

## MEPI MEDREGION UPDATE

## MEDREGION UPDATE

## PREPARING FOR THE NEXT FORUM FOR THE FUTURE



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MEPI IN 2009—  
APPLY FOR A  
GRANT!

- The Tunis Regional Office has almost \$2 million to support grants in the region.
- Details on how to apply can be found on page two or with your local MEPI committee.
- Make this the year to become involved with your community...and MEPI activities!

The Moroccan government, in coordination with the holder of the current G8 Presidency, Italy, will host and chair the 2009 Forum for the Future (FfF). In late January, governmental and civil society (CS) attendees meet in Amman, Jordan to plan for the 2009 event.

More than thirty representatives of CS organizations throughout the Middle East and North Africa (see *photo at right*) attended the meeting. In addition to the FfF in Morocco, there will also be a sixth parallel meeting, to reinforce the CS network throughout the broader Middle East and North Africa.



The January meeting in Jordan was organized by the Foundation for the Future in cooperation with the Yemen based Human Rights Information and

Training Center and with the support of the Middle East Partnership Initiative.

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## WELCOME TO OUR NEWEST MEPI COLLEAGUES

The MEPI Regional Office is very pleased to welcome two new colleagues to the team: Khaoula Touati joins us at the Regional Office in Tunis as our new Information Assistant and Eliane Fersan is the new MEPI Alumni Network Coordinator in Beirut, Lebanon. Their biographic information is below, and we wish them both a warm welcome to MEPI !

In 2004, Khaoula Touati was awarded the Partnership for Learning Undergraduate Studies (PLUS) scholarship to pursue her undergraduate studies in the United States of America. She earned a Bachelor's degree in Broadcast Journalism with focus on Broadcast news from the University of Nebraska at Omaha.

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Khaoula Touati is the new RO Information Assistant.

## NEW MEPI COLLEAGUES (CONTINUED)

### (Continued from the front page)

Khaoula started her career by working at the Educational Channel at Omaha for 18 months.

Khaoula worked as a journalist for the Tunisian Radio and Television Establishment. In 2007 she was awarded the British Chevening scholarship to pursue her postgraduate studies at the University of Leeds in England where she earned her Master's degree in Political Communication.

Eliane Fersan (pictured right), the new MEPI Alumni Network Coordinator in Beirut, holds a Masters degree in history (focus on migration), and BAs in history and archeology. In addition to her teaching experience both at the high school and university level, she has over 7 years of experience in NGO development,



project and event management as she held several executive positions with regional and international NGOs and companies. She recently completed a consultancy contract with the United Nations Population Fund regional communication and media office for the Arab States, Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

Knowledgeable in the fields of protocol and diplomacy, Ms. Fersan prepared advocacy campaigns for a participatory democracy prototype in the Middle East and is now helping several local authorities develop this model. Active with several civil society associations, Eliane is member of the HR and PR committees of the Lebanese Volunteers Association, Board member of the Syria League Cultural Center and member of the Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections.

Ms. Fersan is also a researcher in the fields of history, migration, democracy and identity issues. Author of several articles and publications, she is editor in chief of the foreign section of her town's bulletin. She is fluent in English, French and Arabic and has a working knowledge of Spanish.

## PREPARING FOR THE NEXT FORUM FOR THE FUTURE

### (Continued from the front page)

Participants endorsed the Rome coordination meeting proposals, which focus future discussions on three subject areas or 'baskets': Political reforms, Economic Reforms and Human Development.

The first basket will be addressed in a Bahrain or Qatar workshop scheduled for May 2009 and will focus on the themes of political pluralism, the role of political parties, and the "Partnership Document", which provides a framework for the relationship between governments and NGOs.

An additional workshop will be held in Lebanon or Jordan to address the second basket that will focus on Corporate

Civic responsibility, transparency and role of the private sector.

A final workshop will be held in Morocco or Algeria and will cover the third basket, which aims at developing the themes of women's empowerment in public life, education, citizenship and pluralism.

The Amman, Jordan meeting reaffirmed the need to keep and strengthen the CS parallel meeting and to provide all necessary technical support to "Organisation Marocaine des Droits de l'Homme", the host organization of the upcoming CS parallel meeting.

In Amman, representatives also discussed ways in which to improve the process for selecting participants to represent civil society in the FFF, how to

empower the CS steering committee and how best to write and issue a report on the "State of Democracy".

Participants stressed the importance of achieving genuine reform in the course of supporting democracy and human rights throughout the region. They emphasized their commitment to establish viable partnerships among civil society and government as well as with the private sector.

Wahid Labidi participated in the Amman meeting from the Tunis Regional Office, and will continue to provide reporting through the year on items of interest to Civil Society through the region. If you have suggestions for future topics, please let Wahid know via email at: [labidiw@state.gov](mailto:labidiw@state.gov)

## TUNISIAN LBPF ALUMNI REFLECTS ON HER EXPERIENCE

By Sabrine El Makkes

There was a time during my Legal and Business Fellowship (LBFP) experience when I considered having achieved in five months what I used to achieve in five years. Five months fully packed with self-discovery and discovery of a new culture and ways of living and working, five months of going beyond my limits, looking broader and thinking globally. These five months were full of shining stars, from the core LBFP Cohort, to Amideast, the Wharton school, Penn Law staff and professors, and finally the Cisco family....the company where I interned.

The Cisco family has something unique: it is extremely broad, diverse and as the slogan says, it is “a human network”, where every employee brings his own contribution to the team. This sense of collaboration is reflected everywhere in the company culture.

Cisco’s Middle East Inclusion & Diversity Employee Resource Group organizes different events throughout the year and invites different stakeholders to take part and contribute to them. Last summer, Cisco invited the MEPI-LBFP fellows and interns from the Lebanon Partnership Program to open a “Window into the Middle East” by triggering its Cisco audience’s curiosity with questions like “Do you ever wonder about what it is like to live in Middle East” and “What it is like for a woman to live in the Middle East?”

This was an appealing event for the Cisco community and a great opportunity for us fellow interns to outrun the stereotypes, bridge the gaps and be the ambassadors of our countries and region.

I was thrilled for this unique opportunity to connect with my fellow interns and with Cisco family, as the event was broadcasted live on Cisco TV, and I considered it an honour as well, because I was the only Tunisian intern at San Jose Cisco Campus and along with a Tunisian Lawyer based at Cisco-Dubai, we were the only Tunisian women working in this huge multinational.



Above from left to right : MEPI interns Majda AL Ryami (Oman), Sabrine El Makkes (Tunisia), Dalia Adaweya (Jordan), and Hend AbdelAziz (Egypt).

On “D-day”, I was very excited to present my country, its historical, cultural and economic features, its Arabic and Islamic identities and the developments it witnessed since its independence, but at the same time very nervous as the audience was getting larger and the event was broadcast live. Fortunately, my presentation went well and after all presentations were brilliantly done, there was an open and lively Q&A session.

Based on everyone’s acknowledgment, this event was a success on all levels. We were congratulated and thanked for being spontaneous and passionate and at the same time giving the real image of who we are.

A week later, I was taking the light rail with my fellow intern, from Egypt, when a passenger she apparently knew said hello to her then looked at me and all of sudden said: “Hi, you were from the Panel at Cisco’s Middle East presentation...? ...you are the lawyer from Tunisia...right?”

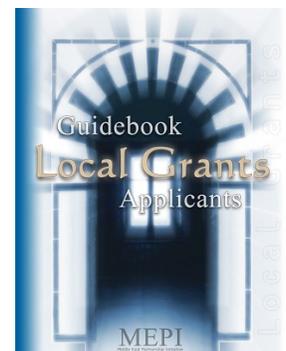
Shyly, I answered: “yes. Indeed...” he smiled and said: “You did great, I was very impressed and as soon as I went back to my cubicle I Googled your country... I would love to spend my holidays there soon...!”

I consider this gentleman’s acknowledgment as my modest success story...It is among the many stories that shaped my experience during my fellowship and which greatly influenced and still influence me since my return.\*

\* Item edited for brevity.

## SUBMIT YOUR GRANT APPLICATIONS NOW!

Funding is available now for Local Grants. Please 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.*



## MEPI GRANTEE 2AJ UNDER WAY WITH NEW PROJECT IN MOROCCO

Moroccan MEPI grantee Association Action Jeunesse (2AJ) reported on its first nation-wide meeting held in Casablanca in late December, 2008 in partnership with the Ministry of National Education in Morocco.

Together they launched “Al Mustaqbal” (Future) program, a new MEPI-funded program designed to increase political participation among Moroccan youth in high schools by training students in leadership skills and the basics of democracy.

The meeting was attended by more than 55 students from six Moroccan cities (Sala, Tangier, Fes, Marrakech, Asfi, and Casablanca) representing 12 associations and high schools in Morocco.

During the meeting organizers and participants stressed the importance of fostering a spirit of initiative and building leadership skills of students, highlighting the significance to create tools presenting the students’ participation as a main factor in the development of school life.

The project puts an emphasis on treating political subjects with youth such as democracy, elections and citizenship. Participants pledged to launch the Al Mustaqbal Club, which is consid-

ered to be the most prominent activity in the Al Mustaqbal program’s agenda.

This project also includes holding school elections, in which electoral campaigns are conducted and student councils chosen, so that participating students can practice what they’ve learned in a real-world setting, while raising student interest in and understanding of other school activities. In this same context, visits to local cities councils are organized so that students could examine how a similarly-elected organization work

U.S. Chargé d’Affaires Robert P. Jackson spoke highly of 2AJ’s activities, as they have run several successful MEPI grants in the last two years. Jackson noted that “The elections held last year by 2AJ at a local high school were a tremendous success and enjoyed the enthusiastic participation of the students. We have high hopes for bringing this program to six cities nationwide where students will have the opportunity to learn about and participate in the fundamentals of running an electoral campaign and participating in the political process”.



LEFT: participants at the launching of the Al Mustaqbal program in Morocco.

