

## Joint Statement by President Obama and Prime Minister Mehdi Jomaa of Tunisia April 4, 2014

In their meeting today at the White House, President Obama and Prime Minister Jomaa reaffirmed the strategic partnership between the United States and Tunisia. The two leaders discussed the historic progress made in Tunisia as its political and civil society leaders have worked together to advance Tunisia's democratic transition and secure a more peaceful and prosperous future for Tunisia. The two leaders also emphasized their commitment to advancing our shared interests in a secure, stable, and prosperous Maghreb, Africa, and Middle East and to furthering the strong friendship between the peoples of the United States and Tunisia.

### *Support for Tunisia's Historic Democratic Transition:*

Prime Minister Jomaa briefed President Obama on recent developments in Tunisia's transition to democracy, including the ratification of the new Tunisian Constitution on January 26, 2014, that enshrines equality between women and men. He also noted the establishment of the Independent Elections Commission and the progress that the National Constituent Assembly has made towards finalizing an elections law. Prime Minister Jomaa reiterated the Tunisian government's intention to give all necessary support to ensure the holding of free, fair, and transparent parliamentary and presidential elections before the end of 2014. The President commended the compromises made by all of Tunisia's political parties to secure the country's democratic progress and to set out a pathway towards elections later this year. He lauded Tunisia's efforts to advance its democracy through the adoption of a progressive constitution that protects the rights of all its citizens. The President welcomed Tunisia's efforts to hold elections this year and noted that the United States is prepared to provide additional assistance for the elections and to participate in the delegation of interna-

tional election observers. Since the revolution began over three years ago, Tunisia has been a model in the region and beyond.

### *Advancing Economic Cooperation and Development:*

The two leaders emphasized that the United States and Tunisia are dedicated to working together to promote economic development and business opportunities in Tunisia. The Prime Minister briefed the President on steps his government is taking to implement economic reforms, keep on track with its International Monetary Fund program, and improve Tunisia's prospects for long-term economic stability. To respond to Tunisia's near-term economic challenges and support the Prime Minister's reform agenda, the President announced the Administration's intent to provide a second loan guarantee for \$500 million to facilitate Tunisia's access to international capital markets.

The United States and Tunisia seek to broaden and deepen bilateral trade and business relations. To that end, the bilateral Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (TI-FA) Council will next meet on June 16, 2014 in Tunis. The TIFA Council plans to address specific issues aimed at facilitating trade and investment, including in the areas of market access, entrepreneurship, information and communication technology services, and intellectual property. It also expects to explore additional ideas for building a more robust bilateral trade and investment relationship and for liberalizing the exchange of goods and services.

Recognizing the central role of the private sector in creating economic growth, the United States and Tunisia will organize a U.S.-Maghreb Entrepreneurship Conference this fall in Tunis that will bring a high-level U.S. business and government delegation to Tunisia.

*Educational and Cultural Cooperation:*

In keeping with the importance of people-to-people ties between Tunisia and the United States and of education for advancing long-term development, the United States has provided \$10 million through the Thomas Jefferson Scholarship program to support Tunisian students. The United States has requested from Congress an additional \$10 million to expand these opportunities to other deserving Tunisians. This effort builds on the long history of educational exchange under the U.S.-Tunisia Fulbright Program and other educational and cultural exchanges. Both leaders committed to strengthening ties and increasing mutual understanding between Tunisian and American youth and expanding the existing university linkage programs.

The Governments of Tunisia and the United States underscore their shared desire to enhance their cooperation by negotiating and concluding a new Science and Technology Agreement. Both sides stressed the economic, educational, and commercial benefits of expanded scientific and technological cooperation.

The President commended the Prime Minister for the support he expressed for Tunisia's participation in the J. Christopher Stevens Virtual Exchange Initiative and for his dedication to the values it seeks to promote by connecting youth from all different age groups in the Middle East and North Africa with youth in the United States through virtual exchange.

*Security and Counterterrorism Cooperation:*

The United States and Tunisia have a shared interest in increasing security cooperation to address common threats in Tunisia and across the region. The two leaders committed to advancing increased bilateral contacts between our governments regarding security and defense cooperation, counterterrorism programs, and security assistance. They look forward to continued progress in these areas at the meet-

ing of the Joint Military Commission to be held in Tunis in May 2014.

Broader cooperation on legal matters is a priority for both countries to help advance our security goals and to combat transnational crime. The leaders noted the progress made in negotiations on the Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty and committed to finalizing the treaty as soon as possible.

Prime Minister Jomaa expressed to President Obama Tunisia's deep and sincere regret for the September 14, 2012 attack against the U.S. Embassy and the American Cooperative School of Tunis. Prime Minister Jomaa stated that his government intends to do everything in its power to resolve remaining issues, including bringing to justice those involved in the attack. The Prime Minister emphasized the importance Tunisia places on the security of all diplomatic facilities in Tunisia and confirmed that Tunisia is continuing to provide all requested security assistance to U.S. Government facilities and personnel.

*Conclusion:*

The President and the Prime Minister closed the meeting by emphasizing their shared commitment to advancing ties between the United States and Tunisia. They welcomed the progress made during the inaugural session of the U.S.-Tunisia Strategic Dialogue led by Deputy Secretary of State William Burns and Foreign Minister Mongi Hamdi at the Department on April 3. They look forward to a future session of the U.S.-Tunisian Strategic Dialogue to be held in Tunis in 2015. Today's meeting between the two leaders demonstrates the depth and breadth of the partnership and friendship between the United States and Tunisia as well as our shared commitment to supporting Tunisia's historic democratic transition and its economic growth and security.

NOTE: An original was not available for verification of the content of this joint statement.