



NATIONAL U.S.-ARAB CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

غرفة التجارة الأمريكية العربية الوطنية

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
April 22, 2015
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U.S. – ARAB CHAMBER CONCLUDES NORTH AFRICA BUSINESS ROAD SHOW TO WASHINGTON DC, MARYLAND, AND TEXAS

Largest Public / Private Sector Delegation of Its Kind, Representing Maghreb Nations, Promotes Commercial Unity and Strength in Numbers

Meetings with the Governor of Maryland and the Mayor of Houston Auger Well for Increased Trade and Investment

The National U.S. – Arab Chamber of Commerce (NUSACC), in partnership with the Union of Maghreb Chambers of Commerce (UCEMA), has just wrapped up a week-long business-focused visit to the United States. The delegation, consisting of more than 20 leaders, primarily from the private sector, spent half a week in the Washington DC area and half a week in Houston, Texas. During that time, they met with hundreds of American businesspersons, made site visits to leading U.S. companies, and held meetings with senior officials in federal, state, and local governments – including the Governor of Maryland and the Mayor of Houston.



The Road Show delegation -- here with Hon. Larry Hogan, the Governor of Maryland (standing, center) -- included over 20 business and government leaders from the Maghreb nations of North Africa.

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NATIONAL U.S.-ARAB CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

غرفة التجارة الأمريكية العربية الوطنية

“Our Chamber was privileged to host this important delegation, the largest and highest-level group of its kind from multiple North African nations,” said David Hamod, President & CEO of the U.S. – Arab Chamber. “Especially meaningful was the fact that this mission was driven by the North African business community, not by governments. This is essential if the Maghreb nations want to see private sector job creation generated by meaningful economic growth.”

The Maghreb nations, in alphabetical order, historically include Algeria, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, and Tunisia. In Arabic, *Maghreb* refers to the most Western part of the Arab world, “where the sun sets.” Even today, the Maghreb nations, geographically speaking, are closer to the United States than any other part of the Arab world.

E Pluribus Unum

Delegates pursued opportunities in the following sectors: Agribusiness, electricity & power generation, finance & investments, logistics & transportation, and tourism. In Washington DC, Maryland, and Texas, delegates held numerous Business-to-Business (B2B) meetings with U.S. companies interested in doing business in North Africa.



H.E. Hassane Berkani, delegation leader and Vice President of the Union of Maghreb Chambers of Commerce: “The opportunities in our region are beyond imagination.”

In recognition of the business focus of this trade and investment mission, the delegation was led by H.E. Hassane Berkani, President of the Casablanca Chamber of Commerce (Morocco) and Vice President of the Union of Maghreb Chambers of Commerce.

His message was one of unity: “Our delegation, like North Africa, is a mosaic – including the private sector, government officials, and heads of chambers of commerce. Our strength in the Maghreb lies in unity: We represent common interests, common strengths, and goodwill for all in the Maghreb region. When united as a region, we will all benefit, and we will all prosper together.”

Approximately half of the population of the Arab world may be found in North Africa, making this an increasingly attractive market for U.S. companies. These nations, more than ever before, are now serving as entrepôts for the rest of Africa, which is experiencing some of the fastest economic growth in the world. Moreover, approximately two-thirds of the population of this region is composed of youth, which means that this market will be driven by increasing numbers of young consumers for decades to come.



NATIONAL U.S.-ARAB CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

غرفة التجارة الأمريكية العربية الوطنية



Said Berkani, “The Arab Maghreb features coastlines that stretch along the Mediterranean and the Atlantic, a region rich in natural and human resources.” In short, he suggested, “The opportunities in our region are beyond imagination.”

“We are confident that the U.S. private sector, which drives the largest economy in the world, is aware of the economic and strategic position of the Maghreb region – a thriving market and an increasingly important gateway to Africa,” Berkani concluded. “We are in the United States to help raise this awareness and to send a message that, as our financial and regulatory reforms take hold, trade and investment with our region will flourish.”

“We are confident that the U.S. private sector, which drives the largest economy in

Day One: Official Visits

Day One of the mission was dedicated to official visits in Washington DC – the nation’s capital – and Annapolis, capital of the State of Maryland.

Visit to the U.S. Capitol

The day began with a VIP tour, arranged by Senator Charles Grassley (Iowa), of the U.S. Capitol Building. The Capitol is the meeting place of the nation’s legislature: The U.S. Senate and the U.S. House of Representatives. The building dates back to November 1800, when the U.S. Congress met in the first completed portion, the north wing.

Fourteen years later, during the War of 1812, the U.S. Capitol was torched by British troops. This act, and



The North Africa delegation poses in front of the U.S. Capitol.



NATIONAL U.S.-ARAB CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

غرفة التجارة الأمريكية العربية الوطنية

America's long struggle for real independence, resonates with countries in the throes of the Arab Spring. Today, the U.S. Capitol and its stately dome have become international symbols of America's representative democracy.

Visit to the U.S. Department of State

The delegation then moved to the U.S. Department of State, where they received a briefing by Hon. John Desrocher, Deputy Assistant Secretary for North Africa.

Desrocher began the briefing with an overview of U.S. policies toward the Maghreb and recent U.S. – Maghreb activities. “The U.S. Government seeks to encourage economic development in the Maghreb,” he noted. “Just last month, we supported the Tunis Investment and Entrepreneurship Conference, which brought together business people from across the region.”

He continued, “We were also pleased that the Global Entrepreneurship Summit in Marrakesh last November attracted such a robust turnout of youth from across the region committed to bringing new ideas to the market. And last year in Washington, the U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit put a distinct focus on strengthening commercial ties between the United States and Africa, including the Maghreb.”



Hon. John Desrocher (center left), Deputy Assistant Secretary for North Africa: “Closer regional integration is vital to economic growth and stability in North Africa, all the more important given the strong link between jobs and security.”

Desrocher said the U.S. Department of State was pleased to welcome the delegates to Washington DC. “We are encouraged to receive this important delegation,” he noted. “Closer regional integration is vital to economic growth and stability in North Africa, all the more important given the strong link between jobs and security.”

“I am glad that you will be meeting with American companies in Washington DC and Houston,” he stated. “We see real value in trips like these, and we would like to encourage more such North African delegations.”



NATIONAL U.S.-ARAB CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

غرفة التجارة الأمريكية العربية الوطنية

Desrocher concluded, "We would like to thank the National U.S. - Arab Chamber of Commerce for organizing this delegation. NUSACC has been a great partner in working to strengthen ties between American business and North African commerce."

Meeting with the Governor of Maryland

The last official stop of the day was in Annapolis, capital city of Maryland, where the delegation was received by Hon. Larry Hogan, Governor of the State of Maryland.

In full view of the beautiful waterfront in Annapolis, dubbed "America's Sailing Capital," Governor Hogan touted the many attributes of Maryland. He said, "With our unique location on the eastern seaboard, our international shipping port and airport, our close proximity to Washington DC, all of the Federal government agencies and access to nearly 200 foreign embassies, Maryland is the ideal location for those interested in doing business here in the United States."



Annapolis, capital of the State of Maryland, offers an international shipping port, close proximity to Washington, DC, and the highest median household income in the nation. (Photo courtesy: Brian White/AP)



Hon. Larry Hogan (center), Governor of Maryland, receives a gift of appreciation from H.E. Hassane Berkani (right), delegation leader, during the visit to the Governor's offices in Annapolis. (David Hamod, NUSACC's President & CEO, is at left.)

One of the original 13 Colonies, Maryland was the seventh state to ratify the U.S. Constitution and is considered to be the birthplace of religious freedom in America. Maryland is one of the most densely populated states in America, and it boasts the highest median household income, making it the wealthiest state in the nation. Maryland also has the lowest poverty rate of any state in the USA.

Hogan, Maryland's sixty-second Governor, was sworn in on January 21, 2015. He is only the second Republican Governor in Maryland in the past 45 years, and he is promoting a business-friendly agenda. "My Administration is committed to expanding trade and business opportunities," he told the delegates. "Maryland has an experienced, diverse, and gifted workforce ready to offer their knowledge and



NATIONAL U.S.-ARAB CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

غرفة التجارة الأمريكية العربية الوطنية

talents and help grow your business here in the United States.”

Governor Hogan concluded, “It was a pleasure and an honor to meet with the National U.S. - Arab Chamber of Commerce and NUSACC’s North African trade delegation during your visit to Annapolis.”

After the Governor’s welcome, some of the State’s top officials briefed the delegation, including: Hon. John Wobensmith, Secretary of State; Director Anna Yankova, Office of the Secretary of State; Director Signe Pringle, Office of International Investment and Trade; Steven J. McAdams, Executive Director of the Governor's Office of Community Initiatives (GOCI).

Secretary of State Wobensmith highlighted the importance of people-to-people diplomacy, citing Maryland’s 15 “sister state” relationships. Maryland places special emphasis, he said, on education, medicine, business, and arts & culture.

On the business front, Wobensmith noted, Maryland is a national leader in biotechnology and cybersecurity. Maryland is a major center for life sciences research and development. With more than 400 biotechnology companies, Maryland is America’s fourth-largest nexus in this field.

In terms of cybersecurity, the city of Ft. Meade serves as the national headquarters of the Defense Information Systems Agency, the U.S. Cyber Command, and the National Security Agency/Central Security Service.

Finally, some of America’s top institutions and government agencies that are focused on research and development are located in Maryland. These include but are not limited to the Johns Hopkins University, Goddard Space Flight Center, the U.S. Census Bureau, the National Institutes of Health, the National Institute of Standards and Technology, the National Institute of Mental Health, the National Military Medical Center, and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration.

Following the briefing, delegates held B2B meetings with select Maryland companies, arranged by the Governor’s Office of Community Initiatives and the Governor’s Commission on Middle Eastern American Affairs.



H.E. Sid'Amine Ahmed Challa (left), Senior Advisor to the Prime Minister of Mauritania, with Steven McAdams (right), Executive Director of the Maryland Governor's Office of Community Initiatives.



Day Two: Focus on the Business Community

Day Two focused on networking with the U.S. business community at a half-day conference, the U.S. – Maghreb Trade and Investment Forum. Delegation speakers included: H.E. Hassane Berkani, President of the Casablanca Chamber of Commerce (Morocco) and Vice President of the Union of Maghreb Chambers of Commerce; H.E. Khaled Al Gonsel, Director General of the Libyan Foreign Investment Company; H.E. Sid'Amine Ahmed Challa, Senior Advisor to the Prime Minister of Mauritania.



Hon. Ken Hyatt, Deputy Under Secretary of Commerce for International Trade: “This is a great moment in the commercial relationship between the United States and North Africa.”

Challa noted, “We are delighted to join this delegation to the United States. Mauritania – under the leadership of President Mohammed Abdulaziz and Prime Minister Amin – is striving for economic growth, strategic partnerships, and foreign direct investment.” He concluded, “On behalf of the Government of Mauritania, I would like to thank the National U.S. - Arab Chamber of Commerce for diligently helping to develop paths of economic growth between the Arab world and the United States.”

As part of the half-day conference, delegates participated in roundtable B2B sessions focused on: Construction; Transportation & Logistics; Education; Power Generation; Agribusiness.

The keynote speaker at lunch was Hon. Ken Hyatt, Deputy Under Secretary of Commerce for International Trade. In December 2014, Hyatt led an infrastructure sector-focused business delegation to North Africa.

During his luncheon remarks, Hyatt highlighted several programs and activities that the U.S. Government has undertaken since his trip to promote U.S.-Maghreb commercial cooperation. “We are spending a great deal of time in the region,” he noted, “with one Commerce Department official after another visiting your nations.” U.S. Secretary of Commerce Penny Pritzker participated in two of those visits to the region.



NATIONAL U.S.-ARAB CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

غرفة التجارة الأمريكية العربية الوطنية



The U.S. – Maghreb Trade and Investment Forum in Washington, DC attracted over 100 government officials and business leaders from the DC metropolitan area.

Hyatt congratulated the delegation, driven by North African business leaders, for taking the initiative to come to the United States. “This is a great moment in the commercial relationship between the United States and North Africa,” he said, “a region that holds enormous potential.”

Hyatt urged the delegates to make their respective countries as attractive as possible for U.S. investors. To that end, he stressed the importance of transparency and predictability, two essential elements in the global competition for foreign direct investment (FDI). “It is essential . . . [that] contracts be honored, that entrepreneurs have an opportunity to start businesses, and that the rule of law be respected,” said Hyatt. North Africa’s private sector, he shared, has a particularly important role to play in this process.



Panelists at the Forum were presented with an American flag flown over the U.S. Capitol in their honor. Presiding is Hon. Ken Hyatt (right), Deputy Under Secretary of Commerce for International Trade.

Finally, in the spirit of trade facilitation, Hyatt urged delegates to “think as a region – one in which goods and services may move easily among countries.” The spending power of the Maghreb as a region is more attractive to American traders and investors than that of individual countries, he suggested. Hyatt concluded, “In the 21st Century, trade and investment is a vital tool for prosperity and for relations among nations.”



Day Three: Hospitality & Travel

Day Three was focused on sightseeing in the nation's capital and then traveling to Houston, Texas.



The Houston Metropolitan Chamber (HMC) hosted an outdoor evening reception for the North Africa delegation. Pictured right to left: Zaid Sultan (right), HMC Chairman; Peggy Wilson, HMC President & CEO; H.E. Hassane Berkani, delegation leader; and David Hamod, NUSACC President & CEO.

(Photo courtesy: Voice of Lebanon)

Upon their arrival in Texas, delegates received a very warm welcome by the Houston Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce, which hosted a rooftop dinner reception overlooking downtown Houston. Delegates enjoyed some Texas-sized hospitality, which included Texas barbeque and music performed by guitarist Andrew Bateman.

“We were honored to host this esteemed delegation from North Africa,” said Zaid Sultan, Chairman of the Houston Metropolitan Chamber and Director (MENA) of the Censere Group, Inc. “It is my goal in the

coming year to highlight not only the significance of Houston as a commercial center – specifically in the energy, healthcare, and aerospace industries – but also to highlight the incredible diversity that this city has to offer.”

The Metro Chamber has recently formed an International Affairs Council to pursue these objectives. “The reception was the Council’s first event,” noted Sultan. “It was natural for us to work with NUSACC on this first initiative by supporting the visit of the North African trade delegation.”

“On behalf of our Chamber and the City of Houston, we wish much success to the delegates and the countries they represent,” concluded Sultan. “NUSACC has been a strong partner of the Houston Metropolitan Chamber over the last year, and we look forward to continuing our special relationship in the months ahead.”



NATIONAL U.S.-ARAB CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

غرفة التجارة الأمريكية العربية الوطنية

Day Four: Business Conference in Houston

A half-day conference showcased delegation members and connected them to members of the Houston business community. The gathering also provided an opportunity to meet with some of Houston's top local officials.

Welcome by the Mayor Pro Tem

Opening Remarks at the conference were offered by Hon. Ed Gonzalez, a member of the City Council (District H) and Houston's Mayor Pro Tem ("deputy mayor"). He touted Houston as an economic driver, locally and regionally. "Houston has a strong economy that is one of the fastest growing in the nation," he said. "You may be aware that this city has led our nation in economic growth. We were the first U.S. city to recover from the 2008 economic recession, and we have now added nearly three jobs for each job that was lost [during that recession]. A large part of this success can be attributed to global trade."



Hon. Ed Gonzalez, Mayor Pro Tem of Houston



B2B meeting roundtable sessions focused on: Agribusiness; Construction; Education; Power Generation; and Transportation & Logistics.

Gonzalez pointed out that Houston is home to many of the world's largest energy companies and is a world center for virtually every segment of the oil and gas industry, including exploration, production, transmission, marketing, supply and technology. In addition, he noted, Houston is home to the Texas Medical Center, the "largest in the world and at the forefront of advancing life sciences." For example, Gonzalez said, the "TMC has recently launched an accelerator program to work closely with life science and digital health startups to accelerate

healthcare innovation by connecting these startups with potential customers and partners."

Gonzalez continued, "If you are looking for talent and a well-educated work force and partners to expand your business, Houston has one of the world's greatest concentrations of engineering talent generated from energy, aerospace and medical clusters, and nearly a



NATIONAL U.S.-ARAB CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

غرفة التجارة الأمريكية العربية الوطنية

third of all adults in Houston have college degrees.” Houston is also a magnet for entrepreneurship, he suggested: “You will find Houston welcoming entrepreneurs across all sectors that are accustomed to international business and eager to form international partnerships.”

The Mayor Pro Tem concluded, “I am confident that today’s conference will foster fruitful relationships that will lead to successful new partnerships.”

Welcome by the Sheriff

The Hon. Adrian Garcia, Sheriff of Harris County, also welcomed the Maghreb delegation to Houston. Garcia has spoken regularly at NUSACC events over the years, earning him the affectionate nickname of Houston’s “Sharif.”

Harris County, which he oversees, is the nation’s largest county in population gain, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. The county has nearly 4.5 million residents, and the population grew 8.5 percent over the past four years, despite the economic downturn facing most of the United States.



Hon. Adrian Garcia,
Sheriff of Harris County



At the Houston Conference (from left to right): Jamal Bafagih, NUSACC; Hon. Chase Untermeyer, Qatus Advisors; H.E. Mohammed Al Homaid, Qatari Consulate General; David Hamod, NUSACC; H.E. Hassane Berkani, delegation leader; and H.E. Cemalettin Aydin, Turkish Consulate General.

Prior to being elected Harris County Sheriff in 2008, Garcia spent 23 years with the Houston Police Department. After that, he served six years as a member of the Houston City Council, eventually serving as Mayor Pro Tem, the same position that Councilmember Ed Gonzalez occupies today.

Garcia highlighted the importance of education in Houston, which is home to a number of colleges and universities. The University of Houston’s annual impact on the



NATIONAL U.S.-ARAB CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

غرفة التجارة الأمريكية العربية الوطنية

Houston area's economy, for example, equates to that of a major corporation: \$1.1 billion in new funds attracted annually to the Houston area, \$3.13 billion in total economic benefit, and 24,000 local jobs generated, according to Wikipedia.

Several private institutions of higher learning – ranging from liberal arts colleges to a Tier One research university, Rice University – are located within Harris County. Rice is consistently ranked among America's best private schools.

Garcia noted that Houston's ethnic diversity contributes to the city's strength and appeal. One in five Houstonians was born outside the United States, he suggested, and this international character has played an instrumental role in attracting overseas businessmen and businesswomen.

"We are pleased and privileged to welcome this important delegation to Houston," he concluded. "I think you'll find Houston to be one of the most hospitable cities in America, and our door is always open."



H.E. Khaled Al Gonsel,
Director General of the
Libyan Foreign Investment
Company

Final Day: Site Visits in Houston

Day Five, the last day of the mission, was dedicated to site visits in Houston.



Day Five of the North Africa Mission included a presentation by the Port of Houston.



NATIONAL U.S.-ARAB CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

غرفة التجارة الأمريكية العربية الوطنية

Port of Houston Authority

The day started with a briefing, led by Ricky Kunz, Vice President of Trade Development & Marketing, at the Port of Houston Authority. In his PowerPoint presentation, he reeled off a long list of superlatives, each of which could be attributed, at least in part, to the impact of the Port of Houston:

- Texas boasts the second largest economy in the United States (\$1.4 trillion), as well as the second largest population among U.S. States (8 percent of the U.S. population).
- 51 Fortune 500 companies are headquartered in Texas, and half of these are based in Houston.
- If Texas were a nation, it would have the 13th strongest economy in the world, just after Australia and just before Spain.
- Texas is America's top state for doing business, and Houston is the #1 manufacturing city in America.
- Industrial real estate in Houston is the third largest in the United States.
- The Houston Foreign Trade Zone (FTZ), composed of over 12,000 acres and including 23 general purpose zones, is sponsored by the Port of Houston Authority.
- The Port of Houston is undergoing a major expansion, costing over \$1 billion, which will result in a channel that is wider and deeper (45 feet).
- The Port of Houston is the #1 break bulk port in the United States.
- Houston boasts the largest petrochemical complex in the United States.
- Houston is America's #1 port by foreign waterborne tonnage (163 million tons) and the sixth busiest U.S. container port by total TEUs.



Mohammed Ahmidi of Sodimco SARL, Morocco, came to the U.S. to meet American partners in the construction industry.

On top of all these superlatives, Kunz said, 1,000 individuals are moving to Texas every day, with population expected to grow to 54 million by the year 2040.

GE

GE's production unit in Houston is one of the company's most important facilities in the United States. North African delegates, on a visit to that plant, were briefed by GE representatives about GE's worldwide footprint, which includes power generation projects in a number of Maghreb nations.



Delegates enjoyed a tour of GE's production unit in Houston.

By the year 2050, according to GE, the world's population is expected to grow to 8.9 billion, 1.4 billion of whom will be without electricity. Demand for electricity will grow by 35 percent between now and the year 2020, GE found, and by the year 2030, global demand for water will outpace supply by 40 percent.

GE is hard at work on innovative solutions for these seemingly intractable problems. The company's first step, taken in recent weeks, is to return to its core business: Supporting industry. By next year, GE expects that 75 percent of its revenues will come from industry, and that number is expected to rise to 90 percent by the year 2018.

In this spirit, the company is spinning off most of GE Capital. According to *The Wall Street Journal*, GE has agreed to sell \$26.5 billion worth of office buildings and commercial real estate debt to Blackstone Group, Wells Fargo, and other buyers.

This return to GE's core business makes the work of the Houston facility even more important, suggested Otman Dinari, Fulfillment Engineering Executive for Distributed Power, based in Houston. To date, GE has installed 37,000 units of distributed power, with 147 gigawatts of capacity, and that number is expected to grow substantially in coming years.



NATIONAL U.S.-ARAB CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

غرفة التجارة الأمريكية العربية الوطنية

Houston Airport System

Matt Townsend, Deputy Director and CFO of the Houston Airport System (HAS), briefed the delegates on new developments at Houston's three airports: George Bush International, Hobby, and Ellington. The latter is a public and military facility used by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), and it will serve as the future home of Houston's Spaceport.

HAS handled 53 million passengers last year, according to Townsend, and the airport system had an economic impact totaling \$27.5 billion. Houston now serves 188 destinations, including nonstop flights to Dubai (Emirates Airline) and Doha (Qatar Airways).

Meeting with Mayor Annise Parker

The last stop on the visit to Houston was City Hall, where delegates had an opportunity to spend time with Mayor Annise Parker. She talked about Houston's rapid rise as an international trade and investment destination fueled, in part, by the city's high quality of life. "Houston is a city of business," she noted. "We are proud of our economic vitality and hospitality, which is a reflection of our residents, who come to Houston from all over the world."

The mayor pointed out that the Houston economy has four major contributors: Oil & gas, the Port of Houston, the Texas Medical Center, and aerospace. "The fastest growth in recent years has been in manufacturing," she said, "much of it associated with the Port of Houston. Business is booming, and we are eager to continue growing."



Hon. Annise Parker (center front), Mayor of Houston, met with the delegation and emphasized the importance of developing personal relationships as a foundation for conducting business.



NATIONAL U.S.-ARAB CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

غرفة التجارة الأمريكية العربية الوطنية

In 2014, according to the Port of Houston, several Arab nations were among Houston's "Top 20" trade partners, including Saudi Arabia (#4), Kuwait (#13), and Iraq (#14). Maghreb nations were a bit further down the list, including Algeria (#34), Morocco (#49), Libya (#57), Tunisia (#61), and Mauritania (#100).

In her concluding remarks, Mayor Parker emphasized the importance of developing personal relationships as a foundation for conducting business. "People do business with people they know," she suggested, thereby inviting the North African delegation to build on relationships developed during the visit to Houston.

Adding a personal touch of her very own, Mayor Parker then presented each delegate with a 'City of Houston' lapel pin commemorating the delegation's visit to City Hall.

Concluding Remarks

"We are very glad that the delegates from North Africa found the visit useful; some have already expressed an interest in returning to Texas for business," noted Jamal Bafagih, Director of NUSACC's office in Texas. "Houston and surrounding counties represent a very vital and dynamic region, one that offers a lot of opportunities to international business visitors and investors."

Bafagih concluded, "On the heels of NUSACC's recent High Tech Road Show, which took a delegation of Arab tech executives to three cities in Texas for the first time, the NUSACC office in Houston was honored to receive these very senior delegates from North Africa."



The Houston skyline at night.

"This delegation's visit comes at a critical time, one in which the United States is playing an increasingly important role in the economic, political, and social development in the Maghreb region," said H.E. Hassane Berkani, delegation leader. He concluded, "We commend the National U.S. - Arab Chamber of Commerce for hosting us and for developing a very impressive program that included government meetings at the highest levels, private sector Business-to-Business meetings, and introductions to key decision-makers in Washington DC, Maryland, and Texas."

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