



NATIONAL U.S.-ARAB CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

غرفة التجارة الأمريكية العربية الوطنية

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## U.S. – ARAB CHAMBER WELCOMES NEW TUNISIAN AMBASSADOR TO WASHINGTON

*Amb. M’hamed Ezzine Chelaifa Highlights Tunisia’s “New Momentum” in Promoting Commercial Ties, Adopting a New Constitution, and Naming a Caretaker Government*

Washington, DC - The National U.S. – Arab Chamber of Commerce (NUSACC) hosted a welcome luncheon this past week for Tunisia’s Ambassador to the United States, H.E. M’Hamed Ezzine Chelaifa. It was the first meeting between the new ambassador and the American business community, with more than 100 U.S. corporate leaders in attendance at the event in Washington, DC. Senior members of the U.S. Government were also in attendance, including the Honorable Richard Schmierer, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, and the Honorable Matthew Murray, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Commerce.



Tunisian Ambassador H.E. M’Hamed Ezzine Chelaifa asserted during his first meeting with the U.S. business community: "A new momentum is at work in Tunisia."



David Hamod, NUSACC President & CEO: "Tunisia is setting an impressive example for other Arab Spring nations undergoing the transition to Democracy."

David Hamod, President & CEO of the U.S. – Arab Chamber, noted, "NUSACC has a long tradition of welcoming new Arab ambassadors, and it was our great privilege to host this event for Tunisia's new representative in Washington, DC. Tunisia is setting an impressive example for other Arab Spring nations undergoing the transition to Democracy, and Ambassador Chelaifa made that point very eloquently today."

Ambassador Chelaifa said that a "new momentum is at work in Tunisia." He

highlighted his nation's recent adoption of a new constitution and the inauguration of a new government that will lead Tunisia to general elections in a few months. The new constitution, he noted: "Asserts freedom of conscience, belief and worship; guarantees gender equality and provides for affirmative action in favor of women by requiring parity in elected offices; settles the debate on religion and politics by upholding that Tunisia is a civil state based on citizenship and the rule of law."

In December 2013, Tunisian political parties agreed on the appointment of H.E. Mehdi Joma'a, Tunisia's Minister of Industry, to serve as Prime Minister of a caretaker cabinet until nationwide elections could be held later this year.

A February 3 editorial in *The Wall Street Journal* – a bellwether for the U.S. business community – was typical of American media coverage offering plaudits to Tunisia for its patience and perseverance. The *Journal* said, "Tunisia's parliament erupted in hard-earned celebration last week after adopting a model constitution and marking a democratic milestone for the birthplace of the Arab Spring. The otherwise bleak regional outlook makes this achievement even more remarkable." The *Journal* went on to say, "Tunisians have made their country a good Arab model, and Washington ought to do what it can to nurture and reward this example of democratic progress in the Middle East."

On the business front, Ambassador Chelaifa said, his nation has been working with the World Bank Group to develop a new investment code that will be showcased in coming



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weeks. The new code will offer stronger and simpler investment guarantees, he suggested, as well as better arbitration services, more direct access to markets, and more attractive incentives to invest.

Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) is vital to Tunisia, and the National U.S. – Arab Chamber of Commerce has supported the Tunisia Investment Forum, organized by the Foreign



Some of the VIPs and NUSACC team members welcoming the new Tunisian Ambassador to the U.S.: bottom row (from left): David Hamod, President & CEO, NUSACC; the Hon. Matthew Murray, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Commerce; H.E. M'hamed Chelaifa, Tunisia's Ambassador to the United States; Ambassador Richard Schmierer, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State; Marleine Davis, Motorola Solutions. Top row (from left): Jasmin Navarro, NUSACC; Ambassador Marisa Lino, Northrop Grumman Corporation; Simonetta Verdi, Ford Motor Company; Habib Debs, Advanced Technology Systems Company, Raad Alghamdi, NUSACC; Ambassador Gordon Grav, National Defense University; and Amin Salam, NUSACC.





Investment Promotion Agency (FIPA), in each of the past two years. Click [here](#) for NUSACC coverage of the 2013 Forum and [here](#) for coverage of the 2012 Forum. The 2014 Tunisia Investment Forum is scheduled to be held in Gammarth, Tunisia on June 12 and 13.

Ambassador Chelaifa highlighted reasons why Tunisia is working to establish itself as a hub for business in Europe, Africa, and the Arab world. Some of these attributes include:

- Tunisia has free trade agreements in place with Europe and Arab regional trading partners.
- Tunisia's infrastructure is expanding. There are now more than 100 industrial zones in that nation, and more than 1,400 flights serve the European market from Tunisia on a weekly basis.
- Tunisia's workforce is one of the best in the region, with more than 65,000 college graduates entering the market every year.
- Foreign Direct Investment is on the rise, and more than 75 percent of the 3,300 joint ventures in Tunisia export their entire production every year.



Ambassador Chelaifa suggested that U.S.-Tunisian commercial relations should be a priority for solidifying democratic gains made in Tunisia. US. goods exports to Tunisia jumped 37.62% in 2013.

Tunisia's trade with the United States is on the upswing. U.S. exports of merchandise to Tunisia jumped a whopping 37.62 percent in 2013, according to the U.S. Bureau of the Census, growing to \$817.26 million. The Top Three categories of exports included petroleum & coal products, transportation equipment, and agricultural products, and America's Top Five exporting States to Tunisia included Louisiana, Texas, Georgia, Ohio, and Wyoming.



In his concluding remarks, Ambassador Chelaifa emphasized the importance of commerce. “One of the most effective ways that the United States can offer support to the Tunisian people as they work to solidify democratic gains is by expanding trade and commercial ties,” he said. “In particular,” he noted, “the most effective way to achieve a mutually beneficial new momentum is to explore the possibilities that a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) could offer for our respective business communities.”

“With a negligible cost to the U.S. economy,” he suggested, “an FTA with the United States would send a potent message to business circles all over the world.”

Ambassador Richard Schmierer, Deputy Secretary of State, said, “It was a pleasure to be able to join NUSACC in welcoming Ambassador Chelaifa to Washington, and to congratulate the Ambassador on Tunisia’s ongoing political progress, especially its recent success in ratifying a new, widely-praised constitution and inaugurating a new independent government.” He concluded, “NUSACC’s effort to gather such a large and prominent group of Washington leaders to promote closer relations with Tunisia and to underscore our support for Tunisia’s transition was a most welcome gesture in strengthening Tunisian-American friendship.”

*The National U.S.-Arab Chamber of Commerce, widely regarded as the voice of American business in the Arab world, is in touch with business communities across the United States and serves as the U.S. point of contact for the national chambers of commerce in the 22 Arab nations. On a daily basis, NUSACC works closely with leaders throughout the Arab world, as well as high-level decision makers in the U.S. business community, public policy research centers, multilateral institutions, nongovernmental organizations, media, and the U.S. Government.*