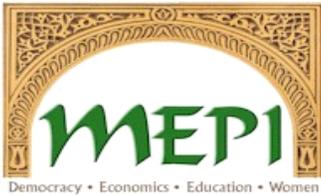


MEDREGION UPDATE

NOVEMBER 2008

CIVIL SOCIETY MEETING AT THE FORUM FOR THE FUTURE



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SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST:

- MEPI RO Tunis is ready to fund local grants immediately. Please get us your proposals!
- Last year, we funded over 40 projects in the region with a total of nearly \$2,000,000 in support.
- See our [website](#) for applications!

As many of you know, the Forum for the Future (FFF) is the most significant ongoing international initiative aimed at fostering a wide dialogue on political, economic, and social reforms in the broader Middle East and North Africa. Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) confirm that the FFF is the only regional framework that provides an opportunity for civil society representatives in the Arab world to discuss their viewpoints on reform issues in the presence of their respective governments.

Immediately prior to the FFF this year, more than 200 CSO leaders from across the Middle East and North Africa met for the 5th Civil Society parallel meeting, held October 14-17 in Dubai/UAE. They met prior to the FFF for three days of intensive discussions on the legal environment for CSOs, progress in democratic reform (including elections, rule of law,

independent media, corruption and transparency), political empowerment for women and the opportunities for deepening cooperation with governments and the private sector. The meeting was a platform of debate for CSO participants to contribute recommendations on thematic topics to the FFF. It was an opportunity to review the progress made in the implementation of the Sea Island Initiative and to renew CSO determination to continue their close cooperation to achieve true dialogue and partnership with their governments.

Despite the political challenges in the region, CSO leaders acknowledge more than ever before that reform is needed to bring hope, peace and prosperity to the people of the region and to isolate the minority of extremists who seek to sow division and discord.

They concluded that the FFF has achieved some success in supporting CSOs and convincing authoritarian regimes about the need to advance reform.

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WELCOME TO THE NEWEST MEPI TEAM MEMBERS!

Welcome to our newest MEPI team members in the region:

Johann Schmonsees is the Director of the Regional Office. Johann lived in Tunis once before, as an Arabic student at the Foreign Service Institute Arabic Field School. Johann has been a career Foreign Service Officer with the State Department since 1992. In his Economics specialization, he has served as the sole



Economic Officer at the US Embassy in Bern, Switzerland, and headed up the Economic and Commercial Section in Port-au-Prince, Haiti. He also served as Political-Economic Counselor at the US Embassy in Beirut, Lebanon.

In other Foreign Service assignments, Johann has worked on

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CIVIL SOCIETY MEETING AT THE FORUM FOR THE FUTURE

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Much of the debate on the margins has focused on how to revitalize the process rather than dwelling on any apparent shortcomings. Participants did their best to leave behind disagreements and focus on core issues by making joint diagnosis, proposing solutions and recommending work plans associated with mechanism and timeframe. The increased number of CSO representatives (60) in the FFF was very much appreciated by CSOs but the absence of

interaction with governments was an area of concern. The general consensus during the meeting was that the most urgent reform priorities in the region are freedom of expression, independence of the judiciary and freedom of organization, including the legal environment protecting NGOs. CSO participants look forward to continuing their cooperation with the G8 during Italy's upcoming Presidency and its co-chairmanship (with Morocco) to continue organizational improvements for the 2009 FFF.



Hoda El Khatib from Lebanon addressing the Forum.

WELCOME TO THE NEWEST MEPI TEAM MEMBERS!

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North Korea's nuclear program and on security assistance for Taiwan, and was Vice-Consul in Georgetown, Guyana. In his last assignment, Johann was Chief of the Press Office at the US Embassy in Baghdad, Iraq.

Born in the port city of Charleston, South Carolina, on the southeast coast of the United States, Johann received his Bachelor's in International Studies from the University of South Carolina following study abroad programs in England and France. He earned a Master's in International Business Studies from the same university via study and internship programs in France and Germany. Johann is joined in Tunis by his wife, Chantal Zammar Schmonsees, born and raised in Beirut, Lebanon.

Kirk Samson is the Deputy Director of the MEPI regional office in Tunis, Tunisia. He most recently worked in Norway as a political officer with responsibility for human

rights and religious freedom issues, as well as outreach programs such as educational cooperation and Fulbright. Kirk previously served as economic officer and vice consul in Prague, the Czech Republic and spent four years in Europe as an attorney for the U.S. Air Force, working on contract and international law issues.



He has a law degree from the University of Wisconsin and a Master's degree in Scandinavian Studies from the University of Minnesota. He is married with one very active thirteen month old son.

Shirin Baskey is the new MEPI Coordinator in the US Consulate in Jerusalem. She and her husband recently moved to Jerusalem from Cairo, Egypt, where she worked as an international development consultant with a variety of private companies & NGOs. Shirin previously worked for Chemonics International in Washington DC and as a Policy Analyst for the Congressional Research Service in the Library of Congress. She has a Bachelor's degree in comparative religion & history from Trinity University and a Master's degree in public policy from American University. Shirin has spent nine years living in the Middle East, and hopes one day to become fully conversant in Arabic.

In Beirut, **Arabella Barbir Bohsali** joins us as the MEPI Program Management Specialist at the US Embassy in Lebanon. Arabella holds a B.A. in Political Studies and a Master's degree in International Relations from the

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“the most urgent reform priorities in the region are freedom of expression, independence of the judiciary and freedom of organization...”



Shirin Baskey, the new MEPI Coordinator in Jerusalem

NEW LEBANON CHAPTER OF MEPI ALUMNI

A July 10 reception at Le Royal Hotel in Dbayeh officially launched the Lebanon chapter of the MEPI Alumni Network. Through its focus areas and many programs, MEPI empowered and united a diverse group of Lebanese community leaders, as was evident during this first gathering of MEPI Alumni. The alumni, showing their enthusiasm and discussing ways to support the network, included young entrepreneurs, businessmen and women, lawyers, civil society activists, and students. In the midst of a tense Lebanese political situation, MEPI alumni proved their commitment to democratic practices by electing a Steering Committee (SC) in late January. The Steering Committee defined the MEPI Alumni Network in Lebanon as follows:

The MEPI Alumni-Lebanon Chapter is a network of positive thinkers and advocates of change. We aim to create public value for the Lebanese society within four pillars: Democracy, Education, Economics and Women's Empowerment. We implement activities that include drafting policy recommendations, contributing to human development, enhancing citizenship and promoting the rule of law. Our diverse backgrounds, openness to dialogue, outreach and inherent synergy are the landmarks of our success. Our vision of success is empowered MEPI Alumni, a network that has become a hub for Lebanese civil society, as well as a think tank, that will influence policy and improve the lives of individuals.

The definition of the MEPI Alumni Network was published in the first issue of Lebanon's MEPI Alumni Newsletter. The second newsletter focused on mentorship. The

elected Steering Committee established five working committees – Public Relations & Outreach, Youth & Education, Policy Studies, Women's Issues and Economics – to encourage participation in Network activities. Since January, MEPI alumni have become increasingly active.

The Steering Committee's ambitious goals are being met by regular town hall meetings with members to update them on the committees' activities. On September 26, the Steering Committee organized an iftar where committee representatives discussed their progress, encouraged involvement, and welcomed new alumni to the Network. The Network's latest activities featured a "Negotiations Gimmicks" training seminar. The Women's Issues Committee hosted the Corporate Ambassadors in collaboration with the Young Women Leaders at the Lebanese American University for a panel discussion about the latest in strategic development. Accountability in the Lebanese political system and taxation incentives to encourage commercial entities' donations to civil society organizations are the main focus of the Policy Studies Committee, the Public Relations & Outreach committee is planning "MEPI Excellence Awards for Civil Society Activities." These awards will honor projects implemented by Lebanese non-governmental organizations.

MEPI Alumni in Lebanon are firmly committed to empowering and improving civil society. They believe that effective reform and change should come from Lebanese working for their own communities.

- Nadine Saba in Beirut

"Our diverse backgrounds, openness to dialogue, outreach and inherent synergy are the landmarks of our success. Our vision of success is empowered MEPI Alumni, a network that has become a hub for Lebanese civil society, as well as a think tank, that will influence policy and improve the lives of individuals."



Launching Reception for the newest MEPI Alumni

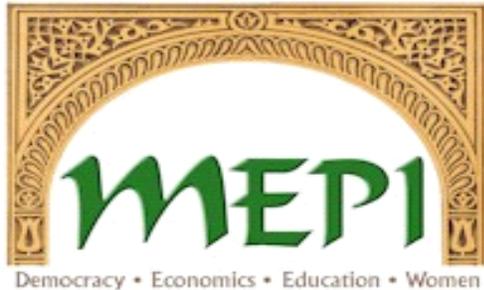
Please visit our website!

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MEPI TEAM ADDITIONS CONTINUED

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American University of Beirut (AUB). She started her career by working at 'Banque Nationale de Paris Intercontinentale' (BNPI) for a year, and then she has worked at the Japanese Embassy in Beirut for the last 9 years. As part of her networking activities, she has been elected last year at the International Council of the Worldwide AUB Alumni Association.

In Rabat, **Jimmy Mauldin** arrived at the Embassy in July 2008 and is the new MEPI Coordinator. He is a second tour foreign service officer. Jimmy, his wife, and their four children served their first tour with the U.S. State Department in Chennai, India where he worked as a Vice-Consul in the Non-Immigrant Visa section. Prior to joining the State Department in 2005, Jimmy lived in Ghana, West Africa for eight years where he was the administrator of an NGO hospital in the rural north. He has a Bachelor's and Master's Degree in Business Administration from The University of Alabama.

A NOTE ON TRANSLATIONS

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Due to a staffing gap, we are producing this newsletter edition in English only. We hope to have an Arabic language version of next month's newsletter, and we welcome your comments on the utility of producing a French version.

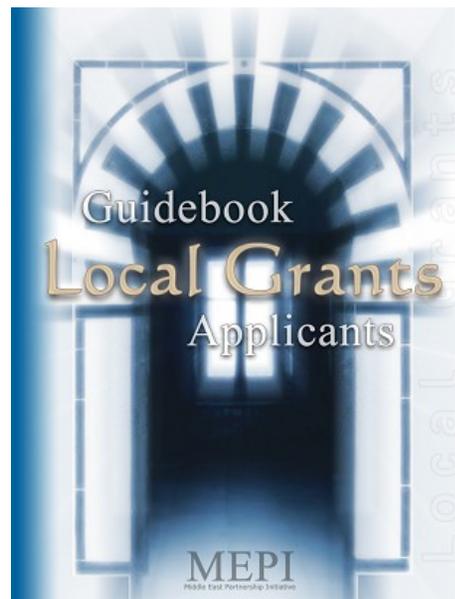
Please contact us with feedback about translations or comments regarding the newsletter content at:
mepi-medregion@state.gov.

Call for submissions

We welcome submissions from all MEPI partners on their success stories for use in future articles! Short articles with photos are always appreciated.

What is the MEPI Regional Office?

The [Tunis RO](#) is located in Tunisia and covers the Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt, as well as Lebanon, Israel, and West Bank/Gaza. The Regional Office in Tunis serves as liaison between MEPI's central office in Washington, DC, and the U.S. Embassies located in the region, to facilitate their work with MEPI's partners, program participants, and other reformers at the civil society or "grassroots" level.



SUBMIT YOUR GRANT APPLICATIONS NOW!

Funding is available now for local grants. Contact your country's US Embassy MEPI Committee and see the guidebook available on our [website](#) for step-by-step instructions in English, Arabic, or French! *Become a partner for reform.*