




TUNISIA NEWSLETTER

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TUNISIA-JAPAN



Tunisia participates in the 5th meeting of the Friends of Syria International Working Group on Sanctions (Tokyo, 30 November 2012)

The Friends of the Syrian People International Working Group on Sanctions held its fifth meeting in Tokyo on 29-30 November 2012. Japan, Morocco and EEAS (European External Action Service) co-chaired the meeting.

The Ambassador of Tunisia to Japan, H.E. Mr. Elyes Kasri, represented Tunisia at this meeting, which witnessed the participation of the representatives of 63 countries, as well as the League of Arab States, the Gulf Cooperation Council and the European Union.

Was also present the Syrian Economic Task Force, who attended on behalf of the National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces.

The meeting was convened as a part of efforts by the international community toward stopping the violence in Syria, and the discussion of the meeting focused on improving the effectiveness of the sanctions implemented by the international community.

A statement was adopted at the end of the meeting.

Tunisia takes part in the Fukushima Ministerial Conference on Nuclear Safety (December 15 - 17 2012)

H.E. Mr. Elyes Kasri, Ambassador of Tunisia to Japan, represented Tunisia at the Fukushima Ministerial Conference on Nuclear Safety, held from December 15 to 17 2012 at Koriyama City, Fukushima Prefecture, Japan.

Hosted jointly by the Japanese Government and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), this Ministerial Conference was attended by about 500 people including ministers and other officials from 120 countries and organizations.

The conference pledged to further enhance nuclear safety in light of the accident at the Fukushima nuclear power station that occurred in March 2011.

Tunisia, Japan seal 25-billion-Yen bond issue on "Samurai" market

17 December 2012

Tunisia and Japan signed on 17 December 2012 an agreement on a 25-billion-Yen debenture bond issued last December 14 by the Central Bank of Tunisia (BCT) in Japanese financial market "Samurai".

The 25-billion-Yen bond comes guaranteed by the Japanese Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC) in view of "a difficult environment in the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region, fueled by the political crisis in Egypt and the events of Siliiana in Tunisia," reads a communiqué released by the BCT.

Securities firms Mizuho and Nomura arranged the samurai bond issuance, which marks Tunisia's gradual return onto the international capital markets since the revolution.

The conditions of the bond are favorable due to the guarantee by the JBIC. The issued samurai bond has a 10-year maturity and an annual interest rate of 1.19%, which is among the lowest of all bonds issued by Tunisia since 1994, pointed out the BCT in the same communiqué.

Second 25-billion-yen bond to be issued soon

18 December 2012

A 25-billion-Yen debenture bond will be issued soon by the Tunisia's Central Bank (BCT) on the Japanese financial market "Samourai," announced Prime Minister Hamadi Jebali.

At the end of his meeting, on 18 December 2012 in Tunis, with BCT Governor Chedly Ayari and representative of Japan's Bank for International Co-operation Shigeto Hashiyana, Mr. Jebali said that the 25-billion-Yen bond issued by the BCT, on December 14, on the Samourai financial market, with the Japanese government's guarantee, has demonstrated Japan's preparedness to back up Tunisia at this particular juncture.

Mr. Ayari, for his part, pointed out that the bond issuance aims to bolster resources of the 2013 State budget, notably those dedicated to public investments.

He reminded that the bond issue, on "one of the markets whose access is the most difficult," has coincided with Tunisia's degraded rating to "BB+" by international Fitch Ratings agency.

The visit of the Governor of Tunisia Central Bank to Tokyo

Mr. Chedly Ayari, Governor of Tunisian Central Bank, visited Tokyo from 18 to 23 November 2012.

Mr. the Governor met during his visit with responsables from the Bank of Japan, JICA and JBIC.

Tunisia's Government aims to achieve Tunis 13th Yen denominated bond issue, known as "Samourai bond" on the Japanese market.

The Embassy organized a reception on the occasion of the visit of Mr. Ayari to Japan attended by Mr. Fumio Hoshi, COO and Senior Managing Officer of JBIC, Mr. Hideaki Domichi, Senior Vice-President of JICA, and other government officials and representatives of banking and financial sector.

PM Jebali visits the desalination project of underground water in Ben Guerdane

24 November 2012

Prime Minister Hamadi Jebali paid on 22-24 November 2012 a three-day visit to the Governorate of Medenine, accompanied by the Ministers of Equipment and Regional Development and the Secretary of State for Agriculture.

Among others activities undertaken during this visit, Mr. Jebali inspected, in Ben Guerdane, the desalination project of underground water whose works reached a furtherance stage of 76%, to be completed in May 2013, worth 20 million dinars under the shape of donations granted by the Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA) for a production capacity of 1,800 cubic meters a day.

PM Jebali got acquainted with the components of the project of improving the quality of Ben Guerdane water under achievement for an amount worth one million 795,000 dinars.

Inspecting the furtherance of the achievement of the industrial zone site, the Prime Minister listened to the claims of the attending citizens who called for speeding up achievement of this project.

Over 80 researchers take part in Tunisian-Japanese forum for quality improvement in food industries

20 November 2012

Works of the Tunisian-Japanese Forum on "Scientific Progress, Quality Improvement in Food Industries and Boosting Partnership for Sustainable Development" took place on 16-20 November 2012 in Hammamet, with the participation of more than 80 academics and researchers, including 40 Japanese experts from Tsukuba University.

This symposium has been using strong networks of Tunisia-Japan Symposium on Science, Society and Technology (TJASSST) since 2000.

The theme of this edition was "Food Quality & Science" and the scientific program included plenary sessions with invited speakers, selected oral presentations and papers in a poster format.

This meeting was jointly organized by the National Agronomic Institute of Tunisia, Agricultural Investment Promotion Agency (APIA), Arid Regions Institute, Center of Biotechnology of Borj Cedria, National Food Research Institute (Tunisia), National Agriculture and Food Research Organization (Japan), ARENA & CANMRE, University of Tsukuba (Japan).

The symposium was intended to serve as a platform for discussion on the latest developments in the area of Food Sciences, as well as for the dissemination and sharing of knowledge among the participants.

Japanese Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs takes part in the "Forum for the Future"

Mr. Kazuyuki Hamada, Japanese Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs, participated in the 9th Ministerial meeting BMENA (Broader Middle East and North Africa) entitled "Forum for the Future", which took place in Tunis on 11-13 December 2012.

On this occasion, Mr. Hamada had an exchange of views with the participants at the ministerial level of the Middle East, North Africa, G8 partners as well as representatives of international organizations and civil society organizations, on the political, economic and social situation in the region.

The Forum for the Future is a joint initiative of the countries of the BMENA region and the industrialized countries of the Group of Eight (G8).

Tunisia accepted, on the occasion of the 8th Session of the Forum (Kuwait, November 2011), to host the 9th Session of the Forum for the Future and to be its co-chair together with the U.S.A. who are chairing the G8 in 2012.

This year forum has three key themes: women's empowerment, economic governance and entrepreneurship, and freedom of expression and association.

POLITICS

Government priorities in 11 points

20 December 2012

Prime Minister Hamadi Jebali presented, on 20 December 2012, during Government's Declaration on the 2013 Finance and State Budget Bill, Government's priorities for the next transition stage.

Mr. Jebali stressed, on the occasion, that implementing this agenda requires consensus and mobilisation of all efforts.

Government's agenda includes the following:

- Hold free and transparent elections in the shortest time possible, to be monitored by the Independent Higher Authority for the Elections and under national and international observation.
- Restore stability and security, as they are vital conditions for development.
- Indemnify the victims.
- Respect general balances.
- Speed up job-creation process and fight against unemployment.
- Promote regional development.
- Fight against poverty.
- Control prices.
- Provide citizens with better services.
- Fight against corruption.
- Reinforce international relations.

Tunisia adopts law to establish election oversight body

12 December 2012

The National Constituent Assembly (NCA) adopted on 12 December 2012 the bill of the Independent Higher Authority of the Election, known by its French acronym ISIE.

The ISIE bill effectively establishes an election management body to oversee the forthcoming Tunisian legislative and presidential elections.

"The adoption of ISIE bill will send the right message to Tunisians. It is high time now to reassure the people about the election," said a NCA member affiliated with the ruling Ennahdha party.

Tunisia willing to draw inspiration from Portuguese experience in matters of democratic transition

11 December 2012

Tunisia is willing to draw inspiration from the Portuguese experience in matters of democratic transition since the Portuguese model has proved efficient with the passing years, affirmed National Constituent Assembly (NCA) Speaker Mustapha Ben Jaafar at the opening on 10 December 2012 in Tunis of a conference on the Portuguese experience in matters of democratic transition.

In his lecture, Former Portuguese President and UN High Representative for the Alliance of Civilisations Jorge Fernando Branco de Sampaio paid tribute to Tunisia which, he said, had managed to make great steps forward on the path of democratic transition, highlighting the similarities between the Revolution of Freedom and Dignity in Tunisia and the Carnation Revolution in Portugal in 1974.

The former Portuguese President gave an overview on the democratic transition process started in his country during the 1970s as well as the social and economic challenges. "The social and political tensions prevailing in Tunisia are quite normal in a transition period, just like in all the countries that lived through similar changes," he affirmed.

President Marzouki and Ennahdha Leader Ghannouchi receive Chatham House Prize in London

27 November 2012

President Moncef Marzouki and Ennahdha leader Rached Ghannouchi, joint winners of "Chatham House" prize, received on 26 November 2012 in London their prize at the Royal Institute of International Affairs.

The Chatham house prize is an annual award presented to the statesperson deemed by members of the Royal Institute of International Affairs at Chatam House to have

made the most significant contribution to the improvement of international relations in the previous year.

The prize was handed over to President Marzouki and Sheikh Rached Ghannouchi by Prince Andrew, Duke of York, at a ceremony attended by members of the Institute, politicians, academics, intellectuals and journalists.

" This prize rewards the two both recipients for their contribution to the success of Tunisia's democratic transition experience and their historic role in fighting against repression and dictatorship" Director of the Institute Robin Neblett said, adding that the coalition government experience represents, in many respects "a clear example of democratic practice in North Africa and the Middle East after the revolution."

A Ministerial Council devoted to the progress of works of drafting the new Investment Code

12 November 2012

The Head of Government Mr. Hamadi Jebali headed on 12 November 2012 at the Government Palace in El Kasbah a working session devoted to view the process of drafting the New Investment Code in the presence of the executive team in charge of its preparation.

The team consists of representatives of the concerned ministries as well as representatives of the private sector, National Bar Association, and the international financial institutions.

The Minister of Investment and International Cooperation Mr.Riadh Bettaieb declared that the session was an opportunity to discuss the outlines of the New Investment Code that will be a constitution for business and investment environment in Tunisia.

The minister emphasized on the fact that the New Investment Code will take into consideration the national priorities summed up by Mr. Bettaieb in four major themes as follows; strengthening the basis of regional development, the development of the human capital, giving a boost to employment, focusing on high value added tax (VAT), highlighting the importance of export and paying attention to the Tunisian institutions active in the investment sector abroad.

DIPLOMACY

PM receives a German parliamentary group

19 December 2012

Prime Minister Hamadi Jebali conferred, on 19 December 2012, with a German parliamentary delegation from Bundestag on progress of the democratic transition process in Tunisia and the Tunisian-German co-operation.

According to a prime ministry communiqué, Mr. Andreas Schockenhoff, deputy-chairman of the German Christian Democratic Union (CDU-CSU) parliamentary group stressed Government's will "to set up an environment that

rests on freedom of speech, culture of difference and pluralism."

Mr. Schockenhoff called, on the occasion, for "drawing up a constitution which meets Tunisians' expectations, without ideological or clannish dominance, holding legislative and presidential elections in due time, and establishing a climate favourable to elections."

President of Republic confers European Parliament President

19 December 2012

President Moncef Marzouki conferred, on 19 December 2012, with President of the European Parliament Martin Schulz who paid a two-day visit to Tunisia.

The talk centered on "means to strengthen relations between Tunisia and the European Union (EU) and hoist them to the level of effective partnership," the Presidency of the Republic reports.

Mr. Martin Schulz pointed out that the European Parliament is well aware of the challenges Tunisia faces in building up a democratic regime and creating constitutional institutions which will break with the past dictatorship.

The EU senior official also reasserted the EU Parliament's support to Tunisia in the socio-economic fields and development in the underprivileged inland regions, stressing that Tunisia "is able overcome the present transition stage and ensure its success."

President Marzouki emphasised the importance of reaching a better balance between the development stakes and the socio-economic challenges to be taken up, as well as to build up a real democratic political model.

Mr. Martin Schulz had also a talk with Prime Minister Hamadi Jebali and stated after the meeting: "This is my third meeting with the Prime Minister and we had a very open and frank exchange of views on the political situation in the country and the relations between Tunisia and the European union".

Mr. Martin Schulz met also the Speaker of the National Constituent Assembly Mustapha Ben Jaafar.

US support for democratic transition process in Tunisia

13 December 2012

U.S. Deputy Secretary of State William Burns, on 13 December 2012, reiterated the American support for the process of democratic transition in Tunisia, a presidency statement said.

Burns, who met President Moncef Marzouki in Carthage, expressed his country's confidence in the ability of Tunisians to lay down foundations of constitutional institutions and draft a constitution respecting human rights and winning consensus of all sides, said the same source.

The meeting also focused on ways to foster bilateral relations and mechanisms to deepen Tunisian-American economic co-operation.

International and regional issues including the situation in Syria, the effects of the Mali crisis and security challenges posed to countries of the region were also discussed, said the presidency.

Tunisian-Canadian will to launch direct flight to ease invest flow

13 December 2012

President Moncef Marzouki and Canadian Foreign Minister John Baird "expressed a pressing need to launch a direct flight between Tunisia and Canada to facilitate capital and investment flow."

Meeting on 13 December 2012 in Tunis, they also pointed the imperative to establish a new mode of bilateral relations that lays down the foundations of a real partnership in the economic, social, industrial and trade fields.

The meeting was an occasion to discuss the situation of the Tunisian expatriate community in Canada and the mechanisms to guide its members, notably in Quebec.

Mr. John Baird reasserted, during the meeting, Canada's support to the democratic transition process in Tunisia, adding that his country understands perfectly the special nature of the stage, notably in light of the social, economic and political challenges characterising the democratic transition period.

"Canada is confident in Tunisia's capacity to forge a successful democratic model in the region," he assured.

Co-operation between Tunisia and S. Korea in matters of governance and citizen's E-participation

13 December 2012

A co-operation agreement in matters of governance and e-participation of the citizen was signed on 13 December 2012 in Tunis, between Tunisia and South Korea.

This agreement was signed jointly by Governance and Anti-Corruption Fight Minister Abderrahmane Ladgham and Head of South Korea's Anti-Corruption and Civil Rights Defense Commission Jae-Young Park.

Tunisian-Qatari co-operation in financial sector

11 December 2012

Prime Minister Hamadi Jebali conferred, on 11 December 2012 in Tunis, with Sheikh Jassim Ben Hamad Al Thani, Board of Directors' President of the Qatar Investment Bank "Qinvest" and Qatar International Islamic Bank (International Islamic).

The meeting provided the occasion to examine means likely to boost co-operation between the Tunisian government and the Qatari banks, in the field of finance

and infrastructures... Thanks, notably, to the issue of Islamic Sukuks (treasury bonds,) denominated in Dollar.

The talk also turned on funding by the two Qatari banks, of a number of governmental projects, notably, in real estate in addition to the development of Islamic funding. Both sides evoked the possibility of the opening of "Qinvest" and Qatar Islamic Bank agencies in Tunisia to target the African markets.

Tunisia, Algeria boost ties

4 December 2012

Tunisian Prime Minister Hamadi Jebali wrapped up a two-day visit to Algiers on December 3rd, 2012, with a number of co-operation agreements.

The visit focused on the joint counter-terrorism effort, consular issues and the economy. Among the agreements, Tunisia and Algeria decided to form joint committees comprising of officials from the two countries' defense and interior ministries to focus on border security and development. Those committees will meet before the end of the year.

During the visit, PM Jebali was received by Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika and Prime Minister Abdelmalek Sellal. During the talks, the two sides reviewed ways to activate the Arab Maghreb Union and achieve Maghreb integration.

Tunisia's foreign minister Rafik Abdessalem accompanied PM Jebali and had talks with his Algerian counterpart Medelci.

FM Abdessalem talked about a bilateral agreement to confront security problems in Sahel, especially in Mali, where the situation still poses "a concern for Tunisia and Algeria alike".

"We've exchanged information to confront all dangers posed by criminal groups, especially terrorist groups, that threaten our countries' and region's stability and security," he added.

Indonesian Parliament Speaker visits Tunisia

01 December 2012

Indonesia's Parliament Speaker Ali Marzouki paid a visit to Tunisia from 28 November to 1 December 2012.

He asserted, on 1 December 2012, his country's commitment to encourage Indonesian businessmen to invest in Tunisia and increase the volume of trade exchanges between the two countries.

Following his meeting with President Mohamed Moncef Marzouki, he voiced regret that "the volume of commercial exchanges is far lower than what is hoped for."

A communiqué of the Presidency of the Republic reports that the speaker of the Indonesian parliament said that he reviewed with Mr. Moncef Marzouki means to boost bilateral co-operation, particularly in the economic and higher education areas.

In this connection, the two sides agreed to encourage scientific and university exchanges and to ease studies procedures for Tunisian and Indonesian students in both countries.

Indonesia's Parliament Speaker had also a meeting with Prime Minister Hamadi Jebali, on 29 November 2012, which was an occasion to discuss issues of mutual interest as well as regional files, notably the Palestinian cause.

President Marzouki congratulates Abbas on Palestine's upgrade to UN Observer Status

30 November 2012

President Moncef Marzouki congratulated Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas on Palestine's upgrade to the United Nations non-member Observer Status.

During a telephone conversation with the Palestinian leader, President Marzouki described "this gain" as a "historical step" allowing to remedy injustice and free the Palestinian people from the oppression endured since the Nakba (Arab-Israeli War 1948).

It also reflects, he said, the international solidarity with the rights of the Palestinian people and their just cause".

Mr. Marzouki reiterated Tunisia's continuous support for the Palestinian people until they recover their legitimate rights and establish their State with Al-Quds as capital.

President Mahmoud Abbas paid tribute to Tunisia for its "historical support" to the Palestinian cause and to Palestine's bid to this status and renewed the invitation to President Marzouki to visit the Palestinian territories.

Tunisia starts process of EU 'advanced partner' status

22 November 2012

Tunisia started the process of privileged partner of the European Union (EU). At the 9th EU-Tunisia Association Council session held on November 19th, 2012 in Brussels, Tunisia and the EU both agreed on the terms leading to a Privileged Partnership.

The two parties signed on that occasion a new Action Plan, delineating bilateral cooperation in the areas of scientific research, higher education, social affairs, and finance for the period between 2013 and 2017, stated a press release from the Tunisian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The EU's continuing support for Tunisia's economic recovery and democratic transition was also included in the framework of November 19th agreement.

The 27-member bloc will provide financial, technical and advisory support for these comprehensive reforms, Minister of Investment and International Cooperation Riadh Bettaieb said. It will later be capped with signing "a free exchange agreement" as a basis for privileged partnership that would enable Tunisia to integrate both economically and socially in the EU, he added.

The EU has boosted its financial support for Tunisia to about 220 million Euros this year, but Tunisia hopes to see this assistance doubled to 400 million Euros next year, according to Minister Bettaieb.

For its part, the European side expressed hope about launching agricultural trade liberalisation talks, as well as negotiations about the liberalisation of air transport in order to revitalise Tunisia's tourist sector.

Cypriot Foreign Minister Erato Kozakou-Markoulli, whose country currently holds the rotating EU presidency, underlined that Tunisia needs to consolidate the state of law, protect human rights and basic freedoms, and give civil society its due standing.

BUSINESS & ECONOMY

Forceful comeback of Accor in Tunisia

18 December 2012

French Accor hotel trade's President Gerard Pelisson announced, during his talk with President Moncef Marzouki, on Tuesday, that his group is making a strong comeback to Tunisia to invest in the country.

According to a communiqué released by the Presidency of the Republic, Mr. Pelisson announced that Accor is opening two hotels in Tunis, Novotel and Ibis.

He pointed out that the group is planning to strengthen its presence in Tunisia, a country which remains a privileged destination despite challenges of the present transition stage.

Germany Pledges to Convert Local Debt Into Investment in Disadvantaged Regions

18 December 2012

Germany pledged to convert 30 million Euros of Tunisian debt into investment in projects for most disadvantaged interior regions, Foreign Minister Rafik Abdesslem said after meeting, on 18 December 2012, with a German parliamentary delegation.

Political development in Tunisia, security and progress of Tunisian-German development projects were discussed at the meeting, said Abdesslem.

European 107-million-euro grant to Tunisia

18 December 2012

The European Union has granted Tunisian 107 million Euros (214 million dinars), in donation.

These funds, which are accompanied by two loans from the World Bank and the African Development Bank (each worth 500 million dollars), are paid into the recovery support program

This exceptional assistance in its amount allows the government to balance the public accounts in the year 2012 and helps to cushion the negative effects of the international crisis on the Tunisian economy and the instability that still exists in the country.

This program supports reforms undertaken by the government to revive the economy and establish democratic institutions and rule of law.

The reforms target particular regions and social groups particularly those disadvantaged.

Measures also aim to improve the business environment and the competitiveness of the Tunisian economy, by promoting public-private partnerships as an example.

In terms of regional development, measures have already been taken to increase the financial capacity of municipalities through amendments to local taxation of largest and most profitable companies.

Dialogue on reforms and European support also affect aspects of good governance: transparency of public management, establishment of an independent judiciary and fight against corruption.

The program involves civil society organizations, in both preparation and implementation phases.

Employment strategy targets 9% unemployment rate in 2017

17 December 2012

The new Strategy for Employment aims to achieve an unemployment rate of about 9% in 2017, against 17% now, Abdelwaheb Maater, Minister of Employment declared on 17 December 2012.

According to the minister, the new model for employment, which breaks with the job design in the old development scheme, determines the responsibilities of departments for the promotion of employment.

"If we keep the old development model whose inability to absorb new annual job applications has been demonstrated, we will have 1.5 million unemployed in 2017 as production sectors rely primarily on cheap labor."

He said the State has projects and programs in the field of renewable energies, which have high employment potential, particularly in the areas of Tataouine, Gabes and Kebili.

Number of tourists up 22% compared to 2011

The number of tourists, who visited Tunisia during the first 11 months of the current year, reached 5,441,683 against 4,456,200 during the same period of 2011, and 6,487,223, in the same period of 2010, up 22% compared to last year and down 16% compared to 2010.

Tourism earnings reached 2.9 billion dinars during the first 11 months of 2012, compared with 3.2 billion dinars in the same period of 2010 and 2.2 billion dinars in 2011, posting an increase of 31% compared to 2011 and a decrease of 10% compared to 2010.

A round table of the Davos Forum held in Tunis

7 December 2012

A round table of the Davos World Economic Forum was held in Tunis on December 6th, 2012, on the theme «Advancing Tunisia's Economic Transition.»

The meeting, which was attended by several internationally and nationally famous figures, brought together experts, academics and businessmen from Tunisia, Europe and others from Asian and American countries.

The aim of the event was to inform economic policy makers in the world on the socio-economic reality in Tunisia and the challenges the country is facing.

It also aimed to raise awareness of the experience of democratic transition in Tunisia and to give an idea about the business climate and investment opportunities offered by the country.

Four main themes were discussed in the context of this meeting: "Strengthening competitiveness in the transition period," "The need to create jobs and to tap the potential of young people", "The risks to ensure investments in the democratic transition "and "Building institutions for effective governance and a renewed social contract".

Tunisia: significant increase in guest workers abroad

7 December 2012

The Tunisian Agency for Technical Cooperation (ATCT) has ensured the recruitment of 2,663 Tunisian guest workers abroad, to November 30, 2012, including 270 primo job seekers, up 36.1% compared to the same period of 2011.

These recruitments have involved the education and teaching sectors with 1,424 recruited or 53.47%, the health sector with 556 recruited among doctors and paramedics and business and marketing with 244 enrolled.

Arab countries remain in first place in terms of recruitment of Tunisian skills with 83%, followed by European, African and international and regional organizations with 17% of new hires.

ATCT has recorded an increase in the recruitment of Tunisian skills abroad. Indeed 71 recruitment boards travelled to Tunisia to conduct interviews with Tunisian candidates and to learn about human resources available, i.e. 75% increase in the total number of foreign delegations who came to the Agency in 2011.

36 Tunisian experts also conducted technical assistance missions in favor of Arab and African countries, within the framework of bilateral or triangular cooperation. This assistance has affected the areas of port management and quality for the benefit of the Sultanate of Oman and ophthalmology for the benefit of UAE, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Guinea, and Africa South.

It should be noted that the total number of guest workers seconded to the ATCT and working abroad totaled 12,808 Tunisian experts and employees.

EBRD office in Tunis to serve development of inland and underprivileged areas, EBRD Chairman

4 December 2012

"Scheduled for February 2013, opening of an office of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) in Tunis will undoubtedly contribute to energising the co-operation mechanisms between Tunisia and the EBRD," said, on 4 December 2012, chairman of the Bank Suma Chakrabarti, who visited Tunisia on 4-5 December, leading an important delegation of the bank.

During his meeting with President Moncef Marzouki in Carthage, he also specified that the office will strengthen partnership with the private sector and stimulate creation of development projects in the inland and underprivileged areas of the country.

A communiqué from the Presidency of the Republic reports that the meeting was an opportunity to look at means to bolster Tunisia-EBRD economic and social co-operation. It also helped focus on means to narrow regional disparities and solve the development problems confronting Tunisia at this transition stage.

Means to step up European investments in Tunisia looked at

29 November 2012

President Moncef Marzouki received, on 28 November 2012, European Commission Vice-President in charge of Industry and Entrepreneurship Antonio Tajani.

The meeting turned on means to develop economic co-operation and step up European investments in Tunisia.

The European official who was accompanied by a businessmen delegation, said that the meeting had been "very fruitful," specifying that it had been an occasion to look at prospects to step up investments and trade exchanges between the two sides in this stage.

Mr. Tajani also pointed out that President Marzouki had extended to the delegation a "reassuring message" on the democratic transition experience in Tunisia, which would incite, he affirmed, European businessmen to "re-invest heavily in Tunisia".

Tunisia could become a model of democratic transition in the region, Mr. Tajani estimated.

USAID to fund businesses upgrading

28 November 2012

American agency USAID has launched a new project to support the upgrading of Tunisian companies.

To improve the skills and competitiveness of enterprises, this project offers to make the diagnosis of businesses and difficulties they face to expand and export, and the training needs of their workforce and employability of jobless young graduates.

The project focuses on specific sectors: ICT, textiles, food processing, tourism, automotive components, transportation...

The agency's experts are planning to hold a meeting with interested businesses at the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Sfax.

The agency funds diagnoses of selected companies and if necessary finances up to 80% of the cost of training.

World Bank approves \$500 million to accelerate Tunisia's economic recovery, pave way for more inclusive growth

27 November 2012

The World Bank approved on 27 November 2012 a US\$500 million loan to Tunisia that continues WB support for key reforms as the government manages the country's political transition. The "Governance, Opportunity, and Jobs Development Policy Loan" also helps pave the way for stronger economic growth and job creation over the medium term.

In June 2011, in the immediate aftermath of the revolution, the WB approved a loan to Tunisia to support the then-transition government as it put in place critical changes such as access to information and liberalization of the internet to signal a sharp departure from the past. The

new loan builds on those achievements and supports Tunisia's further reform efforts.

"The agreement signed today sends a clear signal about the historic changes underway in Tunisia," said Inger Andersen, Vice President for Middle East and North Africa at the WB. "The reforms which this financing supports will help Tunisia improve employment opportunities while ensuring better social services and more transparent government. These are the key demands of citizens across Tunisia."

The new loan aims to accelerate Tunisia's economic recovery by providing quick-disbursing assistance for reforms designed to encourage fair and sustained growth for every segment of society.

The reform program focuses on four important areas:

- improving the business environment by removing red tape, reducing discretion and increasing transparency for investments;
- strengthening financial sector stability through strategic audits and improved prudential regulations;
- reforming key social services, including better managing job-entry programs for young people, and certification and accreditation for higher education and health sector institutions and staff; and
- advancing transparency through improved public access to information and more transparent budget preparation and reporting.

Tunisia to sign IMF stand-by arrangement worth \$1.1 billion

19 December 2012

Tunisia is preparing for the signing, early next year, of an International Monetary Fund (IMF) stand-by arrangement worth \$1.1 billion, said, on 19 December 2012, Minister in charge of Economic and Social Files Ridha Saidi.

Cabinet meeting, held on 19 December under Prime Minister Hamadi Jebali's chairmanship, decided to set up a technical ministerial committee to be tasked with identifying the provisions of this accord.

This committee will determine the procedures and details pertaining to this agreement to be submitted for approval by the next Cabinet meeting. Tunisia's application will be forwarded to the IMF Executive Board by early 2013.

Mr. Saidi pointed out that the sought-after aim of this move is to help Tunisia benefit from resources of the IMF which requires that Government carries out economic, financial and monetary reforms.

The State is also required to keep the economy's general balances under control, particularly the budget deficit.

Governor of Tunisia's Central Bank Chedly Ayari explained, during the Cabinet meeting, that "the IMF arrangement will provide the Tunisian economy with valuable financial resources at advantageous rates."

"The agreement with the IMF will also offer the advantage of swiftly responding to the country's urgent needs in foreign funding," he added.

Mr. Ayari further elaborated that signing such an arrangement with the IMF, in the present situation, will also serve to reassure the markets and investors about the Tunisian economy's prospects and solidity, and about credibility of the Tunisian financial scene.

CULTURE

President Marzouki chairs opening of 45th International Sahara Festival in Douz

22 December 2012

President Mohamed Moncef Marzouki chaired on 22 December 2012 the opening of the 45th International Festival of the Sahara which drew large crowds.

The opening ceremony featured folkloric dance shows performed by popular art groups of Tunisia, Egypt, Algeria and Libya.

Also on the programme of the festival, scenes from traditional weddings, traditional music and dancing, poetry readings, nomadic caravans, hunting with sloughi dogs, camel fights and camel races.

The Sahara Festival represents a four-day annual celebration of traditional desert culture.

Members of Scientific Council of "Beit al-Hikma" take office

1 December 2012

Members of the Scientific Council of the Tunisian Academy of Science, Letters and Arts "Beit al-Hikma" took office, on 1 December 2012, at a ceremony held in the seat of the Academy in Carthage, in the presence of

President Moncef Marzouki, National Constituent Assembly Speaker Mustapha Ben Jaafar and Prime Minister Hamadi Jebali. The ceremony was also attended by several Ministers and Ambassadors and a host of researchers and culture people.

In his address, Dr. Hichem Djait, President of Beit al-Hikma said the scientific council of the academy was established thirty years ago but was effectively implemented only after the Revolution thanks to a renewed vision of the future of knowledge and culture.

He said the message of Beit al-Hikma consists, particularly, in encouraging the spirit of research and disseminating the values of knowledge in society to contribute to Tunisia's radiation. He announced the creation of the Beit al-Hikma prize in early 2013. This prize will be awarded to prominent literary, scientific and artistic works, he said.

Mr. Moncef Marzouki called on politicians not to marginalise culture. He also said the Beit al-Hikma is a pillar of cultural construction in a context marked by profound changes.

For his part, Mr. Mustapha Ben Jaafar underlined that the scientific council of Beit al-Hikma should help make this institution a beacon of knowledge, citing, in particular, the literary debate, the development of dictionaries and encyclopedia and translation of works.

In his address, Mr. Hamadi Jebali highlighted the huge challenges posed at the economic, social and cultural levels and which require giving a fresh impetus to knowledge and rehabilitating the place of academics in the Tunisian society. He added that Beit al-Hikma which includes in its composition elite from the fields of education and culture will certainly contribute to the emergence of a renaissance free from any domination.

Mr. Jebali said the Government plans to create an institution called "Ibn Khaldun Centre of Philosophical and Social Researches". He also announced the Government's will to create institutions tasked with publishing and distributing works of scientists and creators and the creation of 25 prizes named after Tunisian scholars, writers and artists, covering the areas of natural science and mathematics, humanities, Islamic science, letters and arts.

CIVIL SOCIETY

Volunteers honored for a year of vital service in Tunisia

10 December 2012

The Tunisian Red Crescent celebrated along with the rest of international organizations the International Volunteer Day with the theme of promoting safer and easier volunteering in coordination with the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and the International Committee for the Red Cross.

On this occasion, the Tunisian Red Crescent organized a campaign from December 5 till December 9, 2012 in Tunisia. The campaign included many activities with the purpose of defining and promoting volunteering, recruiting volunteers and acknowledge their efforts alongside other promotional campaigns.

The Red Cross Red Crescent Movement is the biggest volunteer-based humanitarian movement in the world, and the Tunisian Red Crescent, as part of this movement and a supporter of public authorities, derives its power from volunteers as a basis for humanitarian work and an economic value for the country.

And for the first time in Tunisia, International Volunteering Day gathers United Nations Agencies, civil society and national organizations: United Nations Development Program UNDP, France Volontaire, Japanese Agency for International Cooperation and the National Youth Observatory, all active in the field of volunteer service to celebrate together their commitment to contribute to national development.

Dr. Taher Chniti, the President of the Tunisian Red Crescent, said that International Volunteering Day provided a great opportunity to commend volunteers on their work during the year. "We shall call upon governments to do their best to protect volunteers during their field work and facilitate their interference in national development activities," he said. "Volunteering represents a fundamental principle that sets us apart."