



American Chamber of Commerce in Tunisia

THE 2016  
**U.S.-TUNISIA**  
**JOINT ECONOMIC COMMISSION**

Tunisia's Private Sector Participation

Washington, D.C. | 6 May 2016



PNB-NAPEO TUNISIA   
North Africa Partnership  
For Economic Opportunity

### **About AmCham Tunisia**

American Chamber of Commerce in Tunisia (AmCham Tunisia) is a nonprofit organization that aims to represent and promote members' business interests and develop economic relations between Tunisia, the United States, and the region. AmCham Tunisia pursues these goals by providing insights, advocacy, networking, and discussions.

### **About PNB**

Partners for a New Beginning (PNB) is a non-profit network of business leaders and civil society actors that aims to build partnerships and advance economic opportunities in the focus areas of entrepreneurship, education, and innovation by catalyzing and convening networks of global leaders. PNB is working in ten countries, including Tunisia.

### **About PNB-NAPEO**

The North Africa Partnership for Economic Opportunity (PNB-NAPEO) is a network of US and North Africa business leaders, entrepreneurs, civil society leaders, and governments with a mission to foster job creation, entrepreneurship, and education with a focus on youth. PNB-NAPEO has created a network of stakeholders, which is locally owned and locally driven.





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## Preface

On May 6, 2016 in Washington D.C., the American Chamber of Commerce in Tunisia (AmCham Tunisia) participated in the first meeting of the U.S.-Tunisia Joint Economic Commission (JEC) as the representative of Tunisia's private sector in this commission. The AmCham delegation, led by Kahled Babbou, was composed of high-level representatives of Tunisian companies as well as representatives of U.S. companies operating in Tunisia. In addition to the Tunisian and American governments' representatives and AmCham Tunisia delegation, the meeting has registered the participation of representatives of the American private sector, including American companies, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the National U.S.-Arab Chamber of Commerce, and the Tunisian American Young Professionals Association.

The meeting was co-chaired by Ziad Ladhari, Minister of Vocational Training and Employment, on the Tunisian side, and Catherine Novelli, Under Secretary of State for Economic Growth, Energy, and the Environment, on the American side. The two members of Government in addition to AmCham's President offered keynote remarks on the opening session.

The general topic of this first meeting was "Creating private sector jobs and bilateral opportunities through competitiveness and growth." The breakout sessions focused on accelerating Tunisia's competitiveness in three priority sectors: Agribusiness, Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), and Information and Communications Technology (ICT). Topics discussed were:

- Bringing Tunisian Agro/Food Products to the U.S. Market, Opportunities for U.S. Distributors
- Building a Modern SME Ecosystem
- ICT: Connecting More Tunisians to the World

In preparation for its preparation in the JEC, AmCham Tunisia engaged a consultative process with various stakeholders and held three sessions of AmCham Days in order to discuss issues and identify recommendations for priority actions in the three key sectors. All of the identified actions tend to achieve productive, efficient, competitive, inclusive, and sustainable agribusiness and ICT sector, and globally competitive, resilient, innovative, and inclusive SMEs. AmCham Tunisia put forth for the JEC the actions that can be included within the U.S.-Tunisia cooperation.

In the three sectors, AmCham proposals focused on i) marketing conditions, ii) value chain development, iii) productivity, technology and innovation, iv) knowledge and skills, v) access to finance vi) access to global (and U.S.) markets, and vii) business

environment. In addition, AmCham Tunisia put forth general recommendations on the private sector engagement, the future of the U.S.-Tunisia relations, and the follow-up scheme for the JEC. The Joint Statement of the JEC lists the selected actions and initiatives committed by governments and the private sectors in this first meeting of the JEC.

The JEC was created on the occasion of President Beji Caid Essibi's visit to Washington in May 2016 to serve as a forum for promoting bilateral economic relations, expanding private sector ties between Tunisia and the United States, and advancing Tunisia's economic reforms, competitiveness, and growth through both policy discussion and formulation of assistance programming.

As part of the implementation of the U.S.-Tunisia Strategic Dialogue, AmCham Tunisia regards the JEC and an appropriate and effective institutional mechanism to deal with bilateral economic and development issues and to envision and enact policies, actions, and practical measures to advance economic partnership, expand trade and investment, and promote business opportunities and sectoral cooperation between the two countries.

This document includes the opening speeches, AmCham Tunisia's proposals is not a report of AmCham's mission to Washington but instead a policy document, which outlines expectations and a framework for action by different stakeholders, and identifies a set of concrete recommendations and potential next steps, relevant to the topics discussed in the conference, and with a special focus on Tunisia.



## Opening Speeches

Ziad Ladhari  
Tunisian Minister of Vocational Training and Employment

[Include speech]

Catherine A. Novelli  
U.S. Under Secretary for Economic Growth, Energy, and the Environment

Thanks, John. Good morning. It is great to see so many friends and colleagues here today. I'd like to recognize my co-chair, Minister of Employment Ladhari, along with the rest of the Tunisian delegation. I'd also like to welcome our private sector representatives, and thank everyone who has worked so hard over the past few months to organize this event.

It is an honor to co-chair the first full meeting of this Joint Economic Commission. When President Obama and President Caid Essebsi agreed last year to establish the JEC, it was a testament to the strong partnership between the United States and Tunisia. They envisioned a mechanism to support Tunisia's economic reform priorities and encourage private sector ties between our countries, in a manner that would promote economic development in both our countries.

Tunisia has a strong partner in the United States. We have provided Tunisia with more than \$750 million in foreign assistance since 2011 and underwritten nearly \$1 billion in loan guarantees.

It is worth taking a step back and recognizing what Tunisia has been able to accomplish since 2011. In the face of immense challenges and overwhelming odds, Tunisia has managed to build an accountable, representative, and inclusive democracy.

On the economic front, we commend the Tunisian government for completing a number of significant reforms, such as the bankruptcy law, the competition and prices law, the public-private partnership law, and public bank recapitalization. We recognize that other reforms are in the works: an investment code, a banking sector reform law, a tax code, and customs modernization. We applaud these efforts.

This morning, you may have noticed a large screen at the front of this conference room. It was playing a video of interviews with Tunisian business owners and entrepreneurs.

There's Khaled Doulami, a young entrepreneur who has founded two radio stations and two IT companies. And there's Ramzi Ben Hedi, who runs Chili's and Papa John's franchises. There's also Badreddine Ouali, who operates a Tunis-based financial software supplier. And Abdelaziz Makhloufi, representing C.H.O. Group, one of Tunisia's major olive exporters. Each one has created jobs and opportunities within Tunisia. I encourage everyone to take a look at the video and hear these amazing stories.

We know that they and similar entrepreneurs operate in the face of many challenges. They describe a lack of access to credit, uncertainty about registering a business, complicated customs processes, and licensing delays. Business owners and entrepreneurs have told us about the regulatory, legal, and other barriers that stifle innovation and economic growth.

Finding practical ways to address these challenges is what the JEC is all about. The JEC is our only bilateral dialogue with Tunisia that includes private sector participation. This is what makes it unique and so important.

The JEC is also about building Tunisian partnerships with U.S. firms and finding tangible ways to unlock the potential that already exists in the Tunisian economy. This includes creating the right business environment to attract foreign investment, including from U.S. companies. Concrete steps to improve the business environment, which make it easier for Tunisian and U.S. firms to operate, will help create jobs for Tunisians. Boosting trade and business links between our two countries will also benefit the U.S. economy and help to strengthen U.S.-Tunisian relations.

Improving Tunisia's business climate will also help to move more workers from the informal to the formal sector. In an economy where approximately 40 percent of non-agricultural workers are employed in the informal sector, this is a critical objective. This is will also boost economic opportunities for women, as women are hit particularly hard by being excluded from the formal economy.

Today's agenda reflects the input of private sector representatives – groups like AmCham, Partnership for a New Beginning, and Tunisian American Young Professionals. Over the past few months, we've talked to hundreds of people – including many of you in this room – and we've received suggestions on where and how to focus our efforts.

In our break-out sessions today, we're going to focus on three areas: 1) new opportunities in the agriculture and food sector, 2) strengthening small and medium-sized enterprises, and 3) growing the ICT sector. Let me say a few words on the outcomes we hope to achieve in each of these areas.

### Agro/Food Sector

We know that Tunisian firms would like to trade and partner more with U.S. companies. Agriculture comprises almost ten percent of Tunisia's GDP and provides jobs for roughly 15 percent of the labor force, and this is a sector ready for increased cooperation.

Today, we will focus on steps to increase opportunities for Tunisian farmers and agricultural exporters to find U.S. partners. We will assist the Tunisian government, in coordination with our private sector colleagues, in the creation of a road map to boost bilateral trade.

### SMEs (Small and Medium-sized Enterprises)

We will also focus on Small and Medium-sized Enterprises – SMEs – which are the lifeblood of economic growth in most countries. In Tunisia, new job growth comes predominantly from businesses in their start-up phase, which is to say businesses that are less than four years old. SMEs comprise more than 80 percent of Tunisia's economy.

Yet Tunisian entrepreneurs face a complex process for registering a business, involving multiple ministries. By some estimates, it takes up to 40 days and costs an average of \$500 to register a business. This prevents many entrepreneurs from registering companies in the first place, which is why so many businesses remain in the informal sector. This is not just an isolated phenomenon. It is a systemic barrier to economic growth and job creation.

The World Bank estimates that the financing gap for Tunisian SMEs exceeds \$2 billion. And nearly 50 percent of Tunisian SMEs are unserved or underserved in terms of access to credit.

So today, we will look at ways to improve the environment for SMEs within Tunisia. We will focus on concrete steps to simplify the process for starting a business, including through the creation of a one-stop shop for online business registration. We will work together on ways to enable small business owners to use assets – such as equipment or accounts receivable – as collateral to access financing, thus bringing down borrowing costs significantly.

We will share best practices on developing legal and regulatory frameworks that expand access to finance for SMEs. We will also look for opportunities for Tunisian SMEs to partner with U.S. firms.

### ICT (Information and Communications Technology)

What's so encouraging is that all of these changes – increasing transparency, moving more Tunisians from the informal to the formal sector, and making it easier for SMEs to partner with U.S. firms – are within reach as a result of Tunisia's commitment to building out its ICT capacity.

Last May, Tunisia launched "Digital Tunisia 2018," which includes nearly 1 billion Tunisian dinars for its "Smart Tunisia" initiative. And Minister of Telecommunications and Digital Economy Fehri just announced plans to connect every Tunisian school to the Internet by 2017, and all Tunisians by 2020.

The Tunisian government is already moving forward on updating its Telecom/Digital Communications Code and establishing a comprehensive National Broadband Plan. These are important steps that will help attract increased private sector investment in Tunisia's ICT infrastructure.

These are ambitious efforts. And today we will identify ways to mobilize public and private sector support for these efforts.

One specific way to advance Tunisia's ICT strategy is through our Global Connect Initiative. The State Department launched this initiative last fall to bring an additional 1.5 billion people around the world online by 2020. Our strategy is to mainstream the view that Internet connectivity is as fundamental to economic development as roads, ports, electricity, and other traditional infrastructure.

As you may know, we are coming off our very successful Global Connect High Level Event several weeks ago. Secretary Kerry and World Bank President Kim hosted more than 100 participants, including representatives from over 25 countries, including Tunisia, as well as representatives of civil society, the ICT industry, international organizations and multilateral development banks.

Participants announced more than 65 new and ongoing initiatives valued at more than \$20 billion to expand global connectivity infrastructure. The public-private partnerships that underpin these initiatives are entirely consistent with Tunisia's connectivity strategy. In fact, Finance Minister Chaker, who attended the event, proposed that Tunisia serve as a model country for the initiative.

Moving forward, the United States will work through the Global Connect Initiative to support Tunisia's ambitious connectivity goals.

### Conclusion

Although I've spoken about each JEC theme separately, all three of the breakout sessions are closely linked together. Simplifying the process for registering businesses and making it easier for SMEs to access finance will also help agricultural firms hoping to export to new markets.

Bridging the digital divide and connecting more Tunisians to the Internet will make it easier for innovators and entrepreneurs to create new businesses, hire new workers, and bring new efficiencies to the market. It will also make it easier for U.S. firms to invest and find new opportunities in Tunisia.

Achieving these inter-connected goals will require a multi-stakeholder approach – which is what makes the JEC so important. Governments have an important role to play, but it is the private sector that will drive our economic relationship and create greater prosperity in both Tunisia and the United States.

We have a tremendous opportunity today to expand our economic relationship and bring our countries closer together, creating jobs in Tunisia and the United States. I look forward to working with each of you to do so today and into the future.

Thank you.

**Khaled Babbou**  
**President of the American Chamber of Commerce in Tunisia**

Your Excellency Ms. Novelli,  
Your Excellency Ziad Ladhari,  
Ladies and Gentlemen:

We, in AmCham Tunisia, have been looking forward to this meeting for months and I am proud to address you on behalf of the private sector in Tunisia.

Madame Under Secretary, Mr. Minister, thank you for your invitation to join you on this Joint Economic Commission and I want to acknowledge your support and personal commitment to the U.S.-Tunisia partnership.

I want also to thank our friends in the U.S. Administration and in the Tunisian ministries for your dedication to supporting trade, investment, and private sector partnership between our two countries.

#### Structure of U.S.-Tunisia relations and role of the private sector

The U.S.-Tunisia relations have been undergoing a transformation over the past five years. Bilateral cooperation has improved. The U.S. Government and Congress have made commitments and taken actions to support Tunisia's transition.

Within this context, the American Chamber of Commerce in Tunisia has been working to promote a constructive dialogue on bilateral issues, and to identify policies and actions to advance the relationship between our two nations, and enable new opportunities for our peoples.

Because we believe the closest possible collaboration and cooperation between Tunisia and the United States in all the aspects of their relationship is in the national interests of both countries, and help promote peace, stability, and prosperity in the Maghreb and beyond.

We welcomed the launch of the U.S.-Tunisia Strategic Dialogue in 2014, and the stated commitment of both sides to a deep and comprehensive partnership, which accompanied it. We have offered our vision on this dialogue to both governments, and we have provided a number of recommendations on how to advance it.

In particular, we called for an ambitious and structured approach to implementing the Dialogue and developing the Tunisian-American cooperation. We see the creation of the Joint Economic Commission, decided on the occasion of President Beji Caid Essebsi's visit to Washington last year, as a first step in building this approach.

We regard JEC as the ideal framework to deal with bilateral economic and development issues and to envision and enact policies, actions, and practical measures in connection with trade, investment, sectoral cooperation, and business partnership. Nevertheless, we believe that it must be backed up by willingness on both sides to act towards delivering the conditions for tangible and sustainable results and to make real and rapid progress on its focus areas.

We appreciate the participation of the private sector in this process. However, we believe it is essential to fully recognize the role of the private sector in economic growth, job creation, innovation and development. We call for an active engagement of the private sector, as an equal partner, in the design and implementation of development and economic policies and in discussing and identifying solutions and actions to advance the U.S.-Tunisia bilateral relations.

#### Future of the U.S.-Tunisia relations

We applaud the actions taken to strengthen economic ties between the United States and Tunisia. However, while moving in the right direction, trends of cooperation and partnership between our two countries are mixed. At a time of political and economic challenges, we need more ambition and creativity in our approach to developing our relationship and high visible initiatives in key areas that can have positive impact immediately and in the long-term.

To this end, we propose to convene an independent joint study group, cosponsored by both sides, to assess the U.S.-Tunisia relations, identify the shared interests, and develop a clear understanding of these relations, their dynamics, and the direction in which they must head. The group will consider the aspirations of each side and identify who among policymakers, private sector, civil society, and the general public wants what and why, and offer concrete policy recommendations based on those shared interests on key focus issues and areas.

#### Sectoral Proposals

Today, we put forth recommendations for priority actions in the three sectors this session of JEC is discussing. They were identified through a consultative process and in various stakeholder meetings, called AmCham Days. We brought to JEC only actions that can be included within the U.S.-Tunisia cooperation. All of the proposed actions tend achieve productive, efficient, competitive, inclusive, and sustainable agribusiness and ICT sector, and globally competitive, resilient, innovative, and inclusive SMEs.

#### Agribusiness

In Agribusiness, we propose actions in five areas: i) marketing conditions, ii) value chain development, iii) technology and innovation development, iv) trade and investment, and v) access to finance.

## ICT

In ICT, we propose actions to i) develop Tunisian start-ups; ii) promote cooperative nearshore platform for US ICT companies; iii) promote e-Government and e-Business programs; iv) develop ICT competencies; and v) raise awareness and use of intellectual property.

## SMEs

For SMEs development, our proposals are within six priority areas: i) entrepreneurship and management capabilities; ii) knowledge, skills and talents; iii) productivity, technology and innovation; iv) access to finance; v) access to global markets; and vi) business environment.

## Conclusion

Our goal is to make Tunisia a more attractive partner to the United States and to the world. That is why we are supporting the Tunisian government's reforms to create a thriving environment for investment, eliminate unnecessary restrictions, enhance Tunisia's international credibility, raise effectiveness, encourage innovation, and enhance growth and employment.

Our goal also is to create opportunities for U.S.-Tunisia partnership in the short and the long term in key areas such as trade, investment, entrepreneurship, science, technology, innovation, education, infrastructure, capacity building, and people-to-people exchanges. That is why we call for an Economic Partnership Agreement between Tunisia and the United States, which includes a Free Trade Agreement or any variation of it.

We believe that it is possible, and that it is necessary.

The credibility and sustainability of our cooperation process, and hence its success, will critically depend on our commitment to turn the principles, values and objectives guiding the bilateral relations into policies and actions that will give content to what could otherwise become a merely rhetorical partnership.

I very much hope that this inaugural session of the U.S.-Tunisia Joint Economic Commission will deliver results equal to our expectations, that we can build on to keep moving towards a higher level of collaboration.

In all events, the private sector in Tunisia is committed to doing its part and working with the Government and the civil society to provide solutions and create the conditions for more growth, jobs and prosperity in our country, and for a stronger partnership with the United States.

Thank you for this opportunity to address you.





# Tunisia's Private Sector Proposals

## General Recommendations

### Objective

- Make Tunisia a more attractive partner to the United States and to the world
- Support the Tunisian government's economic reforms
- Structure and clarify U.S.-Tunisia relations
- Create opportunities for U.S.-Tunisia partnership in the short and the long term

### Proposed Actions

1. Recognize the essential role of the private sector in economic growth, job creation, innovation and development, the engagement that the private sector brings to development and economic policies, and the contribution of the private sector as an equal partner in discussing and identifying solutions and actions to advance bilateral relations
2. Establish a five-year Economic Development Program for Tunisia, including a focus on private sector development.
3. Establish an Agribusiness Development Program to develop marketing conditions; value chains; productivity, technology, and innovation; trade and investment; and access to finance.
4. Establish an ICT Development Program to develop Tunisian start-ups, a cooperative nearshore platform for US ICT companies, e-Government and e-Business programs, ICT competencies, and intellectual property.
5. Establish an SME Development Program to develop entrepreneurship and management capabilities; knowledge, skills and talents; productivity, technology and innovation; access to finance; access to global markets; and business environment.
6. Establish an independent joint study group, cosponsored by both sides, to assess different aspects of the U.S.-Tunisia relations, identify shared interests, develop a clear understanding of the bilateral relations, and offer concrete policy recommendations to advance these relations and achieve common goals in key focus issues and areas.
7. Adopt the objective of establishing an Economic Partnership Agreement between Tunisia and the United States for as a framework for advanced, structural, stable, and comprehensive economic and development partnership, which includes a Free Trade Agreement or any variation of it.

## Agribusiness

### Objective

- Build a productive, efficient, competitive, inclusive, and sustainable agribusiness sector

### Proposed Actions

- Marketing Conditions
  8. Establish a central digital repository for national and international agriculture and food market knowledge and information
  9. Establish U.S.-Tunisia public-private partnerships in building market infrastructure that supports all levels of the agribusiness value chains
  10. Build innovative partnership business models in key value chains
- Value Chain Development
  11. Establish a capacity building and training program for enterprises and entrepreneurs in value adding
  12. Establish a program of technical assistance for the transposition of international standards into the Tunisian national standards system
  13. Set an information and communication program on investment and business opportunities to encourage U.S. private agribusiness investment in Tunisia and establish partnerships with U.S. wholesalers
- Productivity, Technology and Innovation
  14. Create three centers of excellence for cereal, olive oil, and fruit and vegetable development
  15. Establish a program for technology and knowledge transfer and public and private R&D collaboration with institutions, businesses and industries
  16. Create a binational agricultural and food research and development fund
- Trade Development
  17. Establish a program of technical assistance for the transposition of international standards into the Tunisian national standards system
  18. Establish a program for brand building and value proposition making for Tunisian agribusiness products
  19. Establish a market access facilitation program for agribusiness products with the involvement of the private sector, including GSP

- Financing Conditions
  20. Establish a capacity building and technical assistance program for financial institutions in designing and developing financial products
  21. Establish a program for creating and developing alternative financing for the agribusiness sector with the involvement of the private sector

## Small and Medium Enterprises

### Objective

- Support globally competitive, resilient, innovative, inclusive, and sustainable small and medium enterprises

### Proposed Actions

- Marketing Conditions
  22. Establish a central digital repository for national and international agriculture and food market knowledge and information
- Entrepreneurship and Management Capabilities
  23. Establish a program to encourage and promote entrepreneurship and business start-ups, including among youth and women
  24. Provide capacity building for management skills development for SMEs
- Knowledge, Skills and Talents
  25. Establish a program for skills development and talents training for SMEs
- Productivity, Technology and Innovation
  26. Promote innovation as a key competitive advantage for SMEs
  27. Provide technical assistance to raise awareness and use of intellectual property rights
  28. Establish a program for cluster development
- Access to Finance
  29. Provide a upgrading and modernization program for Tunisian financial and banking sector, with particular consideration for SMEs access appropriate finance
  30. Provide technical assistance funds and credit guarantee mechanisms to facilitate access to credits and other forms of financing

- Access to Global Markets
  31. Set a working group, with the involvement of the private sector, to identify and address trade barriers facing SMEs, with the aim to facilitate access to the U.S. market for Tunisian products and services, including expansion GSP
  32. Promote partnerships between Tunisian SMEs and large U.S. firms
  33. Establish a program to build SME capabilities to access to international markets, integrate into the global supply chain, and enhance market development and promotion skills
- Business Environment
  34. Establish a cooperation program to promote open, transparent, and competitive business environment for SMEs

## Information and Communications Technology

### Objective

- Promote digital economy as a development vector to boost employment and increase high value added activities

### Proposed Actions

- Start-up Ecosystem Development
  35. Provide Technical Assistance to benchmark Tunisia's startup ecosystem and to support developing a bold strategy and a related roadmap for the enhancement of the Innovation ecosystem in Tunisia
  36. For the existing Tunisian incubators, set U.S. incubators and support as well as exchange programs between US and Tunisia incubators
  37. Set up a sponsorship program, consisting in a one-on-one sponsorship of Tunisian start-ups by US corporations in order to enhance Tunisian start-up's visibility & access to market and access to Tunisia innovative start-ups for US companies
  38. Support the setup of an investment fund dedicated to Innovation and Technology-based companies through a new or through the on-going initiative held by Tunisian American Enterprise Fund
- Tunisia as a cooperative nearshore platform for US ICT companies
  39. Benchmark Tunisia ICT's environment against the offering in the US, identify hurdles to attracting US companies in Tunisia, and develop a road map that presents the components, stakeholders and milestones of this initiative

40. Provide capacity building to plan and implement for the opening of an office in the Silicon Valley, with the objective to act as a bridge between U.S. companies and Tunisia business environment and innovation.
  41. Set up a promotion fund, targeting US companies, and aiming at attracting US companies to start operations in Tunisia
  42. Develop with OPIC a guarantee fund for American ICT companies to cover the downside risk of US companies starting in Tunisia
- Contribute to the enhancement of Tunisia e-Government and e-Business programs
    43. Include selected programs in the Global Connect Initiative, for operational and financial support
  - Develop ICT competencies in Tunisia
    44. Set up training initiatives such as “3-month development boot camp” with appropriate certification programs in ICT skills
    45. ICT skills-based training programs as well as soft skills programs within Smart Center at TBS School
    46. Facilitate mobility through internships in US companies
  - Intellectual property
    47. Provide technical assistance to Tunisian Institute of Normalization and Intellectual Property (INNORPI) to allow it improve services rendered to Innovation and Technology-based companies
    48. Help Tunisia assess its current ability to turn R&D into intellectual property in ICT and develop a strategy to enhance the current IP environment.



# U.S.-Tunisia Joint Economic Commission Statement

At the Joint Economic Commission (JEC) held today in Washington, Under Secretary for Economic Growth, Energy, and the Environment Catherine A. Novelli and Tunisian Minister of Vocational Training and Employment Zied Ladhari acknowledged the growing economic partnership between Tunisia and the United States, as well as the engagement of the private sector in building Tunisia's economy. Both governments and the private sector made commitments to support initiatives in three key sectors for this Commission: Agro/Food, Small and Medium Enterprises, and Information and Communications Technology. Both governments reaffirmed their commitment to the promotion of social and economic development in Tunisia in the framework of strategic partnership between the two parties.

## Bringing Opportunity to the Agro/Food Sector

The U.S. Departments of State and Commerce committed to sponsor agricultural and trade roadshows within 12 months that will increase knowledge of U.S. agro-trade opportunities and promote market access. These will complement the set of workshops in Tunisia planned by the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative on the requirements of the U.S. Generalized System of Preferences program.

The U.S., through the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)-funded Business Reform and Competitiveness Project (BRCP), committed to provide targeted training and technical support to facilitate high-potential exports.

The Tunisian Ministries of Agriculture, Industry, and Trade committed to collaborate with the private sector to create a three-year roadmap to increase market access and bilateral commercial engagement. USAID committed to contribute technical assistance.

AmCham Tunisia/Partnership for a New Beginning (PNB) pledged to create three centers of excellence for cereals, olive oil, and fruits and vegetables, and to use expertise gained from agribusiness AmCham Days to promote increased trade.

The Tunisian American Young Professionals committed to conduct a webinar training on export readiness within 12 months.

## Strengthening Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs)

The Government of Tunisia, through the Ministry of Employment, agreed to form and lead an inter-ministerial/private sector coordinating committee to create a website within six months describing administrative processes in support of SMEs, starting with

business registration. The website will evolve into an online business registration portal and one stop shop with links to financial resources and mentoring opportunities provided by the private sector. USAID will offer funding from the BRCP to assist.

The Tunisian American Enterprise Fund committed to initiate an ease of doing business report within six months. The Government of Tunisia pledged to consider the report's recommendations.

USAID announced creation of 6,015 sustainable private sector jobs in the last year, and committed to create 6,500 more in the next 12 months through the BRCP.

AmCham Tunisia/PNB pledged to create an SME Export Lab within six months and hold another series of AmCham Days supporting SMEs.

### Growing the Tunisian Information and Communications Technology (ICT) Sector

The Tunisian Ministry of Communication Technologies and Digital Economy committed to submit a new Telecom/Digital Communications Code to Parliament within six months, build a coaching program with the private sector to help U.S. investors enter the Tunisian market, and establish Smart Tunisia representation in Silicon Valley.

The Government of Tunisia committed to connect 60% of Tunisians to the internet by 2018.

The U.S. Government committed to identify technical expertise through the Global Connect Initiative to support implementation of the Digital Tunisia Strategy, and identify partnership opportunities in helping the Government of Tunisia connect all of its citizens.

AmCham Tunisia/PNB pledged to open a chapter in Silicon Valley by the end of 2016, replicate the Tunisian Business School Smart Center training concept at other Tunisian universities, and implement a three-month skills development training program within 12 months.

### Conclusion

The Joint Economic Commission concluded with Under Secretary Novelli and Minister Ladhari's pledges to deepen economic ties and cooperation between the United States and the public and private sectors of Tunisia. As a follow up mechanism, both parties agreed to appoint two focal points each in the U.S. State Department and the Tunisian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. They looked forward to the next U.S.-Tunisia Joint Economic Commission in Tunisia in 2017, when they will build on the progress of this year's commitments.







