



TUNISIA NEWSLETTER

April 2010

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TUNISIA AND JAPAN

Fifty three countries to take part in Tunis Judo Grand Prix

TUNIS, May 4, 2010 (TAP) - Nearly 560 athletes will take part in the 26th edition of the Tunis Judo Grand Prix organised by the Tunisian Judo Federation (TJF) next May 7-9 at El Menzah.

During a news conference held on Tuesday morning, TJF Chairman Hedi Mhirsi said that Tunisia which hosts this 150 thousand-dollar qualifying tournament for the 2012 London Olympics, is the only African country to organise one of the Grand Prix tournament --the next one will be organised by Brazil three weeks later--.

He said that 53 countries will be represented in this tournament, including notably France, Japan, South Korea, Germany and Kazakhstan.

Several Olympic and world champions will also take part in this tournament, such as 2009 world champions Georgii Zantaraia (under 60kg) and Kazakhstan's Maxim Rakov (under 100kg), 2008 Olympic champion German Ole Bishof (under 81kg), 2008 Olympic champion Romanian Alina Dumitru (under 48kg).

Tunisia will be represented by 18 athletes in the seniors category, namely Frej Dhouibi (under 60kg), Ragheb Kachroud, Marouene Romdhani, Housseem Khalfaoui and Rachid Tayari (under 66kg), Seifeddine Ben Hassen, Hamza Barhoumi, Abdelaziz Ben Ammar and Seifeddine Sassi (under 73kg), Mohamed Fadhel Ghazouani, Anis Dekhili and Wael Baccouche (under 81kg), Rafea Talbi, Sabri Sarsar and Amine Ghana (under 90kg), Chamseddine Lahmar (under 100kg), Anis Chedli and Faycal Jaballah (over 100kg).

In women's category, Tunisian judo will be represented by Amani Khalfaoui, Imene Saoudi and Amina Ferjani (under 48kg), Fatma Farhat, Rania Salouaj (52kg), Ons Ben Messaoud, Asma Ben Zeineb and Nesria Jelassi (under 57kg), Asma Bejaoui and Khaoula Miraoui (under 63kg), Houda Miled (under 70kg), Hana Mergheni and Sarra Mzoughi (under 78kg), Nihel Cheikhrouhou (78kg) and Sahar Trabelsi (over 78 kg).

Tunis Judo Grand Prix - Day 2: Houda Miled wins bronze

TUNIS, May 8, 2010 (TAP) –

Tunisian judoka Houda Miled (U-70kg) won a bronze medal at the Tunis Judo Grand Prix, organised on May 7-9 in El Menzah.

Houda Miled lost in semi-final to Japanese Haruka Tachimoto who won by Ippon.

Arab Maghreb Union's active role in developing Arab-Asian partnership

TUNIS, April 7, 2010 (TAP) - "Arab Maghreb at Cross-Roads of Partnership: AMU Role in Developing Arab-Asian Relations" is the theme of the annual symposium held, on Wednesday in Tunis, by the Arab League Centre, under the high patronage of President Zine elAbidine Ben Ali.

This 9th symposium aims to take stock of reality of Tunisian-Asian co-operation and think of ways to further develop it. It also provides the opportunity to discuss the Maghreb countries' role in developing partnership between the Arab world and Asia.

Taking the floor at the opening of works, Trade and Handicrafts Minister Ridha Ben Mosbah highlighted efforts exerted by Maghreb countries to boost partnership with the Asian region, pointing out that the Arab Maghreb, which is a link between Africa and Europe, is a region of high human potential (1/3 of the Arab world's total population), which gives it a strategic position at the Arab and regional level and makes it an important consumer market and a pole of production, creation of wealth and manpower.

The Asian countries attracted nearly 10.8% of exports from the Maghreb countries in 2008: 19 billion dollars, compared with 12.8 billion dollars in 2007, i.e. a 48% increase. This share is more than the quarter of the total Arab exports to Asia.

Regarding imports, AMU countries imported in 2008 nearly 30 billion dollars, i.e. 23.8% of the total imports of the Union's countries, compared with 28.6% for all Arab countries.

The minister also said that Tunisia has always taken special interest in co-operation with Asian countries and that it seeks, as instructed by the Head of State, to diversify the fields of partnership with these countries.

The country has endeavoured, he added, to develop bilateral and tripartite co-operation, particularly with Japan (infrastructure, technology, renewable energies and environment), Turkey and China (industrial partnership) and India (technological co-operation).

He reminded, in this regard, that Tunisia had hosted in May 2009 the 2nd Forum of Chinese-Arab Dialogue and will host, in 2012, the 5th ministerial meeting of the Chinese-Arab co-operation forum.

POLITICS & DIPLOMACY

Head of State receives South African Deputy President

CARTHAGE, April 15, 2010 (TAP) - Tunisian-South African co-operation relations were the focus of President Zine el Abidine Ben Ali's meeting, on Thursday, with South African Deputy President Kgalema Motlanthe. After the meeting, Mr. Kgalema Motlanthe said he was delighted at the warm welcome reserved to him by the Head of State, to whom he had extended President Jacob Zuma's fraternal greetings.

On his visit to Tunisia, the South Deputy President highlighted the interest that President Ben Ali showed for the purport of talks he had held with the Tunisian officials in various areas, as well as his support to the agreements signed between the two countries, stressing the two countries' aspirations to materialise them as soon as possible.

Mr. Kgalema Motlanthe also said that the President of the Republic had asked about former South African President Nelson Mandela's health and that he had entrusted him with extending to him an invitation to visit Tunisia.

The Head of State expressed the deep affection and high consideration he vows to the great leader.

President Ben Ali also entrusted the South African Deputy President with extending his regards and friendship feelings to President Zuma.

The meeting was attended by the Minister of State, Special Adviser to the President of the Republic and Official Spokesman for the Presidency of the Republic and the ambassador of South Africa in Tunis.

Tunisian-South African Working session

KASBAH, April 14, 2010 (TAP) - A working session was co-chaired Wednesday afternoon in Tunis by Prime Minister Mohamed Ghannouchi and South African Deputy President Kgalema Motlanthe, with attendance of the two countries' delegations.

Mr. Mohamed Ghannouchi stressed that the meeting was an opportunity to review in a comprehensive and deep manner the two countries' relations and look at the most appropriate means and mechanisms to enrich and diversify the areas of bilateral co-operation, to keep it abreast with the political will driving President Zine el Abidine Ben Ali and President Jacob Zuma, in accordance with the two brotherly peoples' aspirations.

He emphasised the strength of bilateral relations which date back to the South African people's fight against racial segregation and to win their freedom, stressing President Ben Ali's keenness to strengthen the bilateral co-operation relations, intensify consultation and step up meetings between the two countries' officials.

He reminded, in this regard, of President Nelson Mandela's visit to Tunisia, in 1994, to take part for the first time in the African Union's Summit.

The prime minister stressed the importance to establish a set of points and priorities likely to bolster the co-operation ties and guarantee the attributes of efficiency and perennality.

He praised the vanguard experience in the area of medical co-operation between the two countries which, he said, represents an example of the hoped-for approach and a stimulus to expand co-operation to other areas, such as scientific research, technological innovation, information and communication technologies and other strategic fields.

Mr. Ghannouchi stressed Tunisia's readiness to share its experience and expertise with South Africa, particularly in fight against poverty, promotion of women's status,

assistance to the needy, creation of social dwellings and social welfare.

He reminded, in this regard, of the peculiarities of Tunisia's balanced development model based on the close interrelation between the economic and social dimensions of development, which helped the country achieve laudable gains that earned it the first world rank in matters of swift progress of the human development index.

The prime minister also stressed the importance of boosting trade exchanges "which remain below expectations and the opportunities the countries offer," reasserting the importance of developing mechanisms of co-operation in this area at the bilateral, multilateral and continental levels.

He also said that Tunisia is looking for South Africa's support to sign a preferential trade agreement with the Southern African Customs Union (SACU) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC). He also voiced will to step up contacts and meetings between the two countries' businessmen to forge lasting and fruitful partnership ties.

In another connection, Mr. Ghannouchi renewed Tunisia's congratulations to the South African Republic on its being the first African country to play host to the World Football Cup, in 2010, the greatest world sports event, underlining that this honour is a tribute for the whole African continent.

He also extended gratitude to the South African Republic for its support to the initiative of President Ben Ali to proclaim 2010 "International Youth Year," and for its keenness to contribute to the success of all events to be held within this framework, particularly the International Youth Congress.

He said, in this regard, he was convinced that the dynamics resulting from these events will help enhance Africa's international radiance and open up new ways for dialogue and meeting between African and world youths.

South African Deputy President Kgalema Motlanthe expressed consideration for Tunisia's "generous support to South Africa," particularly during the construction of his country as part of the strong bonds of fraternity and co-operation.

He stressed South Africa's will to share experiences with Tunisian the various fields to achieve more progress and prosperity and take up the challenges which still remain particularly in the areas of education, health, rural development, agricultural reform and employment.

He underlined that for his country, Tunisia is "a shining example of an emergent country that has managed to improve the living conditions of its population."

He pointed to the development of bilateral relations as reflected in the creation in 1996 of a joint committee, in addition to the exchange of visits and officials in both countries and the signing of some twenty co-operation agreements in several fields, stressing the will to expand co-operation to other areas, such as the sectors of sciences, technology, communication technologies, training, culture, arts, youth, as well as the military.

He said that his country wishes to draw on the expertise and potential of Tunisian medics, mentioning the 80

Tunisian doctors working in rural areas of South Africa. He thanked the doctors and members of staff of the Tunisian charity Nadi El Bassar who, in 1997, enabled 1,300 patients in poor, rural areas of South Africa, to have their sight restored free of charge.

The South African official also emphasised the importance of co-operation between the two countries as part of peace-keeping missions on the African continent, as well as Tunisia's contribution to the military instruction of South African units deployed in the desert, which helped promote the South African forces' experience to work in such conditions.

He stressed both countries' capacity to contribute to the achievement of development on the African continent as part of bilateral partnership or through African Union's mechanisms.

Earlier, Mr. Mohamed Ghannouchi had conferred with Mr. Kgalema Motlanthe; the talk focused on relations between the two countries and ways to boost and diversify bilateral co-operation and hoist it to higher levels. The talk also examined regional and international issues of mutual interest.

South African Deputy President visits Borj Touil neighbourhood

ARIANA, April 14, 2010 (TAP) - South African Deputy President Kgalema Motlanthe visited, on Wednesday, the Borj Touil neighbourhood, Governorate of Ariana, where he got acquainted with a residential unit financed by the National Solidarity Fund (NSF).

Secretary of State in charge of the NSF briefed the South African guest on the achievements of the Fund, which had been created in 1992, at President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali's initiative, as part of a coherent development approach to entrenching human rights in their comprehensive acceptance and designed to guarantee a decent living to all.

He also reviewed NSF's goals which include, in particular, opening up the remote areas and improving their populations' living conditions and providing basic facilities and attributes of development to those areas by strengthening infrastructure.

The Secretary of State said, in this context, that the Fund has undertaken 1855 interventions for the benefit of nearly 13.4% of the population, with a total amount of 955 million dinars.

The South African Deputy President was also briefed by the CEO of the Tunisian Solidarity Bank (TSB) on the services provided by the Bank in loan granting and project creation, as well as on the National Employment Fund (NEF) and services it offers to youth, particularly the higher-education graduates.

At Borj Touil, Mr. Motlanthe familiarised at Borj Touil with the components of this residential unit, expressing admiration for the Tunisian experience which he considers as a model of integrated social development for the region and for all developing countries.

He also stressed the international consideration enjoyed by this experience and the support lent to the initiative of President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali for the creation of a

World Solidarity Fund to combat poverty, a support that materialised with the United Nations General Assembly's adoption of the creation of this Fund in December 2002.

Visit of Vietnamese President Nguyen Minh Triet to Tunisia

Ben Ali-Triet talks

CARTHAGE, April 12, 2010 (TAP) - The Tunisian-Vietnamese relations and prospects for boosting bilateral co-operation, as well as the current regional and international issues, were the focus of the talk that President Zine el Abidine Ben Ali had, on Monday afternoon, with President of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam Nguyen Minh Triet.

The Official Spokesman for the Presidency of the Republic said that the talks had provided the opportunity to review the strong friendship relations binding Tunisia and Vietnam and prospects for strengthening bilateral co-operation by means of encouraging partnership and technical co-operation, energising trade relations and launching partnership projects, thanks to the two countries' businessmen, in promising sectors.

The two presidents commended, in this regard, the holding of the "Businessmen's Forum" on the occasion of the Vietnamese President's first visit to Tunisia, which will provide the opportunity to identify new co-operation areas.

They also emphasised the need to strengthen co-operation between Tunisia and Vietnam in the cultural field, on the occasion of cultural events, in such a way as to strengthen the rapprochement and friendship ties between the two peoples.

The talk also provided the opportunity to review the regional and international issues, particularly co-operation between regional groupings, given Tunisia's membership to the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU) and Vietnam's to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

Presidents Ben Ali and Triet also addressed the recent developments in the Middle East region, particularly the Palestinian cause and prospects for reaching a just and lasting settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

The two leaders also exchanged viewpoints on these issues and other regional and international problems, expressing satisfaction at the two countries' similar views on this subject.

They reiterated the will driving Tunisia and Vietnam to hoist bilateral co-operation to the level of the good political relations binding them and intensify consultation between the two countries on issues of mutual interest.

CARTHAGE, April 13, 2010 (TAP) - President Zine el Abidine Ben Ali had, early on Tuesday afternoon, a second talk with Vietnamese President Nguyen Minh Triet. The meeting notably turned on prospects for developing Tunisian-Vietnamese relations and boosting bilateral co-operation.

The two Presidents expressed satisfaction at the promising prospects of bilateral co-operation, particularly in the field of trade exchanges, in light of the agreement signed between the two sides providing for non-double tariff imposition and the scheduled joint committee's meeting, underlining the imperative to combine all necessary conditions to encourage investment and launch partnership projects between Tunisian and Vietnamese businessmen.

They also voiced satisfaction at the joint will, as confirmed during the Vietnamese President's visit, to boost the co-operation relations binding the two countries, as well as at the convergence of viewpoints on means that would help reach the hoped-for targets.

President Nguyen Minh Triet expressed admiration for the progress and development he was able to see for himself in Tunisia, reiterating his thanks to President Zine el Abidine Ben Ali for the opportunity he offered him to visit Tunisia. He also invited the President of the Republic to visit Vietnam; the date of the visit is to set.

After the talk, an official ceremony was held during which President Zine el Abidine Ben Ali bade farewell to President Nguyen Minh Triet.

The Head of State and the Vietnamese President saluted the flag, as the two countries' national anthems were performed, and reviewed a detachment of the presidential guard paying them the honours, before the President of the Republic's bidding farewell to his guest.

The ceremony was attended by the Constitutional Democratic Rally (RCD) politburo members and several members of government.

Speaker of Chamber of Deputies receives President of Vietnam

BARDO, April 13, 2010 (TAP)- Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies Foued Mebazaa received, on Tuesday in Tunis, President of Vietnam Nguyen Minh Triet, as part of his official visit to Tunisia (April 12-13).

The meeting focused on the excellent relations of co-operation and friendship between Tunisia and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, as well as joint efforts exerted to enrich and boost this co-operation in all sectors.

Mr. Foued Mebazaa stressed the importance of relations between the two countries' MPs and their positive contribution to enriching and diversifying areas of bilateral co-operation by stepping up opportunities of dialogue and co-ordination in regional and international parliamentary meetings, given the key role of parliamentary diplomacy in strengthening relations between peoples, he said.

President Triet expressed delight to visit Tunisia, a country which he described as safe and hospitable, praising the continuous impetus witnessed by bilateral co-operation.

The Vietnamese president pointed out that permanent understanding marking political relations between the two countries and similarity of their serious action for development and progress are all fundamental factors to boost bilateral relations in the different fields, particularly in the economic sector.

He also emphasised the importance of the bilateral co-operation established between Vietnam's National Assembly and Tunisia's Chamber of Deputies, stressing the need to endeavour to enrich and boost this co-operation.

The meeting was attended by the members of the delegation accompanying the Vietnamese president, as well as the second deputy speaker of the Chamber of Deputies, the chairman of the political affairs, human rights and external relations commission, the chairwoman of the Tunisia-Vietnam parliamentary friendship group and the ambassador of Vietnam in Tunis.

President of Vietnam says his visit marks new stage in development of bilateral relations

GAMMARTH, April 13, 2010 (TAP) - "I am convinced that my visit to Tunisia will mark a new stage in the development of our countries' relations," said Vietnamese President Nguyen Minh Triet, on an official visit to Tunisia, April 12-13, 2010, at the invitation of President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali.

In a statement to Tunis-Afrique-Presse (TAP) News Agency, after the meeting he had, on Tuesday morning, with Prime minister Mohamed Ghannouchi, Vietnam's President said that his country and Tunisia have longstanding friendship relations which he described as excellent.

"I am convinced that co-operation for the economic development will be reinforced, thanks to the good political ties binding Tunisia and Vietnam and the strong will guiding the two countries' leaders," he pointed out.

"We have stressed in our talks the priorities of developing co-operation in the field of trade exchanges and investment, as well as in oil prospecting, agriculture and phosphate production, tourism," he added.

For his part, Mr. Mohamed Ghannouchi said that the talk had provided the opportunity to review the different aspects of Tunisian-Vietnamese co-operation.

"President Triet expressed Vietnam's will to boost bilateral co-operation relations, notably in trade exchanges and investment," the prime minister specified.

He said that the signing of several bilateral agreements, especially on non-double taxation and guaranteed investments, will contribute to boosting co-operation between the two countries.

Vietnam's president visits premises of Vietnamese oil prospecting company

TUNIS, April 13, 2010 (TAP)- Vietnam's president Nguyen Minh Triet Tuesday paid a visit to the premises of the Vietnamese oil prospecting company "PVEP Tunisia," a subsidiary of "Petrovietnam."

The Vietnamese President enquired about the activities of this company which is managing a prospecting permit and another hydrocarbon research permit called "Tanit " and "Guellala", in co-operation with Tunisia's oil company ETAP.

"Guellala" and "Tanit" permits are located in the Gulf of Gabes and cover respective areas of 2436 square km and 1540 square km. Global investments for prospecting works are estimated at 16 million dinars.

Head of State receives Prince Ahmed Ibn Abdulaziz Al-Saud

CARTHAGE, April 5, 2010 (TAP) - Tunisian-Saudi relations were the focus of President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali's meeting, on Monday afternoon, with Prince Ahmed Ibn Abdulaziz Al-Saud, Saudi Deputy Interior Minister, who voiced immense pleasure to meet the Head of State, praising the warm welcome and hospitality reserved to him during his visit to Tunisia, "his second country."

He stressed, in this regard, the strong ties binding the two countries' Leaders and the common will driving them to serve the interests of the Republic of Tunisia and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, in particular, and the Arab Nation, in general.

Prince Ahmed Ibn Abdulaziz Al-Saudi also commended the progress, security and stability prevailing in Tunisia, wishing the country a more prosperous future, thanks to President Ben Ali's clear-sighted leadership and his commitment to serve Tunisian citizens in different fields.

He also said he had listened to the President of the Republic's pertinent guidelines and felt his keenness to safeguard the Tunisian people's interests and bolster Arab relations which should be exemplary, between leaderships as well as peoples, as part of solidarity and co-operation in the service of their nations' progress.

In this context, the Saudi Deputy Interior Minister said:

"A great hope is pinned on the persons of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, the Crown Prince of the Kingdom, the President of the Republic and all Arab leaders to achieve the Arab Nation's ambitions and aspirations."

The meeting was attended by the Interior and Local Development Minister and the Ambassador of Saudi Arabia in Tunis.

Foreign Minister Kamel Morjane official visit to Canada

OTTAWA, April 30, 2010 (TAP) - During his official visit to Canada, Foreign Minister Kamel Morjane had a series of talks with senior Canadian officials.

The Foreign Minister reviewed with his Canadian counterpart, Mr. Lawrence Cannon, the long-standing friendship and co-operation relations tying Tunisia and Canada and means to reinforce and hoist them to the level of active partnership, in the service of the two countries' interests.

The two ministers laid emphasis, during the meeting which was attended by the two countries' delegations, on the political will driving the two countries' leaders to consolidate partnership opportunities in the various trade, economic and scientific fields, in view of the promising possibilities the two countries offer and the climate

propitious to developing investments, speeding up the pace of trade exchanges and energising tourist activity ahead of establishing shortly a Tunis-Montreal straight-through air link.

The two ministers asserted the two countries' determination to intensify the exchange of experts and skills in the scientific, training and education sectors, on account of the Tunisian skills' high training level and their qualification in the various fields; the purpose being to facilitate Tunisian expatriates' integration into the Canadian society and contribute to enriching the cultural and human relations tying the two friendly peoples, such relations on which the ties binding Tunisia and Canada are built, thus laying the foundations for a strong bilateral co-operation that dates far back to several decades.

Besides, the two ministers discussed the various regional and international issues of mutual interest, including notably the Middle East peace process, emphasising the need to combine all international efforts to re-start negotiations in compliance with the international legality and to establish a just and lasting settlement that rests on the principle of the two States co-existing in peace and security.

The two sides expressed rejection of all forms of violence and terrorism, stressing the need to settle conflicts peacefully and to have recourse to the international authorities to sort out crises in order to avoid that they spin out of control and have negative repercussions on world security, peace and progress.

Mr. Kamel Morjane also had a talk with Canadian International Trade Minister Peter Van Loan. The meeting turned on means to bolster trade and economic co-operation between the two countries and give an impulse to negotiations underway about the agreements on preferential trade and encouragement and protection of investments.

They voiced satisfaction, in this regard, at the outcome of negotiations between the two sides on the air transport agreement which provides for the start of a direct air link between Tunis and Montreal.

The Foreign Minister also met with House of Commons Speaker Peter Milliken.

The meeting allowed to review the privileged relations binding the two countries' MPs thanks to a sustained dynamics of visit exchanges between them, which has helped consolidate the friendly and co-operation relations between the two peoples.

The two sides commended the important role played by the parliamentary diplomacy in bringing peoples closer and enriching civilisations and cultures, as part of mutual respect and cultural diversity.

Foreign Minister Kamel Morjane official visit to the United States

TUNIS, April 28, 2010 (TAP) - Foreign Affairs Minister Kamel Morjane paid, on April 26-28, an official visit to the United States of America, at the invitation of U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton.

The visit was part of consultation between the two countries on bilateral relations and major regional and international issues of mutual interest. On the first day of his visit, the Foreign Minister had a talk, at the White House, with General James Jones, the US National Security Adviser.

The talk focused on ways to strengthen relations between Tunisia and the United States, particularly in the areas of military, scientific and technological co-operation.

Mr. Kamel Morjane also conferred with Ambassador Jeffrey D. Feltman, Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs.

The talk reviewed ways to further boost co-operation between the two countries in the various fields, in light of the new dynamics lived through by the Tunisian-American relations, reflecting the common will of the two countries' leaders, Presidents Zine el Abidine Ben Ali and Barack Obama.

The minister emphasised, in this regard, the imperative to consecrate this joint will by breathing a fresh impetus into bilateral relations through the achievement of co-operation and partnership projects, notably in such vital sectors as higher education, scientific research and modern technologies. In another connection, the two sides also reviewed the construction process of the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU) and developments recorded by the Middle East peace process, stressing the importance to carry on constructive dialogue between the two countries on current regional and international issues.

Besides, a meeting also gathered the foreign affairs minister and Mrs. Maria Otero, Under Secretary of State for Democracy and Global Affairs.

The meeting provided the opportunity to review possibilities for launching buoyant co-operation projects in environment protection, management of water resources and development of renewable energies.

The minister stressed, in this connection, the need to strengthen scientific and technological co-operation in priority sectors for the national economy. At the parliamentary level, Mr. Kamel Morjane met with two members of the US Senate, namely Messrs. Daniel Ken Inouye, Chairman of the Committee on Appropriations, and Richard Lugar, Republican leader, member of the Committee on Foreign Relations, as well as Democratic House Representative Alcee Hastings, chairman of the Tunisian Parliamentary Group in the US Congress and Patty Malcolm, member of this Group.

Talks focused on the importance of boosting relations between the two countries' parliaments and strengthen its role to serve mutual interests.

On the occasion of this visit, Tunisia's embassy in Washington D.C. hosted a reception in honour of the foreign affairs minister.

The reception was attended by several officials from the American Administration, the Congress and civil society, as well as Tunisian skills living in the United States of America.

During this gathering, the foreign minister commended the solid bonds tying Tunisia and the United States of

America for more than two centuries, stressing the common will driving the two countries' leaders to hoist these co-operation and partnership relations to the highest levels.

Mr. Kamel Morjane also pointed out that prospects for the relations of friendship and co-operation between Tunisia and the United States inspire optimism, given the two countries' readiness to further step up bilateral constructive consultations and implement co-operation and partnership projects likely to effectively contribute to achieve the economic and social development goals.

The foreign minister also addressed the Tunisian skills, stressing the targets set by the President of the Republic, and extended to them the Head of State's gratitude for the good reputation enjoyed by the Tunisian community in the United States of America.

He also highlighted President Ben Ali's sustained keenness to follow up the situation of Tunisians abroad and provide them with necessary guidance to strengthen their ties with their homeland.

He said that the 9th topic of the presidential programme, "Tunisians abroad always at the heart of the nation," reflects the presidential commitment to further consolidate bridges of social and cultural rapprochement between members of the Tunisian community abroad and their country and encourage them to contribute to the national comprehensive development effort.

Mr. Kamel Morjane also stressed the key role of members of the Tunisian community living in the United States of America in strengthening the friendship and co-operation relations binding the Tunisian and American peoples and in enhancing radiance of Tunisia's image in this friendly country.

Foreign Minister Kamel Morjane confers with American counterpart

WASHINGTON, April 29, 2010 (TAP) - Foreign minister Kamel Morjane conferred, on Wednesday, with American Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, on the occasion his official visit to the United States of America.

The talk, which took place in a cordial atmosphere and a constructive spirit, provided the opportunity to review the landmarks of the longstanding friendship and co-operation relations binding the two countries, which are presently witnessing a new burst.

The talk also allowed to examine ways and means that would further boost these relations in the service of the two countries' mutual interests in the various fields.

Mrs. Hillary Clinton entrusted the foreign minister with extending a friendship and consideration message to President Zine el Abidine Ben Ali, voicing once again her gratitude for the warm hospitality and welcome that had been reserved to her in Tunisia during her 1999 visit as First Lady, a stay of which she has good memories and an opportunity when she had been able to take note of Tunisia's remarkable progress.

Mrs. Clinton also voiced the American Administration's total readiness to strive to promote the solid relations

binding the two countries and to hoist them to the highest level, in accordance with President Ben Ali's wise recommendations, on the one hand, and the new orientations set by President Barack Obama, on the other.

In this connection, the two ministers looked at the promising prospects for the establishment of a strategic partnership which serves the two friendly peoples' mutual interests in the various fields, particularly co-operation in the education, scientific research, new technologies, environment, agriculture and investment sectors.

Mr. Kamel Morjane stressed the importance to materialise the important orientations and initiatives which President Obama had announced in his Cairo speech on prospects of co-operation between the United States and the Muslim world, expressing Tunisia's wish to achieve fruitful co-operation projects and programmes between the two countries in the various sectors mentioned in that speech.

The minister made a comprehensive account on the vanguard achievements carried out by Tunisia on the path of construction, highlighting the reform process and the advanced changes Tunisia experienced during the last two decades.

Besides, the foreign minister had series of talks with senior officials from the State Department on bilateral co-operation relations and joint efforts to contribute to the establishment of peace, stability and justice in the world. They also tackled progress of the situation in Africa, and the importance of strengthening co-operation and partnership with a view to dealing with the various issues and the political, security, economic and social challenges confronting the Continent.

These talks also provided Mr. Morjane with the opportunity to highlight the Tunisian approach to the promotion and defence of Human Rights and present an account on the various vanguard achievements accomplished in this field in the country, as well as the advanced stages made on the path of materialising the pluralistic democratic process.

In another connection, the foreign minister gave, during his official visit, a lecture in the Washington-based Middle East Institute on the theme "Modernity Process in Tunisia: Achievements and Challenges," with attendance of a large number of American officials, academics, representatives of civil society and friends of Tunisia.

Mr. Morjane highlighted, in this lecture, the foundations of the civilisational project and programmes of comprehensive reform initiated by President Ben Ali since the advent of the Change of November 7, which helped bring about a modern society attached to its national values and characterised by moderation, balance and openness.

In this respect, he pointed up the vanguard gains and achievements accomplished in Tunisia in the various political, economic, social and educational fields which constituted a reference for several international initiatives.

First session of Tunisian-Equatorial Guinean High Joint Committee convenes

TUNIS, April 29, 2010 (TAP) - The first session of the Tunisian-Equatorial Guinean Committee was held on April 27-28 in Bata, Equatorial Guinea's economic capital, under the co-chairmanship of Secretary of State in charge of Maghreb, Arab and African Affairs Abdelhafidh Harguem and Mrs. Victoriana Nchama Nsue Okomo, Equatorial Guinea's Secretary of State for International Co-operation.

Mr. Abdelhafidh Harguem led to this session a delegation made up of representatives from several ministerial departments and businessmen.

The Secretary of State emphasised the importance Tunisia grants to consolidation of co-operation with Equatorial Guinea in fields of mutual interest, in accordance with President Zine el Abidine Ben Ali's will to boost Tunisia's relations with all African countries as part of developing south-south co-operation.

The Equatorial Guinean Secretary of State commended Tunisia's economic and social performances and the gains the country made in different fields, under President Zine el Abidine Ben Ali's enlightened leadership.

She expressed her Government's wish to foster mutual beneficial co-operation ties with Tunisia.

This session's works were crowned with the signing of six co-operation agreements in the energy, geological, mining, new information and communication technologies and the social development fields, as well as in the fight against poverty, SMEs and between the two countries' national news agencies.

President Obiang Nguema shows appreciation for Tunisian development experience

TUNIS, April 29, 2010 (TAP) - Equatorial Guinean President Teodoro Obiang Nguema expressed admiration for the different aspects of Tunisia's comprehensive development experience, under the wise leadership of President Zine el Abidine Ben Ali.

Receiving, on Thursday in the Equatorial Guinean capital, Malabo, Secretary of State for Maghreb, Arab and African Affairs Abdelhafidh Herguem, President Obiang Nguema emphasised his country's will to draw inspiration from the Tunisian development experience as part of a fruitful co-operation to serve the two countries' interests.

Mr. Harguem, who paid a visit to Equatorial Guinea on the occasion of the first session of the Tunisian-Equatorial Guinean high joint committee, stressed Tunisia's will to strengthen its relations of co-operation and partnership with Equatorial Guinea, out of its attachment to the African dimension.

The Equatorial Guinean President entrusted the secretary of state with extending his fraternal greetings and his consideration to President Zine el Abidine Ben Ali.

Chamber of Deputies and Chamber of Advisers Speakers receive Chairman of delegation for relations with Maghreb countries at European Parliament

BARDO, April 29, 2010 (TAP) - Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies Foued Mebazaa received, on Thursday in Bardo, Mr. Pier Antonio Panzeri, Chairman of the delegation for relations with Arab Maghreb Union (AMU) countries at the European Parliament, on a visit to Tunisia.

Mr. Foued Mebazaa stressed the close co-operation established between the Chamber of Deputies and the European Parliament and the continuous progress it has experienced through the numerous meetings and exchange of visits to look at ways to strengthen relations at bilateral and multilateral levels.

He said that the successive visits in the past period have prompted the establishment of a fruitful dialogue in different fields and favoured a strong platform of co-operation between the two parliamentary institutions.

He called to carry on action to strengthen this co-operation to bring views closer on both bilateral relations and partnership between Tunisia and the European Union (EU).

Mr. Pier Antonio Panzeri praised the strong relations of co-operation between the Chamber of Deputies and the European Parliament, expressing hope to enrich and strengthen them, particularly through the creation of joint committees, ongoing dialogue and intensification and periodicity of meetings.

He paid tribute to Tunisia for the progress made in all areas, for its stability and its efforts to strengthen the democratic and pluralistic process and participation of all social segments and the different components of civil society in the development process.

He also pointed up Tunisia's leading role in the region and its continuous efforts to strengthen Euro-Mediterranean dialogue, given its geographic location and its Maghreb, Arab and African dimension which have made of it a link between the two Mediterranean shores and a partner of the EU.

The meeting was attended by the chairman of the political affairs, human rights and external relations committee and chairmen of the parliamentary groups.

Mr. Pier Antonio Panzeri attended part of the plenary session held on Thursday by the Chamber of Deputies during which Mr. Foued Mebazaa and the Deputies bade him welcome.

BARDO, April 29, 2010 (TAP)- Speaker of the Chamber of Advisers Abdallah Kallel conferred, on Thursday in Bardo, with Mr. Pier Antonio Panzeri, Chairman of the Delegation for Relations with Arab Maghreb Union (AMU) at the European Parliament (EP).

Mr. Abdallah Kallel voiced satisfaction at the excellent friendship and co-operation relations between Tunisia and the European Union (EU) countries, pointing out that these relations have incessantly strengthened, thanks to continuous consultations, multiplication of meetings, exchange of visits and dialogue on regional and international issues.

He stressed, in this regard, parliamentary institutions' role in bolstering co-operation and partnership relations between Tunisia and the EU, stressing the distinguished position held by the Maghreb dimension in Tunisia's

foreign policy and the generous efforts of President Zine el Abidine Ben Ali to finish off the construction of the Maghreb and enhance the climate of peace, stability, co-operation and partnership in the Mediterranean region.

Mr. Pier Antonio Panzeri pointed out that his visit was part of the joint efforts to identify ways to consolidate co-operation in the parliamentary field.

He also praised the significant progress made by Tunisia and the qualitative change it has made in different development fields, which has earned it the status of EU advanced partner.

The European guest paid tribute to Tunisia for its major role in boosting Euro-Mediterranean co-operation, particularly since the signing in 1995 of the Association Agreement with the European Union and in enriching partnership between the two shores of the Mediterranean.

Chamber of Advisers Speaker receives Lebanese-Tunisian Fraternity and Friendship Association Board members

BARDO, April 27, 2010 (TAP) - Chamber of Advisers Speaker Abdallah Kallel received, on Tuesday morning, a delegation of the Lebanese-Tunisian Fraternity and Friendship Association Board led by the Association's chairman, Mr. Elias Hanna.

On the occasion, Mr. Abdallah Kallel voiced satisfaction at the constant development recorded by the close fraternity and co-operation relations binding Tunisia and Lebanon, thanks to the firm political will of the two sisterly countries' leaders.

For his part, Mr. Elias Hanna paid tribute to President Zine el Abidine Ben Ali for the social and economic progress Tunisia is living through, the climate of stability prevailing in it and the democratic pluralistic development it is recording.

He specified that these achievements have made of Tunisia a unique model of its kind, pointing out that this progress is indeed the fruit of the judicious choices and orientations adopted by the November 7 Change leadership.

The emphasis was laid during this meeting on the need to boost Tunisian-Lebanese co-operation in all fields.

Members of the Lebanese delegation expressed, in this regard, will to make the most of the Tunisian experience, notably in the legislative field and in matters of interdependent development.

The meeting was attended by several members of the Chamber of Advisers and Lebanon's Ambassador in Tunis.

Foreign Minister Kamel Morjane closes First Forum of African Students in Tunisia

TUNIS, April 19, 2010 (TAP) - The Forum of African Students in Tunisia, held by the Constitutional Democratic Rally (RCD) students' organisation on the theme: "Together to Materialise Dialogue and Mutual Understanding," ended works under the chairmanship of Constitutional Democratic Rally (RCD) Politburo member

and Foreign Minister Kamel Morjane, in RCD Secretary-General Mohamed Ghariani's presence.

Addressing students taking part in the Forum, Mr. Kamel Morjane particularly emphasised the privileged and strategic status which the African dimension has always enjoyed in Tunisia's diplomacy and in forging the country's international relations.

He reminded of the initiatives and projects proposed by Tunisia to materialise the culture of dialogue and narrow the digital divide.

These include, in particular, the "Carthage Charter on Tolerance" (April 1995), the creation of "Ben Ali's Chair for Dialogue of Civilisations and Religions" (November 2001), the United Nations General Assembly's adoption at Tunisia's initiative of the World Solidarity Fund to contribute to combat poverty in the world (December 2002), the organisation of the World Summit on the Information Society, in its second phase in Tunis, to narrow the digital divide and enhance cultural diversity (November 2005), and the proclamation on Tunisia's proposal of 2005 "International Year of Sport at Service of Peace," the FM said.

He added that the most recent initiative, and not the least, is the proclamation of 2010 as "International Youth Year: Dialogue and Mutual Understanding," which was adopted unanimously by the United Nations General Assembly in December 2009, showing the Tunisian will to anchor among young generations the universal values and principles of sharing. "The year 2010," he pointed out, "coincides symbolically with the 50 years of independence of a number of African countries."

"This initiative of President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali is part of a vision based on the will to disseminate the values of tolerance, moderation, respect of the Other and rejection of all forms of violence and extremism in the world," emphasised Mr. Kamel Morjane.

He also highlighted the prime position held by youth in the societal project of President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali and the key role they assume in the development strategy and in defining the future prospects and civilisational approach of Tunisia.

While pointing out that African youth are today the most important capital, the wealth of the African continent and the symbol of its aspiration for a better future, Mr. Kamel Morjane praised youth's innovating capacities, their dynamism and their enthusiasm, as well as their sincere aspiration to establish a better, fairer and more interdependent world.

8th meeting of 5+5 Dialogue Foreign Ministers in Tunisia

GAMMARTH, April 16, 2010 (TAP) - Foreign Minister Kamel Morjane said that works of the 8th meeting of the 5+5 Dialogue Foreign Ministers were constructive and took place in a climate of true friendship.

In a news conference, on Friday in Gammarth, together with Spanish Foreign Minister Miguel Angel Moratinos and Italian Secretary of State to Foreign Affairs Stefania Craxi, Mr. Kamel Morjane pointed out that discussions revolved

around three main themes, namely the consolidation and extension of 5+5 Dialogue framework, emigration and situation in the Middle East.

The minister spoke about Tunisia's call to extend the 5+5 Dialogue to new players, such as employers, in view of their contribution to bolster investments, the territorial entities and local authorities.

He laid emphasis on the decision to open up the 5+5 Dialogue to such fields as trade and environment protection, through the creation of a Mediterranean agency for the ecosystem and coastline protection.

He said that participants agreed to develop inter-cultural consultations and create a mechanism of regular follow-up and co-ordination of the 5+5 Dialogue, to ensure the right implementation of the recommendations and resolutions made within this framework.

Mr. Kamel Morjane pointed out that a better part of the works was devoted to the situation in the Middle East, highlighting the consensus arrived at on the approach to be adopted to fight all that would impede peace efforts in the region.

Answering a question on emigration, Mr. Morjane reminded of the Tunisian approach in this field, asserting that the phenomenon is an international one which requires a comprehensive management and dictates unification of all efforts, assuring that in this area Tunisia's relations with the host countries are good.

Mr. Moratinos expressed deep satisfaction at and extended thanks to President Zine el Abidine Ben Ali and the Tunisian Government for Tunisia's constant commitment for the Euro-Mediterranean dialogue.

He said that, "thanks to this Tunis meeting, we have made today an important step for the Western Mediterranean region's future and to consolidate the 5+5 Dialogue."

He pointed out the important items looked at by the forum's ten countries, specifying that the meeting took place for the first time since the creation of the 5+5 initiative, with attendance of the forum's foreign ministers, which testifies, he went on saying, to the will and political commitment of all to make of the 5+5 Dialogue a more concrete, operational and ambitious reality that meets the aspirations of the region's peoples.

The Spanish foreign minister highlighted, in this regard, the consensus of 10 foreign ministers, submitted to Heads of State and Government, on the organisation of a second 5+5 summit, to be held beginning of 2011 at the latest.

Besides, he pointed out that the first and unique summit of the 5+5 initiative, which had been held in 2003 in Tunis, had defined the main contours for the region's future, specifying that "today, once again in Tunis, we further confirm to organise a new high-level meeting."

He said that "we discussed in Barcelona the next summit of the Union For the Mediterranean (UFM), and decided to work together to prepare for it adequately by looking at political issues in order to take up the challenges the region is faced with, notably the Middle East issue which is at the centre of the UFM 43 countries' discussions," adding that "the 5+5 laboratory of actions, ideas,

reflections and strategies will effectively contribute to the UFM development."

In response to the journalists' questions on Tunisia's role, Mr. Moratinos paid tribute to President Zine el Abidine Ben Ali for Tunisia's balanced and constructive position in the region, pointing out that "Tunisia has always been ready to devise a consensus on the various regional, Mediterranean and international files. This is not a new thing."

He went on saying that "it does come as a surprise, either, if the 5+5 first summit was held in Tunis, and that we reached pure and simple political conclusions during that meeting", explaining that "Tunisia has constantly been a land of listening and openness, of professional people who know how to tackle problems with a constructive spirit. This is the reason why Tunisia is always present in mediations and diplomatic efforts to establish peace."

As regards Tunisia's access to the status of an EU advanced partner, Mr. Moratinos said that Spain totally supports this approach and considers it as legitimate.

For her part, Italian Secretary of State to Foreign Affairs Stefania Craxi confirmed the holding in 2011 in Italy, of the next meeting of the 5+5 Dialogue Foreign Ministers, pointing out that, "for heart's reasons, that it will be co-chaired by Tunisia and Italy."

[Final Declaration of 5+5 Dialogue FMs' 8th meeting](#)

Tunisia commemorates April 9, 1938 Events

TUNIS, April 9, 2010 (TAP) –Instructed by President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, Prime Minister and Vice President of the Democratic Constitutional Rally (RCD), Mr. Mohamed Ghannouchi, presided Friday morning with RCD Politburo Members over the ceremony commemorating the events of April 9, 1938 in recognition of the Martyrs who sacrificed themselves for the independence, invulnerability and glory of the homeland.

At Martyrs Square, Séjourni, the Prime Minister filed a spray of flowers at Martyrs Memorial and recited Al-Fatiha (the opening verses of the Koran) in their memory.

The remembrance ceremony was attended notably by the RCD Secretary General and Members of the Consultative Council of the National Liberation Movement resistance fighters and activists.

Prime Minister Mohamed Ghannouchi receives Belgian Deputy Premier

TUNIS, April 7, 2010 (TAP)- Prime Minister Mohamed Ghannouchi Wednesday received in Tunis Belgian Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and Institutional Reforms Didier Reynders.

The latter said the meeting had allowed to discuss the development of relations between Tunisia and Belgium in all fields, especially in new sectors such as research and education.

Mr. Reynders insisted more particularly on the interest of taking advantage of partnership opportunities provided in the two countries in matters of renewable energies.

The Belgian official also underscored that his country intended to value the expertise and knowledge gained by Tunisia in the field of health to develop tripartite co-operation programmes, notably in Subsaharan Africa.

He added that Belgium will ensure, during the second half of the current year, the chairmanship of the European Union and will certainly take advantage of this opportunity to boost Tunisian-European partnership and provide the conditions likely to favour Tunisia's access to "enhanced status."

Foreign Minister Kamel Morjane receives Belgium's deputy PM

TUNIS, April 6, 2010 (TAP) - Ways to boost a sustainable and mutually beneficial Tunisian-Belgian partnership were the focus of Foreign Minister Kamel Morjane's meeting Monday with Belgian Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and Institutional Reforms Didier Reynders, who is on a working visit in Tunisia.

Having drawn the outlines of Tunisia's economic and financial policy, Mr. Kamel Morjane emphasised Tunisia's will to strengthen the friendship and co-operation bonds with Belgium in all areas, wishing to see the Belgian side further engage in development projects in Tunisia.

For his part, Mr. Reynders praised quality of the relations Belgium has established with Tunisia and voiced his country's readiness to boost these relations in the economic fields, particularly investment.

To energise economic partnership and make the most of the huge potential of Tunisia and Belgium in terms of business and investment opportunities, it was agreed to keep the tradition of consultation between both countries, update the institutional framework and seek to step up contacts between the Tunisian and Belgian operators.

The talk also reviewed the current negotiations to deepen and strengthen the Tunisia-EU relations and highlight the mission of the Union For the Mediterranean (UFM) as vector of building a strong and balanced partnership between countries of the two Mediterranean shores to achieve concrete projects.

Mr. Kamel Morjane and the Belgian guest also emphasised the importance of carrying out joint development projects in Africa, as part of a three-cornered co-operation.

Regarding the situation in the Middle East, the two sides highlighted the need to revitalise, with no delay, the peace process on the basis of two States co-existing in peace and security.

After the talk, the Belgian minister underlined, in a statement, that relations between Belgium and Tunisia are "very robust," and that there are real opportunities to foster bilateral ties, step up exchanges and develop co-operation.

He also said, regarding relations between Tunisia and the European Union, that Belgium, which is to take over the EU presidency in the second half of the current year, wishes "a progress of relations between the two sides."

Mr. Reynders stressed, in conclusion, the need to arrive at a just and lasting settlement for the Middle East conflict, voicing conviction that dialogue remains the best way to reach this.

SOCIETY

Associative action in Tunisia, leading experience in participation in public affairs

TUNIS, April 22, 2010 (TAP)-The enthusiasm shown by Tunisians for associative action is the symbol of the success of a leading experience in matters of participation in public affairs. President Zine el Abidine Ben Ali has taken the initiative, as part of his comprehensive reform project, to give a strong impetus to associative life in Tunisia by developing associations laws, ensuring necessary incentives to strengthen their activities, promote their methods of action and build their capacity to keep pace with the changes experienced by the Tunisian society.

One of the most revealing indicators of the change experienced by associative action is the increase in the number of associations which rose from 1976 associations in 1987 to nearly 9000 now.

These associations operate in different sectors and cover various regions of the country.

The 1988 amendment of the organic law on associations dated 1959 came to deepen the awareness of the extent and nobility of the mission incumbent on associations in deeprooting values of citizenship and strengthening the development process.

Amendments introduced on August 2, 1992 came, in turn, to consecrate the notion of freedom of creation of associations thanks to the suppression of prior authorisations and their replacement by the system of declaration. Thus, the decision taken since 1993 by the President of the Republic to observe on April 23 of each year, National Associations Day, materialises the strong conviction of the key role of the components of the civil society in materialising national choices and boosting the process of modernity, progress and prosperity.

The sustained interest that the Head of State takes in associations has also been confirmed in his reference speeches in which he has continuously encouraged Tunisian associations and organisations to contribute to devise programmes and define national objectives in matters of development, as part of partnership with the different State structures and local communities.

This is, indeed, a drive consecrated by the presidential programme for the next five-year programme in its different axes. Emphasis was laid in the first topic of this programme on the principle of strengthening partnership between the State and the civil society and boosting co-operation and complementarity between local communities, educational, cultural and youth institutions and associations.

Under the title of "society of balance and cohesion among individuals and social categories," the third topic of the

new presidential programme has come to set up a new legal framework organising voluntary work to encourage a better participation of youth and specialists in the social field and offer to retirees broader possibilities of action in this field, in addition to the adoption of a gender approach in all social policies and programmes.

As for the fourth topic of the five-year programme entitled: "a higher standard of living and a better quality of life," it has offered associations greater room for manoeuvre.

The efficiency of associative action in Tunisia is perfectly reflected in the support lent by the civil society to the State's action in matters of employment.

The presidential programme has, in this regard, encouraged in its sixth topic dedicated to employment, the creation of associations to promote employment and aid to integration in professional life, in addition to the need to the need to redouble effort to establish foundations of the interdependent economy and develop new job opportunities.

To multiply income sources in different regions of the country, the presidential programme has advocated, in particular, the creation in each delegation of a development association specialised in micro-credits.

The programme also calls for the development of associations in the area of children in general and more particularly care for children with no support and granting the private sector and local communities an increasing role in strengthening the network of kindergartens as part of the new decennial plan for children due to start in 2011, concurrently with encouraging the creation of charitable associations for the elderly and retirees.

The new presidential programme has also set ambitious objectives to encourage the creation of associations to spread digital culture in the different governorates by establishing a bonus of 5 thousand dinars and the free hosting of associations who has a web site including national, cultural, educational, scientific or recreational data.

The major achievements made in the area of associative action are the fruit of the commitment taken by President Zine el Abidine Ben Ali to hoist Tunisia to highest levels of progress, an action that requires preserving and enriching the gains already made as part of an innovating solidarity approach whose contours were defined by the President of the Republic.

Tunis hosts Arab Conference on "Beijing+15 and Beyond: Future Process for Arab Women Empowerment"

TUNIS, April 26, 2010 (TAP) - Works of the Arab Conference on "Beijing +15 and Beyond" ended, on Monday, with the issuing of recommendations on consolidation of mechanisms of Arab women's political, legal, cultural, social and economic empowerment, particularly as part of the activities carried out by the Arab Women Organisation (AWO).

Participants in the Conference, meeting in Tunis on April 25-26, 2010, called for reviewing laws, eliminating all

forms of discrimination, as well as adopting social gender as a criterion in the assessment of plans and processes.

Besides, they recommended to create a data base on women skills, to set up an overseeing and prospecting commission tasked with conducting strategic studies on Arab women's empowerment in the economic field and strengthening their access to the information and communication technologies.

Moreover, the recommendations include a call to boosting rural women's skills, creating cells for listening, orienting and guiding women, especially in the highly populated urban areas. They also stress the importance of creating an Arab observatory for archiving war crimes and staging information campaigns on the international humanitarian law.

Emphasis was also placed on the need to work out guide books and conduct surveys on Arab women status which take into consideration the Arab countries' specificities, and create a data base on the Arab economies.

Chairing the opening session, Minister of Women, Family, Children and Elderly Affairs Bebia Bouhnaq Chihi said placing this conference under the patronage of First Lady Leila Ben Ali, Chairwoman of the Arab Women Organisation (AWO), shows the sustained interest taken in activities designed to boost the process of Arab women advancement.

She said that the empowerment of Arab women in the comprehensive and sustainable development process is among the interests of Mrs. Leila Ben Ali who seeks to streamline the priorities of action for the next stage and step up efforts to implement programmes devised within the AWO, while taking into account the characteristics of women's status within societies.

The minister reminded of the proposals of Mrs. Leila Ben Ali to create the prize of best journalistic production on women, which is a pioneering initiative in matters of empowerment of Arab women given the strategic role of media to vehicle a true image of women, and to place works of the 3rd AWO Congress due in October 2010 under the topic: "Women, Essential Partners in the Process of Sustainable Development."

She also stressed Tunisia's will to include women's rights at the heart of major national choices which establish a correlation between development and democracy and promotion of human rights in their comprehensive dimension.

The minister also praised the progress made over the past five years in the Arab region in matters of fight against all forms of discrimination against Arab women, particularly fight against violence, and the action to promulgate new family laws and ensure women's participation in public life.

In this context, she cited some examples of legislative reforms in the Arab region including the amendment to the law on nationality in Tunisia, Algeria, Sudan, Egypt, Morocco and Yemen which allows women equally to men to pass their nationality to their children.

Despite the gains made over the past five years in the promotion of women in the Arab region thanks to the

political will and activities of the regional organisations, she pointed out, the issue of gender equality is still facing numerous challenges which requires more action and perseverance.

Organised by the Tunisian Mothers Organisation, the Ministry of Women, Family, Children and Elderly Affairs in association with the Arab Women Organisation, the conference was attended by many women leaders from Tunisia and Arab countries including Mrs. Rabiha Dhiab, Palestinian Minister of Women Affairs, Mrs. Lola Al Ouadhi, Secretary-General of the Bahraini Higher Women Council, and Mrs. Ouadouda Badran, Director-General of the Arab Women Organisation.

Consideration of the Arab Family Organisation for Mrs. Leila Ben Ali's initiatives

TUNIS, April 23, 2010 (TAP) - The Arab Family Organisation (AFO) expressed consideration for the vitality the Arab Women Organisation (AWO) has been living through under the presidency of Mrs. Leila Ben Ali, wife of the President of the Republic, and the avant-garde initiatives undertaken to further raise Arab awareness about women's rights and consolidate their role within the family and in public life.

AFO Secretary-General Houda Ben Youssef pointed out, during a talk she had on Wednesday in Tunis with Women, Family, Children and Elderly Affairs Minister Bebia Bouhnaq Chihi, that the Arab Family Organisation will spare no effort to contribute to consecration of the noble humanist orientations and avant-garde social choices which Mrs. Leila Ben Ali has called for, as part of her judicious AWO chairmanship.

She reasserted the pride she takes at the proclamation of an Arab Day for the Elderly, at the First Lady's initiative, specifying that this would help reinforce all generations' chances to take part in building up Arab societies and jointly endeavour to guarantee the conditions of a better life to the elderly.

For her part, Mrs. Chihi stressed the Head of State's will to strengthen all mechanisms of bolstering joint Arab action and Tunisia's efforts to back up the Arab Family Organisation and enrich its programmes, in order to enhance the role of the family, in light of the changes it is going through. The two sides reasserted the importance of increasing consultation and opening up new prospects to stimulate partnership between the region's countries, in service of the family and to meet its expectations and aspirations.

18th Congress of the International Association of Youth and Family Judges in Tunisia

HAMMAMET, April 21, 2010 (TAP)- The 18th Congress of the International Association of Youth and Family Judges and Magistrates (IAYFJM) opened works on Wednesday in Hammamet under the topic: "United in Diversity: Juvenile Justice and Holistic Approach in Major Legal Systems."

Works of this four-day Congress are attended by over 400 judges, lawyers and academics from 45 countries and

representatives of several regional and international institutions.

The Congress, organised for the first time in an Arab and African country, is held in partnership with the Tunisian Association for Child Rights (ATUDE).

On the agenda of the meeting, several lectures focusing on "violence within the family," "corporal punishment," "children between participation and discrimination," "children and new forms of criminality," "new alternatives to sanction," "challenges and procedures of appeal enforced in Europe."

On the sidelines of the Congress works, several workshops will be held under various topics, particularly "international child adoption and abduction: challenges," "parental responsibilities: rights and duties of fathers," "strategies to prevent violence in the family."

Minister of Justice and Human Rights Lazhar Bououni emphasised that the choice of Tunisia to host this Congress, which is held under the high patronage of President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, is a sign of acknowledgement of the country's influence and a tribute to the strategic choices of the civilisational project of the Change which has made the promotion and consecration of human rights a foundation of the country's policy.

He underlined that Tunisia's ratification since the 1980s of the international convention of child rights is a basis for entrenching a coherent mechanism of laws that come to enrich the capital of human rights in this area.

The minister also said that President Ben Ali's initiative to proclaim 2010 International Youth Year, which was adopted unanimously by the United Nations General Assembly, is part of efforts to guarantee more protection and guidance to youth.

Mrs. Renate Winter, President of IAYFJM and President of the International Penal Court for Sierra Leone, pointed out that the choice to hold these proceedings in Tunisia shows a consideration for Tunisia's place as crossroads between continents and civilisations.

This choice, she underlined, materialises the close ties between authenticity and modernity, while offering an appropriate platform to spread the culture of children's rights on the broadest scale.

Mr. Nadhir Hamada, ATUDE Chairman and Minister of Environment and Sustainable Development, underlined that holding this Congress under the high patronage of the President of the Republic shows the central position given by Tunisia to the human rights mechanism in its comprehensive acceptance and to the promotion of the situation of the family, youth and children in particular.

In his address, Mr. Jean Zermatten, Director of the International Institute for Child Rights and Deputy President of the UN Committee of Child Rights, underlined that this meeting provides the opportunity for professionals and judges to contribute to enhance principles contained in the international convention of child rights which advocate, in particular, the respect of child dignity.

Mrs. Maria Louisa Fornara, UNICEF representative in Tunis, paid tribute to the efforts of Tunisia to protect and consecrate child rights.

She pointed to the commitment of UNICEF to support co-operation programmes between the different countries in the area of reform of legal systems and consolidation of programmes to protect children against all forms of discrimination and exclusion.

The representative of the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (ISESCO) expressed the Organisation's keenness to instil the principles of peace, freedom, democracy, culture and justice in youths while endeavouring to guarantee healthy living conditions to them.

The representative of the Arab Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organisation (ALECSO) stressed the Organisation's attachment to encourage youth to acquire science, knowledge and technology, away from all forms of deviation, self-retrenchment and exclusion.

Prospects of occupational mobility in Europe

TUNIS, April 21, 2010 (TAP) - Works of the two-day 2010 Employment Forum held by the Tunisian-French Chamber of Commerce and Industry and France's embassy in Tunis, in association with the Tunisian Vocational Training and Employment Ministry and the French Ministry of Immigration, Integration, National Identity and Interdependent Development, were opened on Wednesday in Tunis, by Vocational Training and Employment Minister Mohamed Agrebi.

Participants in the Forum said that the issue of migration and occupational mobility should be jointly tackled by the countries of the two Mediterranean shores, in order to reach practical solutions which take into account the two sides' interests in matters of youths' employment and fight against illegal immigration.

It appears from the papers presented on the occasion that, according to surveys conducted by the World Bank, Europe is expected to record a manpower deficit during the next decades, while Maghreb countries would keep on coping with strong pressures on their job markets.

Actually, this European deficit is estimated at 66 million workers by 2050, while in MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region the growth of working population will exceed 40 millions.

Among the themes discussed during the Forum are free-choice training, contents and quality of training, the training centres' infrastructure and equipments, instructors' training, job applicants' guidance, as well as providing information and raising awareness of foreign enterprises about the potential of Tunisian skills.

In his opening address, Mr. Mohamed Agrebi said that, aware of the importance of the human factor in the development process, Tunisia is exerting constant efforts to develop its human resources' capacities.

For his part, France's ambassador in Tunis Pierre Menat reasserted his country's commitment to back up Tunisia's

efforts to achieve development, in particular in the field of youth integration into the labour market.

He pointed out that the memorandum recently signed between Tunisia and Europe provides for a 23-million-euro contribution to mainly develop employment and vocational training during the 2011-2013 period.

He specified that the Mediterranean countries are confronted with the same challenges: growth, sustainable development, technological revolution and globalisation. He also pointed out that by jointly taking up challenges the region could create jobs.

For his part, Tunisian-French Chamber of Commerce and Industry chairman Foued Lakhoua said that the Forum is meant to serve as a catalyst of vocational training and employment, as Tunisia's absolute priority, and to highlight results of the Tunisian-French co-operation, as Tunisia's first trade partner and investor. Indeed, 1,200 French enterprises are implanted in Tunisia and they provide 110,000 jobs.

Boosting Tunisian-Beninese co-operation in social and development field

TUNIS, April 20, 2010 (TAP) - Minutes of the working of the Beninese delegation's visit to Tunisia, on April 12-20, 2010, were signed on Tuesday by Women, Family, Children and Elderly Affairs Minister Bebia Bouhnaq Chihhi and Mrs. Mamatou Meba Bio Djossou, Benin's Family and Solidarity Minister.

The Beninese minister expressed deep consideration for the Tunisian experience in the social field and the political will to improve conditions of social categories, voicing conviction that partnership between the two countries will witness a strong impetus in the coming years.

Members of the delegation, including also Mrs. Rekiatou Madougou, Beninese Minister of Micro-Credits and Employment of Youth and Women, got acquainted with the activities of public structures, organisations and national associations operating in the area of women's promotion.

They also familiarised with mechanisms set up to develop vocational training, promote the employment of graduates, strengthen social solidarity, guidance of persons with special needs, protection of children and the elderly.

The Beninese delegation also visited the Centre of Research, Studies, Documentation and Information on Women "CREDIF" in Tunis.

The visit provided the opportunity to examine prospects for co-operation between the CREDIF and the observatory of the status of women stemming from the Beninese ministry, created in 2003 as part of the tripartite programme financed by the Benin Office of the United Nations Population Fund.

The minister expressed her country's will to draw on CREDIF's experience in developing the potential of Beninese executives in the sector of women by holding training sessions and educational trips.

She also praised Tunisia's approach to guidance of the elderly as she visited the Manouba Elderly Care Centre

where she familiarised with health, social and cultural services offered to the 120 residents of the centre.

Benin's delegation visits Boustil neighbourhood

TUNIS, April 15, 2010 (TAP)- A Beninese delegation led by Mrs. Mamatou Meba Bio Djossou, Minister of Family and National Solidarity was received, on Thursday, by Secretary of State in charge of the National Solidarity Fund (NSF) Omar Ben Mahmoud.

Members of the delegation, including notably Mrs. Rekyath Madougou, Minister of Micro-Finance and Employment of Youth and Women, and the ambassador of Benin in Tunis, visited the Boustil neighbourhood which was achieved as part of the Fund's interventions.

They were briefed on the extension works of the district which will start soon. The new project provides for the construction of 36 residential units, in addition to a crafts city.

Members of the delegation expressed wish to draw on the national solidarity experience and seek with Tunisian sides ways to make the most of their expertise in this area.

Several African countries have set up solidarity funds and banks as part of a triangular co-operation with Tunisia and Luxembourg. These countries include Mali, Senegal, Burkina Faso, Democratic Republic of Congo and Djibouti.

Benin shows interest for Tunisian social experience

TUNIS, April 13, 2010 (TAP) - Benin's Family Affairs and Solidarity Minister, Mrs. Mamatou Meba Bio Djossou, showed appreciation for the Tunisian experience in the area of social action, reiterating her country's will to draw inspiration from the Tunisian experience in the solidarity field, the interest taken by the country in vulnerable categories and fight against poverty, and to take advantage, to this effect, of Tunisian skills.

Minister of Social Affairs, Solidarity and Tunisians Abroad Naceur Gharbi conferred, on Tuesday, with the Beninese minister, who is on a visit to Tunisia from April 12 to 18.

The two ministers stressed the excellent level of the two countries' relations and prospects for strengthening bilateral co-operation in the social field. They reviewed the two countries' experiences in the area of development and social action, particularly regarding solidarity, fight against poverty and mechanisms of assistance to the categories with special needs, the disabled, needy families and children with no support.

The two sides expressed readiness to establish a trilateral co-operation in the social field, to strengthen the bonds of friendship between the two countries.

The talk was notably attended by Secretary of State in charge of Social Promotion, Mrs. Najah Belkhiria Karoui.

Tunisia-South Africa: boosting social co-operation

TUNIS, April 14, 2010 (TAP) - Social Affairs, Solidarity and Tunisian Expatriates Minister Naceur Gharbi Tuesday conferred with South African Social Development Minister Edna Molewa, on her working visit in Tunisia.

The meeting turned on means to energise bilateral co-operation in the social field with a view to hoisting it to higher levels, in line with the will guiding the two countries' leaders.

The South African Minister voiced her country's will to develop the friendship and co-operation relations binding the two countries and make the most of Tunisian social experience.

She called to further strengthen the exchanges of expertise and programmes, particularly those pertaining to the protection of vulnerable elderly and social integration of people with special needs.

The two sides stressed the importance of stimulating three-cornered co-operation and diversifying partnership programmes.

BUSINESS & ECONOMY

PM opens Africa-Tunisia partnership seminar in the field of services

TUNIS, April 15, 2010 (TAP) - Prime Minister Mohamed Ghannouchi opened, on Thursday, meeting of the Africa-Tunisia Partnership in the field of services, with attendance of political decision-makers and economic players.

The prime minister highlighted today's role of the services sector in bolstering economies, saying that "this sector is developing at an ever-increasing rate, which represents at least twice the growth of the primary and secondary sectors in the majority of our countries. It is a sector of activity that holds a more and more important position in the African economies. And this is an unavoidable evolution. It is a factor of economic development and social progress, as shown by the example of advanced countries where services have a share of the GDP well above 60%."

He said that "in the past years, Tunisia has incessantly been, under President Ben Ali's impulse, boosting the services sector which represents 43% of GDP and contributes by 26% to the country's exports."

Mr. Ghannouchi pointed out that the objective set by the 2009-2014 Presidential Programme is to raise the services' share to over 50% of GDP and to more than 30% of exports, with such priority sectors taking the lead like the information and communication technologies, health, logistics and financial services.

Tackling the issue of partnership with Africa, the prime minister highlighted Tunisia's strong will to bolster partnership with Africa, which finds expression in the economic missions organised in the past years in many African countries and encouragement of Tunisian enterprises operating in the various services activities, to invest in Africa, be involved in tenders issued by African countries, create joint-ventures with African enterprises as part of a win-win approach.

He asserted that Tunisia is determined to forge ahead on the path of establishing a fruitful, lasting and mutually profitable partnership with all African countries, be it at the bilateral level or as part of triangular co-operation.

He announced, in this regard, that Tunisia is preparing to sign shortly a trade, investment and technical co-operation agreement with the West-African Economic and Monetary Union, and plans to speed up the pace of negotiations to help Tunisia integrate Eastern and Southern Africa's common market (COMESA) and to conclude a preferential agreement with Central African Economic and Monetary Community.

Earlier, the prime minister had inaugurated the services fair held at the headquarters of the Tunisian Union of Industry, Trade and Handicrafts (UTICA), on the sidelines of the meeting Africa-Tunisia Partnership.

The fair aims to present the know-how and skills of Tunisian companies and forge partnership and co-operation relations with African countries. Mr. Ghannouchi visited the different stands of the fair held with the participation of 46 Tunisian enterprises operating in services, such as banks and research, human resources management and information and communication technologies offices.

Agreement on creation of Maghreb Customs Co-operation Committee signed

RABAT, April 29, 2010 (TAP) - A project on the creation of a Maghreb Customs Co-operation Committee taking into account the national and international changes in this area was signed on Wednesday in Rabat.

Directors-general of customs from the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU) countries signed this document at the end of their works at the headquarters of the Secretariat General in Rabat.

The Committee to be based in Algiers is a mechanism designed to strengthen Maghreb customs co-operation with a view to increasing the volume of trade exchanges between member countries and easing customs procedures for economic operators in the Maghreb space.

Regarding the project of a unified Maghreb customs schedule, as a tool to classify traded goods or those to be exchanged between Maghreb countries and ahead of a Maghreb customs unity, it was agreed to adopt at least 8 numerals to mark goods while taking into consideration commitments of some Maghreb countries towards the European Union (EU), with relation in particular to the integrated classification.

As part of intensifying co-operation with the World Customs Organisation and strengthening the Maghreb presence, it was decided to file the candidacy of Mr. Slimane Ourak, Director-General of the Tunisian Customs, as member representing the AMU to the audit organisation of the World Customs Organisation.

This bid will be presented at the meeting of the North Africa and Far- and Near-East Regions, to be held in Brussels, Belgium, next June. It was also agreed to exchange data between national administrations for

greater co-ordination of customs measures in Arab Maghreb countries to combat smuggling.

Co-ordination of customs measures will be the focus of a workshop to be held next May in Algeria.

Tripoli will host in the same period a similar workshop on fight against smuggling in AMU region.

Tunisian-Algerian preferential trade agreement enters into effect

TUNIS, April 28, 2010 (TAP) - The Tunisian-Algerian preferential trade agreement has come into force after completion by the Algerian side of measures to adopt the agreement which had been signed with Tunisia on December 4, 2008.

The agreement, which had already been adopted by Tunisia in March 2009, aims, according to the Tunisian Ministry of Trade and Handicrafts, to further develop economic and trade co-operation and pave the way for the establishment of a free-trade zone between the two countries.

The agreement compels the two sides to apply to traded goods of Tunisian or Algerian origin the principle of national treatment regarding taxes imposed in importing country.

Articles of the agreement provide, in particular, for a schedule for customs tariffs and tax exemptions according to lists set for exchanged products. Thus, concerning industrial products, the agreement provides for a total exemption of products of Algerian origin on the list and imported from Tunisia.

The same treatment is also reserved to products of Tunisian origin which are on the first list while a second list benefits from a 40% reduction. The Algerian side grants additional cuts on this list one year after the coming into effect of this agreement.

The document provides for carrying out negotiations to grant additional customs cuts for other Tunisian goods not concerned so far by tariff advantages.

Regarding agricultural produces, the agreement provides for a comparable total exemption of customs tariffs, taxes as part of the annual tariff contingents related to two lists of Tunisian and Algerian goods annexed to protocol n°2.

Review of liberalisation of trade of other agriculture and food industry products has been delayed for five years after the implementation of this agreement.

The document also stipulates in Article 6 that traded goods should be accompanied by a certificate of origin issued by the concerned authorities in the exporting country according to the protocol that defines products of origin and mechanisms of administrative co-operation annexed to the agreement.

Rules of origin applied as part of this agreement are the Euro-Mediterranean rules.

"Continental Automotive" settles in Menzel Jemil

BIZERTE, April 27, 2010 (TAP) - "Continental Automotive" settles in the industrial area of Menzel Jemil, Bizerte, with investment of 15 million dinars.

This French company is among the largest international companies specialised in manufacture of automobile electronic components.

The project, stretching over an area of 3200 square-metres, is to manufacture 1.5 million of radio sets per year to be exported supply needs of French Renault company and other car-makers.

The company currently employs 22 people and plans to increase this number by the end of the year up to 120 employees (Engineers, technicians and workers) and subsequently to 350 or even 400 employees, mostly graduates from universities and from sectoral training centres. "Continental Automotive" has 32 production sites and more than 80 facilities in 46 countries.

The project was inaugurated on Tuesday by Mr Abdelaziz Rassaa, Secretary of State in charge of Renewable Energy and Food Industries who stressed that this achievement reflects foreign investors' confidence in Tunisia, a stable and safe country where a healthy social climate and highly skilled workforce prevail.

Similarly, the country offers tax incentives and a variety of other encouragements and good basic infrastructure, which has enabled it to attract international companies specialised in the manufacture of automotive and aerospace components, he added.

He also said that the project meets the objectives of the national industrial strategy aimed at encouraging promising sectors and activities with high value technology, such as mechanical industries which have 380 companies located in different regions.

Mr. Jean-Marc Nozeran, President of the French group expressed the satisfaction of company executives at the favourable environment existing in Tunisia, which encourages them to invest more and create new job opportunities for Tunisian and French skills.

Boosting Tunisian-Libyan trade exchanges

TRIPOLI, April 22, 2010 (TAP) - Tunisian and Libyan businessmen called to ease launching of joint ventures by facilitating circulation of persons and capitals between the two countries.

They recommended, at a seminar held on Thursday in the Libyan capital on the theme "Tunisia-Libya, Partnership and Complementarity" on the sidelines of the Tripoli International Fair, to improve the quality of infrastructure at border areas which are crossed each year by some three million people from both sides.

They also called to lift protectionist measures on some products, pointing out that results of economic exchanges remain below the existing potentialities.

Opening the seminar, Minister of Trade and Handicrafts Ridha Ben Mosbah stressed both sides' will to guarantee all necessary conditions to boost co-operation and

establish an environment of business encouraging investment in accordance with the two heads of state.

He added the number of Tunisian-Libyan partnership projects is estimated in Tunisia at 50 projects, while some thirty Tunisian investors are based in Libya.

The minister highlighted the two countries' keenness to iron out all difficulties impeding the development of bilateral co-operation. For his part, Mr. Jamel Lamouchi, Libyan official in charge of investment, expressed hope that bilateral relations will reach the hoped-for targets to help the two countries conquer new outlets.

He said that Tunisia is a privileged partner for Libya and invited Tunisian businessmen to invest in Libya in all areas, particularly in the health sector, and make the most of the incentives established in this field.

Senegalese interest in Tunisian expertise in urban development

TUNIS, April 20, 2010 (TAP) - Equipment, Housing and Territory Development Minister Slaheddine Malouche said, on Tuesday in Tunis, that Tunisia is ready to put its expertise in territory development at Senegal's disposal.

The minister, who co-chaired with Mr. Karim Wade, Senegalese State Minister, Minister of International Co-operation, of Territory Development, of Air Transport and Infrastructure, a working session, stressed that the Senegalese delegation's visit to Tunisia provided the opportunity for exchanging information and expertise to boost co-operation in this field and identify means to achieve joint targets.

For his part, Mr. Wade highlighted his country's will to draw on the Tunisian experience in territory development by means of establishing an institutional and technical partnership, one that would enrich the Senegalese human resources and enhance presence of experts from the Tunisian private sector in Senegal.

The Senegalese minister, who said that Tunisia is an example worth following in matters of comprehensive, balanced and solidary development, gave an account on the large-scale infrastructure projects the Senegalese government is achieving and others to be carried out.

Targeting new outlets for promotional campaign of industrial strategy

TUNIS, April 20, 2010 (TAP) - The campaign to promote the industrial strategy of Tunisia by 2016 will target new countries, including the United States, Canada, Japan, Korea, China and the Netherlands, in addition to traditional partners to Tunisia (France, Italy, Spain, Germany and Great Britain).

Director General of the Industry Promotion Agency (API) Mohamed Ben Abdallah stressed, at a news conference held on Tuesday in Tunis, that three events were held in Florence (Italy), Almere (Netherlands) and Tokyo (Japan) during the first quarter of 2010, with the participation of some 300 foreign investors.

He announced that 14 seminars will be held during the next period and will focus on aeronautics, food industry, textile and mechanical, electrical and electronic industries.

These events are to include testimonials of foreign investments settled in Tunisia. The 2010 information and promotion campaign of the industrial strategy by 2016 follows the pilot programme of 14 seminars developed in 2009. This programme touched on five European countries: Germany, Spain, France, Great Britain and Italy.

These seminars helped sensitise nearly 1500 economic operators and journalists on the four sectors of activities targeted by the strategic study, namely mechanical and electrical industries, textile, food industry and ICTs. In addition to increasing Tunisian exports, the promotional campaign seeks to develop foreign direct investment and promote a different image of the Tunisian industry by showcasing Tunisia as an important site for high added-value activities.

Fourth Arab symposium on international technical assistance

GAMMARTH, April 20, 2010 (TAP) - "Management of Arab- Arab Co-operation" is the theme of the fourth Arab symposium on international technical assistance and its impact on Arab development.

Opened on Tuesday in Gammarth, this three-day event aims to develop inter-Arab co-operation opportunities, impart necessary efficiency on different assistance mechanisms to inter-Arab development and prompt the exchange of expertise.

It also seeks to develop programmes set up as part of Arab-Arab co-operation, improve their management and enrich thinking on ways to take up challenges faced by the Arab world.

The symposium, which is attended by many experts from Arab countries (Tunisia, Morocco, Libya, Iraq, Egypt, Yemen, Palestine, etc.), is organised by the Arab Administrative Development Organisation, in association with the Tunisian Technical Co-operation Agency, and with the financial support of the Kuwaiti Fund for Economic Development of Arab Countries.

Tunisia-Djibouti: Business and development looked at

TUNIS, April 16, 2010 (TAP)- The situation of cooperation between Tunisia and Djibouti and prospects for its development were the focus of talks held here this morning between Secretary of State in charge of Foreign Trade, Chokri Mamoghli, and a delegation of high officials from Djibouti, currently on a visit to Tunisia to attend the Tunisia-Africa partnership meeting in the field of services.

The Djibouti delegation presented a number of projects planned in their country and notably the achievement of a trade fair and a handicrafts village and expressed will to take advantage of Tunisia's expertise in this field.

The secretary of state reminded for his part of the strategic vision aimed to develop partnership with African states and said that Tunisia will be proud to share its experience with African countries in matters of economic

development. He also stressed the importance of exchanging businessmen's visits and the role that chambers of commerce could play to that end.

Tunisia and Vietnam sign non-double taxation agreement

TUNIS, April 13, 2010 (TAP) - An non-double taxation agreement was signed, on Tuesday in Tunis.

During a ceremony held under the chairmanship of Finance Minister Mohamed Ridha Chalghoum, the agreement was signed by Mr. Moncef Bouden, Secretary of State in charge of taxation, and Mr. Pham Sy Danh, Vietnam's deputy Finance Minister.

On this occasion, the two sides underlined the importance of the legal framework in developing the two countries' relations in the field of investment and the exchange of experience and goods, given the guarantees it provides to investors in the two countries.

Tunisian-Vietnamese Business Forum

TUNIS, April 12, 2010 (TAP) - Tunisian-Vietnamese relations, though modest, offer significant potentials, particularly in oil prospecting, tourism and agriculture, it appears from the Tunisian-Vietnamese Business Forum held on Monday at the headquarters of the Tunisian Union of Industry, Trade and Handicrafts (UTICA).

A Vietnamese delegation led by President Nguyen Minh Triet, on his official visit in Tunisia on April 12-13, took part in the Forum.

The delegation includes some fifty businessmen operating in the sectors of food industry, construction and public works, energy, ICT, financial and banking services, furniture, textile and clothing, leather and footwear, chemistry, fertilisers, car industry, pharmaceutical industry, communication and tourism.

Addressing the Forum, Vietnamese President Nguyen Minh Triet said Vietnam managed to reach quite a high level of economic growth, averaging annually a rate of 7 to 8%.

It achieved a growth rate of 5% in 2009 and banks on a 6 to 7% rate, in 2010.

The country, he pointed out, engaged in a fight against poverty and is seeking to stand out as a viable partner to countries of the world. Tunisia, he reminded, was among the first countries that established diplomatic relations with Vietnam.

Vietnam's President emphasised the multiple affinities between his country and Tunisia, being both countries that had fought for their independence. They are also, he added, two peace-loving countries that are driven by the will to boost their growth and co-operate for their development.

Mr. Nguyen Minh Triet stressed the two countries' will to raise their relations to higher levels and to co-ordinate stands in international events.

He emphasised the modest volume of current bilateral trade exchanges which are not equal to expectations, pointing out that the purpose of his visit is to explore potentials of co-operation and investment and further develop trade exchanges.

There are, he argued, strong potentials for co-operation in the oil field and also in the tourism sector to draw on the Tunisian experience in this area, but also in infrastructure, trade, agriculture and phosphates. He also called for signing agreements to guarantee an environment propitious to investment.

Development and International Co-operation Minister Mohamed Nouri Jouini said he was convinced that the choices and policies of openness adopted by Tunisia and Vietnam will pave the way for the two countries' business communities to develop partnership and explore new markets, particularly in Africa and Asia.

The minister pointed out that, since the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries in 1972, relations between Tunisia and Vietnam have been characterised by mutual respect and esteem.

He reminded, in this regard, that Tunisia had supported Vietnam's membership to the World Trade Organisation (WTO), as well as to the UN Security Council (2008-2009) and, for its part, Vietnam had backed all initiatives of Tunisia, such the ones providing for the creation of the World Solidarity Fund and proclaiming 2010 as the International Youth Year.

Mr. Jouini said that, despite efforts exerted by the two countries, Tunisian-Vietnamese trade and economic exchanges are below what is expected, pointing to the existence of opportunities and prospects for both sides to boost their co-operation and expand it to several fields.

For his part, UTICA Chairman Hedi Djilani underlined that the meeting would certainly breathe a fresh impetus into economic relations between the two countries, describing as "too modest" the economic exchanges between Tunisia and Vietnam compared with the available potentials.

These exchanges still depend on Tunisian phosphate exports, he said, pointing out that the two sides would benefit from boosting new joint investments and partnerships, similar to those established in the area of oil prospecting between "PetroVietnam" company and the Tunisian Company of Petroleum Activities (ETAP).

He expressed hope that this kind of partnership would be intensified in the areas of manufactured industries and high added-value services.

Tunisia and Vietnam are two emerging countries that chose to open up their economies and that could advantageously join their means to catch up more rapidly with the developed countries, he concluded.

Mr. Vu Tien Loc, chairman of Vietnam's Chamber of Commerce and Industry, emphasised, in turn, that Tunisia, a country with a strong economic competitiveness, is a bridge to the European Union, the Arab Maghreb and Africa, in the same way Vietnam, an emerging country, is a gateway to Asia.

He called for setting up mechanisms of co-operation and developing exchange of information between Tunisia and Vietnam.

Tunisavia and Eurocopter sign co-operation agreement

SFAX, April 8, 2010 (TAP) - A co-operation agreement was signed, on Thursday in Sfax, by Tunisian air transport and services company Tunisavia and European group Eurocopter, world leader in helicopter manufacturing.

Under this agreement, Tunisavia's maintenance centre, housed by the Sfax-Tina airport, was adopted by Eurocopter as an accredited centre for maintenance works.

The agreement also provides for other aspects related to technical assistance and technological transfer for the benefit of the Tunisian centre.

The Tunisavia maintenance centre has as its ambition to become a renowned regional centre, particularly in the Maghreb and Africa, in helicopter maintenance services.

The agreement was signed by Messrs. Aziz Miled, chairman of Tunisavia Board of Directors, and Olivier Lambert, deputy chairman of Eurocopter group, in the presence of the director general of civil aviation at the transport ministry and air transport executives.

Mr. Olivier Lambert expressed satisfaction at the level of partnership established between the Tunisian company and the European group, stressing Eurocopter's readiness to strengthen this strategic co-operation.

Tunisavia has been certified since 2006 in conformity with European air safety standards. Eurocopter group has a 52-per-cent lion's market share of world helicopter manufacturing.

Large-scale irrigated olive-growing project of national and regional scope inaugurated at Smenja

ZAGHOUAN, April 2, 2010 (TAP) – A large-scale drip irrigated olive-growing project of national and regional scope was inaugurated in Smenja, the governorate of Zaghuan.

Of a cost of 13 million dinars, and spanning 1200 hectares, the project consists of two parcels, Zitouna I et Zitouna II. It is owned 100 per cent by the Princess Group Holding and its subsidiaries.

The kick-off was given Tuesday at Zitouna I farm, located at Smenja, by Mr. Mohamed Sakher El Materi, Chairman of Princess El Materi Holding Group.

On the occasion, Mr. El Materi said that "Zitouna (Olive-tree) is identified by our religion and beliefs for its blessing and 'Baraka' as it is commonly known in the community's current language. We have used 'Zitouna' as a brand name among our subsidiaries and affiliated institutions such as Radio Zitouna, Zitouna Bank and recently Zitouna Takaful (mutual aid). Today, we fully invest in the olive-tree and olive oil."

Besides, Mr. El Materi added that this initiative results from a survey conducted on both the national and international olive oil market. "We have realized the great relevant development potential, our goal, he stated, has immediately been materialized through launching an integrated project of a national and regional scope."

"The project, to be led by a team of highly experimented engineers and technicians, has been rendered feasible thanks to the incentives and privileges instituted by the State in order to stimulate investing in then farming sector," Mr. El Materi indicated.

Accordingly, he asserted that "the project will be given the most sophisticated technical means guaranteeing an excellent olive oil produce in line with the international requirements and standards which allow access onto new foreign markets and meet domestic demand by providing the Tunisian consumer with quality oil."

M. El Materi announced the gearing of an action plan for marketing Zitouna Brand abroad. "We will draw on the existing structures established by the government such as CEPEX and FAMEX while also relying on alliances to build Tunisian producers."

The first portion of the project consists in planting 1200 hectares with hyper-intensive olive trees, say 19 million seedlings of a density close to 1660 trees/hectare essentially composed of Arbequina and Arbosana varieties. The drip irrigation network already covers a large part of the farm where new planting devices have been introduced.

For the first time in Tunisia, new varieties will be planted such as Sikitita which enables various cutting possibilities and propose a range of olive oil that satisfies all tastes.

It is to be noted that studies conducted by the Olive-tree Institute have proven that the new Arbequina and Arbosana varieties allow a very high yield rate and most importantly an excellent olive oil quality subject to a high market demand in Europe and America thanks to its nutritional characteristics and fruity flavour.

Nonetheless, these varieties may still encounter reluctance on behalf of some Tunisian analysts and olive oil exporters insofar as they are based on new devices of intensification, trimming and mechanical harvest. Such reluctance to change and modernizing of agriculture should be overcome.

The project has given economic and social momentum to the little village of Smenja by employing numerous local workers and technicians.

The second portion of the project consists in building a large crushing unit of a minimal capacity of 100 tonne/day in addition to setting a conditioning and bottling unit.

MSI 20000 certification granted to "Banque de Tunisie"

TUNIS, April 23, 2010 (TAP) - MSI 20000 certification has been granted to the "Banque de Tunisie" (BT), the first Tunisian financial institution to earn such a distinction.

The International MSI 20000 standard crowns not only the results of steady growth and high level of profitability, but

also, strategically, the successes scored on the micro-economic level by innovation, the introduction of new financial products and developing use of credit cards, stressed the certifying body Maghreb Corporate, in collaboration with the Bourse-Paris Institute.

Distinguished by the International American Magazine "Global Finance" in 2009, BT had also been consecrated "Bank of the Year in Tunisia" by financial "Banker Magazine" of the English press group Financial Time.

Boosting banker's card market in Africa

TUNIS, April 1, 2010 (TAP) - Secure electronic payment via the Internet (banker's or postal card) posted a considerable growth in 2009.

The number of operations carried out rose by 32%, while the volume of transactions increased by 57% compared with 2008. The number of banker's cards in Tunisia rose from 900,000 by late 2004 to over 2 millions in 2009. The number of operations carried out by these cards reached over 36 millions in 2009, while the volume of transactions made reached 3.6 billion dinars, compared with 1.3 billion dinars in 2004.

Strides made and opportunities for expanding demonetised payment means, particularly mobile payment which is one of the technologies mostly adapted to the African region, were the focal points of the 5th Forum of Banker's Card Technologies in the African Continent "Africa Cards 2010" which opened on Thursday in Tunis.

Tunisian, Maghreb and African experts taking part in this event discussed commercial and strategic stakes resulting from the considerable development of e-banking activities.

Opening works of this 5th edition, Governor of the Central Bank of Tunisia (BCT) Taoufik Baccar said that promotion of e-banking is a challenge for the African economies, which are expected to develop, modernise and guarantee the safety of their electronic payment systems to enhance the confidence of different stakeholders in these means of payment.

Mr. Baccar also stressed the importance of the Tunisian approach which is focused, in particular, on improving the legislative environment governing electronic transactions and ensuring their safety on the one hand and generalising the use of e-banking, on the other one.

The presidential programme 2009-2014 "Together We Meet Challenges" has confirmed the choice to promote ICT investment to generalise e-banking services, concluded Mr. Baccar.

Launching for first time in Africa of PayPass card in Tunisia

TUNIS, April 1, 2010 (TAP)- Director General of "Tunisia Monetics" Khaled Fradi Wednesday announced in Tunis the launching Thursday, for the first time in Africa, of the PayPass card.

At a news conference held on the occasion of the 5th Banking Card Technologies Forum " Banking Cards in

Africa 2010" (April 1-2), he said that the PayPass technology of Mastercard is a particularly speedy (between 3 and 7 seconds), practical and reliable way to do one's shopping.

He also said that this card will be tested during the current year in well determined sectors for purchase not exceeding 20 dinars.

The number of banking cards issued in Tunisia up to the end of 2009 is estimated at 2 082 905 compared with 791 641 in 2003. Their use to withdraw money from cash dispensers accounts for about 85% of the total utilisations of banking cards in Tunisia whereas their use for payment did not exceed 15% in 2009.

Some 500 participants from 35 countries will take part in this forum and debate different strategies and opportunities of expanding smart card trade in North, Central and West Africa.

ENERGY & ENVIRONNEMENT

Arab Atomic Energy Agency General Assembly meeting in Tunisia

HAMMAMET, April 30, 2010 (TAP) - Works of the Arab Atomic Energy Agency (AAEA) General Assembly's extraordinary session, on Thursday and Friday in Hammamet, turned on means to help implement the Arab strategy on peaceful use of nuclear energy.

Representatives of member Arab countries took part in this session crowned by the adoption of the Agency's budget for 2011 and 2012, which will be submitted to the Arab League's Economic and Social Council.

In his address on the occasion, Secretary of State in charge of Scientific Research Refaat Chaabouni stressed Tunisia's constant support to AAEA as a gain which should be developed, specifying in this regard that Tunisia is ready to make all the National Nuclear Sciences and Technologies Centre's means available to the Agency in order to reinforce co-operation, further training and exchange of expertise.

The Secretary of State underlined the importance lent to the energy sector, notably renewable and atomic energies, in view of their multiple use in strategic fields, specifying that an atomic energy-based electricity-producing station will be operational by 2020, according to the studies that have been under preparation for many years with the assistance of the National Nuclear Sciences and Technologies Centre and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

"Raf Raf" and "Azmour" prospection permits granted

TUNIS, April 8, 2010 (TAP) - Two outline agreements, providing for granting hydrocarbons prospection permits—"Raf Raf" and "Azmour"—to Dutch "Shell Tunisia Offshore" company, in association with the Tunisian Oil Activities Enterprise (ETAP), were signed on Thursday.

The agreements were signed by Industry and Technology Minister Afif Chelbi, on behalf of the Tunisian state's side, ETAP CEO Khaled Becheikh, and authorised representative of Shell company Martijn Mindehoud.

Located on northern Tunisian coastal areas, the two permits cover fields of 2160 square Km and 3416 square Km, respectively.

Minimum commitment of works, during the two-year validity period, corresponds to the achievement of 500 km of seismic data acquisition with an investment estimated at two million US dollars for each permit.

Agreement between STEG and the World Bank signed

TUNIS, April 7, 2010 (TAP) - An agreement was signed by the Tunisian Electricity and Gas Company (STEG) and the World Bank (WB). The document provides for selling a share of carbon credits generated by the 34 MW-wind-power station located in Sidi Daoud.

It is the first clean development mechanism achieved in Tunisia in the wind-power sector.

With the signing of this agreement, the country plans to develop its potential of cutting greenhouse emissions in the energy sector. Within the framework of this agreement, WB acts on behalf of the Spanish Carbon Fund as being its manager.

Thanks to this project, which also includes the construction of a transport line reaching Menzel Temime, STEG inter-connected network members could henceforth be supplied by wind-generated electricity.

In substitution to an electricity production from fossil energies, the production of this power plant will help avoid a volume of emissions estimated at 50,000 tonnes greenhouse equivalent per year.

Tunisia takes part in "5+5" ministerial conference on environment

ORAN, April 26, 2010 (TAP) - Tunisia is taking part in the ministerial conference on the "5+5" Mediterranean dialogue on environment, sustainable development and renewable energies, on April 26-27, 2010 in Oran, Algeria.

The Conference, co-chaired by Algeria and Spain, adopted the Oran Declaration on the importance of boosting the region's co-operation in matters of fight against climate change and vitalisation of youth's participation in this field.

Environment and Sustainable Development Minister Nadhir Hamada emphasised, at the opening of the Conference, the urgency for the Mediterranean region to set up more efficient co-operation mechanisms in the field of environment in order to mobilise the required financial resources that would help improve its ability to cope with climate change.

He called for support to the Head of State's initiative pertaining to the creation of a Mediterranean observatory of early alert to help the region avert environmental

damage and grant further efficiency to the States' interventions in this field.

He cited notably the programme aiming at achieving energy saving of 20 % and raise the rate of renewable energies up to 4% of the total energies used.

Mr. Hamada reminded that Tunisia is to host on May 22, on the occasion of the World Biological Diversity Day, an international conference on youth and biodiversity.

Participants in the ministerial conference discussed issues related to the use of renewable energies and mechanisms of fight against desertification.

Tunisia, Nigeria sign co-operation agreement to fight desertification

MEDENINE, April 17, 2010 (TAP) - A co-operation agreement in the area of fight against desertification was signed Friday between the Medenine-based Institute of Dry Regions (IRA) and the Nigerian environment ministry.

The document was signed by IRA Director-General and the Chairman and Managing Director of the Interact Safety System, a Nigerian institution specialised in environment protection and fight against desertification.

This five-year agreement provides for training Nigerian executives in fight against desertification through a set of training sessions of three weeks each. The Nigerian side pays for the training.

It also provides for sending experts of the institute to Nigeria to initiate programmes of fight against desertification.

IRA is a reference institution in this area thanks to the results of researches achieved in matters of fight against desertification, water resources' exploitation, soils' preservation, pastures' rehabilitation and exploitation, cattle breeding and sensitisation to natural resources' protection.

The Institute has already held training sessions for several countries such as Mali, Chad, Sudan, Mauritania, Yemen and Syria.

It has contributed to launching an international master degree on the fight against desertification and natural resources management, in collaboration with the United Nations University, China's Sciences Academy and the Japanese University of Tottori.

Fifth International Congress on environment and product quality control

SOUSSE, April 10, 2010 (TAP) - Environment and product quality control: recovering and processing of waste and effects on human health, is the theme of the 5th International Congress held in the resort city of Sousse April 9-11.

The meeting is organised by the Laboratory of Analysis, Processing and Recovering of Pollutants of the Faculty of Pharmacy of Monastir, with the collaboration of the Higher Institute of Biotechnology (Monastir), the Technopole of

Borj Cedria (Tunis) and the Tunisian Natural Science Society Branch of Central Tunisia.

Over 250 participants of Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, Mauritania, Libya, Egypt, Syria, Saudi Arabia and Congo are taking part in the congress works which focus on the physico-chemical and microbiological control of products as well as on the processing of waste and the utilisation of waste water.

Opening of 19th session of Near East Forestry Commission

HAMMAMET, April 5, 2010 (TAP) - Works of the 19th session of the Near East Forestry Commission (NEFC) opened on Monday in Hammamet.

The event is held by the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) in association with the Agriculture, Water Resources and Fisheries Ministry.

The five-day regional meeting, attended by representatives from 20 Middle Eastern countries, is to centre on the theme of "Forests, Pastures and Adaptation to Climate Changes."

It is aimed to work out a coherent system for the sustainable management of forests and pastures in the Middle East and to strengthen co-operation and exchange of expertise in this area between countries of the region.

Several issues will be discussed at this 19th session, including in particular "sustainable management of forests and pastures," "pastures, forestry policies and sustainable development," "fauna and protection of forests against fire" and "biodiversity and climate changes."

An exhibition on the achievements of countries taking part in this meeting will be held on the occasion, as part of the Near East Forest Week.

Workshops will also be organised on fires, climate changes and Tunisian forest resources.

Investments in the forest sector in Tunisia have reached 50 million dinars (MTD) currently, compared with only 5 MTD in 1987, said Director General of Forestry Mohamed Ridha El Fkih Salem.

Set up in 1953, NEFC is one of six regional forestry commissions FAO created. It is a forum that discusses and addresses forest-related issues at the regional level.

First eco-friendly hotel in Tunisia inaugurated

HAMMAMET, April 28, 2010 (TAP) - The first eco-friendly hotel in Tunisia, the Yasmine Hammamet "Russellior," was inaugurated on Tuesday. This new hotel unit is unique of its kind in Tunisia, in that it relies on the development of environmental awareness and meets preferences of tourists who choose environment-friendly destinations.

The hotel had already been awarded the President of the Republic's 2009 Energy Saving Prize.

The hotel unit offers high quality services and accommodation conditions. In its ecological rooms, blankets and carpets are made of biological materials.

Cigarettes and alcoholic drinks are not served within this space.

The hotel is located in a green park that houses a large variety of flowers and an oasis of no less than 2000 palm trees which make it a real shelter from sun rays and a source reflecting the warmth of the country's hospitality.

During the inauguration, Tourism Minister Slim Tlatli stressed that this achievement is an example of efforts exerted to offer a tourist product that responds to the demands of foreign and Tunisian tourists. He emphasised the importance of this achievement which will certainly enhance the image of the Tunisian tourist destination, given the excellent level of services it offers.

EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Ways to diversify Tunisia-South Africa scientific co-operation fields

TUNIS, April 15, 2010 (TAP) - Higher Education and Scientific Research Minister Bechir Tekkari conferred with Mr. Derek Andre Hanekom, South African Deputy Minister of Science and Technologies.

The meeting provided the opportunity to review co-operation, particularly in the areas of scientific research in agronomics, medicine and renewable energies.

The South African guest commended the excellent level reached by Tunisia in the sector of communication technologies which has enhanced its position on the international scale.

He expressed his country's will to broaden bilateral co-operation, particularly in the sectors of bio-technology and high added-value technological applications.

During a field visit, Mr. Hanekom was briefed on activities of the National Centre of Nuclear Science and Technologies at the Manouba, a centre linked up to its South African counterpart by a scientific and technological co-operation agreement in peaceful use of nuclear energy.

The South African Deputy Minister was accompanied during his visit by the Secretary of State in charge of Scientific Research.

Training: Tunisia and Palestine sign MOU

TUNIS, April 13, 2010 (TAP) - Ways to strengthen co-operation in the areas of vocational training and employment were the focal points of the memorandum of understanding signed, on Tuesday in Tunis, by Vocational Training and Employment Minister Mohamed Agrebi and Palestinian Labour Minister Ahmad Majdalani.

The memorandum of understanding is meant to develop these sectors in both countries, by boosting bilateral co-operation in the legislative, documentation and research fields related to employment and training.

It also provides for the exchange of visits and development of youth employment and vocational training programmes.

The minister stressed the strong ties binding Tunisia and Palestine, as reflected in the unwavering support lent by President Zine E Abidine Ben Ali to the Palestinian cause and his will to strengthen the fraternity and co-operation bonds in all areas.

The minister reviewed the successes of the Tunisian experience in the area of vocational training, thanks to the efforts exerted to improve the system's performance and consolidate the national companies' competitiveness, in such a manner as to boost youth employment.

He expressed hope that the memorandum would help increase job and training opportunities for Palestinian youth.

For his part, Mr. Ahmad Majdalani expressed will to draw on the Tunisian experience in this area to develop the strategy set up by the Palestinian Authority to boost the employment sector.

He highlighted the key role played by Tunisia from the very beginning of the establishment of the Palestinian Authority, adding that the Palestinian people will never forget that "it was here in Tunisia that the announcement of the formation of the Palestinian Authority was made, as well as the making up of the Government and ministries, with the support of Tunisian skills."

TUNISIA-UNICEF: Boosting co-operation to develop priority and integrating schools

TUNIS, April 8, 2010 (TAP) - Education Minister Hatem Ben Salem conferred, on Thursday, with United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) representative in Tunisia Maria-Luisa Fornara.

The meeting was an occasion to reassert the importance of boosting co-operation with UN organisation, particularly in matters of promoting priority schools and those integrating disabled children.

As regards the integrating schools, the minister pointed out to the need of raising parents' awareness to the importance for their children to mix with disabled pupils.

For her part, Mrs. Fornara expressed UNICEF's readiness to back up the ministry's programmes to ensure a quality education, notably in the priority and integrating schools.

She also reasserted will to use the Fund's skills and means to fight school dropping out and identify new co-operation opportunities in pre-school education field.

International conference on intellectual innovation and respect of intellectual property rights

TUNIS, April 27, 2010 (TAP)- An international conference on technological innovation and respect of intellectual property rights was held on Tuesday in Gammarth by the Arab Communication and Information Communication Technologies Organisation (AICTO), in association with the Communication Technologies Ministry and Microsoft International.

International experts are taking part in this event held on the celebration of the World Intellectual Property Rights Day.

The meeting aims to raise awareness of the need to protect intellectual property and respect copyrights, particularly in the Arab region, in light of the challenges resulting from the growing use of the Internet.

Minister of Communication Technologies Mohamed Naceur Ammar stressed, at the opening of works, Tunisia's adherence to international efforts in the area of protecting intellectual property, saying that it is one of the first ten founding countries of the Berne Convention to protect literary and artistic works.

He also stressed the succession of national laws on the protection of intellectual, artistic and industrial property.

Mrs. Khadija Ghariani, AICTO Secretary-General, stressed that most Arab countries had adopted recently laws in matters of protection of commercial brands, industrial prototypes and copyrights, in addition to rephrasing laws on the protection of software, database and protection of confidentiality of e- exchanges.

She said that the situation differs from one Arab country to another, noting that this situation should not impede the establishment of a joint system to protect intellectual property rights in the Arab countries, while taking into consideration the characteristics of each country.

Microsoft launches new development programme Bizspark Camp

TUNIS, April 20, 2010 (TAP) - Microsoft launched, on Tuesday, at the Innovation Centre of Microsoft at the El Ghazala-based Technopark, the new programme dedicated to startups called "Bizspark Camp," in the presence of Minister of Communication Technologies Mohamed Naceur Ben Ammar.

This new programme aims to further support new innovating projects nationwide and ensure the success and durability of junior Tunisian companies operating in ICTs.

The "Bizspark Camp" programme, dedicated to startups, involves managerial training targeting junior promoters, technical workshops dedicated to IT business managers and developers and online training on www.microsoft.com/bizspark.

The launch of this programme takes place after the success of MIC (Microsoft Innovation Centre) programmes, particularly the annual programme for sponsoring 10 startups which has attracted the attention of many startups.

This success helped develop 28 startups with the achievement of over 30 projects, the training and certification of over 50 developers and the creation of more than 200 jobs and training courses.

Minister of Technologies and Communication Mohamed Naceur Ammar said "Bizspark Camp" is in perfect harmony with the Government's strategy to support innovating projects and junior promoters.

He reviewed decisions expected as part of the presidential programme 2009-2014 to build a more competitive and more modern economy.

He handed, on the occasion, the Prize of Excellence to the Industry Promotion Agency and the Technopark of El Ghazala for their fruitful collaboration in setting up the programme of Microsoft.

The prize of best startup was awarded to IP Tech for the innovative solutions developed by using the latest Microsoft technologies.

Nineth Global Information Technology Report: Tunisia first in Africa and 39th worldwide

TUNIS, April 3, 2010 (TAP) - Tunisia was ranked 1st in Africa and the Maghreb and 39th internationally by the 9th Global Information Technology Report (GITR) for 2009-2010. The latter is made by the Davos Global Economic Forum and the European Business Administration Institute (INSEAD).

The Report, published this year on "Information and Communication Technology in the Service of Sustainability" and whose findings were released recently in New York, is one of the most exhaustive and viable assessments on the international scale regarding the impact of ICT on countries' development process and their competitiveness.

It assesses the countries' capacity to command communication technologies according to three criteria: political and economic environment appropriate for the development of new technologies, the level of use of information and communication technologies and the level of technological progress.

The Report also ranked Tunisia 6th on the international scale in matters of ICT promotion in different regions of the country and setting up of a legal framework designed to support the private sector and boost the national economy.

In addition, it retained the Tunisian experience in the area of ICT as an example to follow, all the more so that Tunisia was one of the first African countries to set up a national strategy based on information and communication technologies.

The major targets of this strategy are the modernisation of infrastructure in different regions of the country, setting up a legal framework of e-economy to consolidate the private sector and improving the national economy's competitiveness.

By late 2009, there were 1,284,924 computers in Tunisia and 3,520,000 Internet users, i.e. 35 users per 100 inhabitants. The rate of the country's connection to the international Internet network is estimated at 27.5 gigabits/second while the number of mobile telephone users is over 9.82 million.

As a result of the gains made and given the country's environment favourable to investment, several multinational companies have chosen Tunisia and offshored their activities dedicated to international markets

(call centres, outsourcing, applications and software industry).

Tunisia seeks to achieve a qualitative leap in the area of ICT by achieving the objectives of the presidential programme "Together We Meet Challenges." The point is to reach one million new broadband Internet users and ease digital access for Tunisian families.

Efforts are also exerted to develop digital contents, set up the terrestrial digital television and involve civil society in the building up of the information society.

TOURISM & CULTURE

Tunisia: Positive tourism indicators

TUNIS, April 29, 2010 (TAP) - Tourism revenues reached 545 million dinars in the first quarter of 2010, with 1.098 million tourists (+0.6%) and 4.463 million bed-nights, i.e. a 4.6% rise compared to the same period of 2009.

During a news conference held on Thursday, Tourism Minister Slim Tlatli said these results account for 12% of the whole year's results as the high season falls with summer.

Thus, according to the minister, the Tunisian tourism would achieve in 2010 revenues similar or higher than those of in 2009, i.e. 3.4 billion dinars.

The World Tourism Organisation expects a 4% growth of this sector in the world in 2010.

He pointed out that 35,675 tourists were unable to go back home in due time as a result of the Icelandic volcanic ash crisis.

He pointed out that 40,364 tourists who had planned to spend their holidays in Tunisia cancelled or postponed their stay as a result of this crisis.

The minister said the department implemented a plan to use information and communication technologies in different tourist activities, underlining that 70% of tourists in the world choose their destination via the Internet and 60% of British and northern European tourists choose and book by using this means.

Mr. Tlatli addressed the issue of exchange of tourist experiences on Internet forums, pointing out that, according to studies conducted on this issue, positive opinions of a tourist on a destination contribute to attract three more tourists to this destination, while negative ones are likely to discourage 10 tourists at once.

He added that initiatives designed to improve the digital contents of the Tunisian tourism will be encouraged in addition to developing the contents of sites of the ministry and the tourism board.

He said that a second campaign to promote Tunisian tourism through advertisements will be staged shortly in fifty European cities.

He announced that the strategic study on the development of Tunisian tourism by 2016 will be completed soon.

World Tourism Organisation supports two Tunisian training and statistics programmes

TUNIS, April 1, 2010 (TAP)- The Tourism Ministry is launching, with the support of the World Tourism Organisation (WTO), a co-operation programme on vocational training and implementation of a tourism statistics system designed to get accurate information about the sector's contribution to the national economy.

This decision was announced at a working session held on Thursday in Tunis between Mr. Frederic Pierret, Executive Director of WTO, who is paying a working visit to Tunisia, and officials of the ministry in charge of upgrading, promotion, marketing and vocational training.

The meeting examined co-operation between WTO and Tunisia. Exposés on the vocational training system, quality programmes and customers satisfaction surveys were discussed on the occasion. Tourism Minister Slim Tlatli had conferred, earlier, with Mr. Frederic Pierret on the world tourism situation, the fallout of the economic crisis which hits the major provider-markets and co-operation between Tunisia and WTO.

Mr. Frederic praised the quality of the relations binding Tunisia and WTO, expressing the Organisation's will to further strengthen its co-operation with this country, which is considered, he said, as one of the major players of Mediterranean and international tourism.

Opening of international conference on dialogue of cultures and religions in literature and arts

SOUSSE, April 22, 2010 (TAP) - "Dialogue of Cultures and Religions in Literature and Arts" is the theme of an international conference that started on Thursday in Hammam- Sousse.

The conference is held by the Centre of Studies and Researches on Dialogue of Civilisations and Comparative Religions, with the participation of a host of men of arts and culture from Tunisia, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Jordan, Spain and France.

Chairing the opening of works, Religions Affairs Minister Boubaker el Akhzouri highlighted the initiatives of President Zine el Abidine Ben Ali to deepen and enrich dialogue, reminding, in this regard, of the proclamation of the "Carthage Charter on Tolerance," the foundation of "Ben Ali's Chair for Dialogue of Civilisations and Religions," and the creation of the "Carthage Centre for Dialogue of Civilisations" designed to become an international space open to individuals, groups, religions and cultures.

The Forum of Tunis for Peace, created in association with the Secretariat-General of the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) seeks to disseminate the culture of

peace at the level of thinking and behaviour, he pointed out.

The first scientific session included two papers on "Arab Culture and Acceptance of Others" and "Role of Geopolitics and Arts in Establishing Dialogue between Islam and the West."

Preparations for Arab Cultural Summit announced in Tunis

TUNIS, April 20, 2010 (TAP) - Director General of the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organisation (ALECSO) Mohamed El Aziz Ben Achour announced here the start of preparations for the next Arab Cultural Summit due in the second half of 2011.

During a news briefing held on Tuesday in Tunis, ALECSO Director General praised the announcement of the start of these preparations from Tunisia which hosts the ALECSO headquarters and where culture enjoys special care from President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali who has made pertinent decisions and set vanguard strategies for culture.

Mr. Ben Achour said the decision to hold a cultural summit was taken at the Arab Summit held in Sirte, Libya on March 27-28, 2010 to face up to the dangers which globalisation poses to Arab culture and identity.

Over one thousand publishers from 35 countries expected at Tunis International Book Fair

TUNIS, April 19, 2010 (TAP)- More than one thousand publishers from 35 countries are to take part in the 28th Tunis International Book Fair to be held on April 23-May 2 at the Kram Exhibitions Park.

Mr. Boubaker Ben Frej, Director of the Fair held a news conference on Monday at the premises of the Tunisian External Communication Agency (ATCE) during which he presented the new edition's agenda.

He emphasised the cultural momentum experienced by Tunisia under the impetus of President Zine el Abidine Ben Ali who has assigned culture and intellectuals a prime position as part of a forward-looking vision meant to make of Tunisia a permanent cultural beacon.

He added that this edition will record, on April 28, the closing of the national consultation on books and reading whose organisation had been ordered by the Head of State, knowing that the previous edition of the fair marked the start of the consultation.

The number of Tunisian publishers will reach this year 103, those from the Arab world, 318, France, 447, and from other countries, 232, Mr. Ben Frej said.

On the cultural agenda of the Book Fair, an international symposium on "The Universal and Local Element in Thinking and Creation" (April 30-May 1).

The event focuses on ways to preserve local specificities at the age of integration in universal culture and creators' access to universality.

A meeting on "creation in other's language... other's creation," to be held on April 28, will address the double creative experience of Tunisian writing in other languages and those who had re-invented foreign works in Arabic, in addition to a study day on "book in the media" (April 29).

The new edition will also focus on "novel writing" (April 24) to grasp current trends of this literary genre.

A section named "Writers of the World" will provide the opportunity to discuss with writers from other horizons, such as writer Chinese Liu Xinglong, one of the pioneers of modern Chinese novel.

Regarding debates on publishing and distribution of books, symposia are scheduled on the themes of "Role of Arab Book Fairs in Exchange of Publishing Rights" (April 28) and "Publishing and Cultural Diversity" (April 26).

Poetry will also be honoured through a set of recitals with the participation of Tunisian, Arab and foreign poets, including Kacem Haddad, Meysoun Saqr and Ahmed Chahaoui.

Among guests to the fair, Egyptian novelist Youssef Zidane, winner of the "Booker Prize" for his work "Azazil," and Algerian writer and poet Ahlem Mostghanmi.

Twelfth Carthage International Meeting on "Memory-Man"

TUNIS, April 12, 2010 (TAP) - Works of the five-day 12th Carthage International Meeting were opened, on Monday at Beit al-Hikma, by Culture and Heritage Preservation Minister Abderraouf el Basti.

Placed under the theme "Memory-Man," the meeting is attended by a number of academics and researchers in psychology, philosophy, history and anthropology from Tunisia, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, Iran, Congo, France and Italy.

The opening session was marked by a lecture of Professor Houria Benis Sinaceur, Director of the Moroccan National Scientific Research Centre, on "Time Sculpture: Memory, Art, Life. »

Tunisia plays host to travelling exhibition on "Indian Modern Figurative Art"

April 11, 2010 (TAP) - As part of cultural exchange between Tunisia and India, the National Cultural Committee organises, in collaboration with India's Embassy in Tunisia and the Indian Cultural Relations Council, a travelling art exhibition on the theme "Indian Modern Figurative Art," featuring 29 paintings of 14 pioneering Indian modern art painters.

The exhibition will be held next April 13-21 in Sousse, April 23-30 in Ben Arous and May 12-22 in Carthage.

Fifteenth session of Arab Women Creators' Festival set for April 15-17 in Sousse

SOUSSE, April 11, 2010 (TAP)- The 15th session of the Arab Women Creators' Festival will be held April 15-17, 2010 in Sousse, under the high auspices of First Lady

Leila Ben Ali, Chairwoman of the Arab Women Organisation.

The news was announced by Mrs. Najoua Monastiri Cherif, Director General of the Festival, at a press briefing held Saturday in Sousse.

She said that women creators from 14 Arab countries will take part in this festival. These countries are: Tunisia, Libya, Morocco, Algeria, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Egypt, Kuwait, Bahrain, Iraq and Palestine.

The session will include 7 panels to discuss the notion of modernity and the role of women in different areas of innovation, including literature, music, painting, sculpture, cinema and theatre. It will also address prospects for Arab women innovation.

Panels include 30 papers to be presented by Arab women creators, including journalists.

New excavation campaign starts in Utica site

TUNIS, April 6, 2010 (TAP) –A new excavation campaign started in Utica as part of scientific co-operation agreements between the Tunis National Heritage Institute, on the one hand, and the universities of Oxford and Sorbonne and the Madrid Phoenician Studies Institute, on the other.

This campaign coincides with a project jointly carried out by the National Heritage Institute and the Heritage Valorization and Cultural Promotion Agency to preserve the site of Utica.

Once the technical studies are conducted, a new museum will be set up on an area spanning over 390 square meters.

The new museum will host the collection of pieces to be updated together with various components of Utica relics.

Two Tunisian award-winning films at Tetouan Festival

TUNIS, April 5, 2010 (TAP) - Two Tunisian films won awards at the 16th International Festival of Mediterranean Film of Tetouan, Morocco, held on March 27-April 3.

Tunisian director Mohamed Zran's long feature film "Vivre ici" (Being Here) was awarded the first prize in the documentary section (out of the 12 taking part in the contest), and Tunisian Walid Tayaa's short film "Vivre" (Live) was awarded the first prize of best short film (out of 15 in this competition).

5th international documentary film festival opens in Tunis

TUNIS, April 2, 2010 (TAP) - The 5th International Documentary Film Festival "Doc à Tunis" started on Thursday evening at the Tunis theatre.

The opening ceremony was attended by Culture and Heritage Preservation Minister, Abderraouf El Basti, and several Tunisian film makers.

This year's festival, due to last up to next April 4, is being held under the following theme "Youths in the Mediterranean" and sponsored by "Ness El Fen" Association.

"Doc à Tunis" which provides free entrance to the public at large offers an opportunity to make known the best documentary films made in the Arab world or in Europe.

Some 60 films from over 20 Arab and European countries will be screened.