levels, and thereby transform its assistance relationship with Tunisia into a serious and sustained bilateral investment.
- **Establish a permanent USAID mission in Tunis.** The administration should quickly finalize the decision to return a permanent USAID mission to Tunisia, which would facilitate the provision of future assistance in each cooperative sector. USAID programs should focus on projects that bolster employment, especially among young people, improve local livelihoods, and address core concerns of the revolution related to governance, poverty, and job creation.
- **Ensure that existing security and judicial assistance programs address the need for institutional reform.** The FY15 budget request includes \$34 million to support the security and judicial sectors in Tunisia. These funds will be used to professionalize these sectors, modernize equipment, and provide training, all goals worthy of U.S. support. It is essential, however, that Tunisia's security forces and judiciary not only become modernized and more competent, but that they are also fundamentally transformed to serve and protect the people of a democratic state. As such, U.S. programming should support efforts to reshape the legal framework for law enforcement and ensure that security forces respect human rights.
- **Publicly express intent to pursue a Free Trade Agreement with Tunisia, while revitalizing the Trade and Investment Framework Agreement process.** Declaring a long-term aspiration to sign a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with Tunisia, the Arab world's most diversified and best performing non-oil economy prior to the revolution, can help spur additional economic reform, encourage a more business-friendly regulatory environment, and galvanize regional and European allies to deepen their own trade and investment relationships with Tunisia. Revitalized Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA) processes should be used immediately to lay the foundations for a future FTA.
- **Support Tunisian priorities for financial and regulatory reform and offer technical assistance to encourage private sector investment.** Working with Tunisian authorities to identify priorities, the United States can offer technical expertise to assist the national bank and Ministry of Finance, including advice on fighting corruption. Tunisia's membership in the Open Government Partnership provides a platform for this effort. Offering technical assistance and mentorship for existing initiatives, like the Tunisian-American Enterprise Fund, can help improve the entrepreneurship ecosystem. Additionally, the administration should strongly consider Tunisia as a host for the 2015 Global Entrepreneurship Summit to support local entrepreneurs and bolster investor confidence in Tunisian companies.

- **Supplement exchanges for students, academics, and civil society and private sector leaders to strengthen understanding, ties, and partnerships.** The administration has been right to include support for such programs in its post-2011 assistance. The recent announcement of an additional \$10 million for the Thomas Jefferson Scholarship program is an important step, but continued expansion of these programs is warranted. These low-cost exchanges are crucial for improving America's image and building capacity of Tunisian civil society, and support for them should be supplemented.

You have said, "the United States will continue to stand beside Tunisia throughout its democratic transition. [...] Our support is not just words." For the benefit of both nations, this is a critical moment for the United States to demonstrate that its commitment does indeed extend beyond rhetoric. We, the undersigned, urge you to carry out these recommendations with determination and urgency. We lend our names in our personal, not institutional, capacity.

Sincerely,

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Ambassador William Hudson, Ret.
U.S. Ambassador to Tunisia, 2004-2006

Ambassador Walter Cutler, Ret.
U.S. Ambassador to Tunisia, 1982-1984

Ambassador Stephen Bosworth, Ret.
U.S. Ambassador to Tunisia, 1979-1981

Thomas Daschle
U.S. Senator, 1987-2005

Joseph Lieberman
U. S. Senator, 1989-2013

Robert "Bud" Cramer
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Howard Berman
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Jane Harman
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