



NATIONAL U.S.-ARAB CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

غرفة التجارة الأمريكية العربية الوطنية

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NATIONAL U.S. – ARAB CHAMBER OF COMMERCE (NUSACC) NAMES TUNISIA’S FAYÇAL GOUIA AS 2019 “AMBASSADOR OF THE YEAR”

Top Tunisian Diplomat Honored in Washington DC by Government Officials, Business Leaders, Fellow Ambassadors, and NGO Community

“The United States is Blessed to Share One of Tunisia’s Great Treasures”
– Wyoming Governor Mark Gordon

Washington, DC – The National U.S. – Arab Chamber of Commerce (NUSACC) this week recognized H.E. Fayçal Gouia, Tunisia’s Ambassador to the United States, as the 2019 “Ambassador of the Year.” The award ceremony and luncheon, held at the Ritz-Carlton Hotel in Washington DC, brought together more than 100 leaders from the business, government, diplomatic, and NGO communities.

“Few countries enjoy the across-the-board bipartisan support in the United States that Tunisia has achieved,” noted David Hamod, NUSACC’s President & CEO. “This success is due in large part to the tireless efforts of Ambassador Gouia, who has faced Tunisia’s challenges in the United States with the utmost professionalism. He has also been a strong advocate, often in partnership with our Chamber, for enhancing the commercial relationship between our two nations.”

“I am incredibly honored and humbled to accept this award from NUSACC on behalf of the Republic of Tunisia, including the Embassy of Tunisia,” said Gouia. “This award would not have been possible without the hard work of my colleagues, fellow diplomats at the Tunisian Embassy. I also want to thank my beloved family, who have been at my side throughout this long journey as a diplomat.”



H.E. Fayçal Gouia (center), Tunisia’s Ambassador to the United States, is named “Ambassador of the Year.” Presenting the award are David Hamod (left), NUSACC’s President & CEO, and George Pickart (right), GE’s Senior Director, Global Government Affairs & Policy.



More than 100 leaders from the business, government, diplomatic, and NGO communities honored H.E. Fayçal Gouia, including 18 Ambassadors. Pictured here are some of the VIPs.

The U.S. Ambassador to Tunisia, Hon. Donald Blome, sent long-distance greetings from Tunis. “My warmest congratulations to Ambassador Gouia for this well-deserved recognition,” he noted. “His energetic and effective advocacy in Washington for stronger U.S. - Tunisia ties has had an impact that I see every day. He is a great partner!”

The “Ambassador of the Year” award, begun in 2004, is given annually to a member of the Arab diplomatic corps for his or her outstanding contributions to U.S. - Arab commercial relations. Eighteen fellow ambassadors participated in this year’s award ceremony, including Arab ambassadors, U.S. ambassadors, and others.

Lead Sponsor of this year’s event was [General Electric \(GE\)](#). Additional sponsors included [Black & Veatch](#), [Comet](#), [Lockheed Martin](#), and the [Pharmaceutical Research & Manufacturers of America \(PhRMA\)](#).

Broad Bipartisan Support for Tunisia

American leaders from across the political spectrum praised Gouia for his successful efforts in enhancing the U.S. - Tunisia relationship.

Hon. Mark Gordon, Governor of Wyoming, said, “You are clearly deserving of such recognition based upon your hard work for the Tunisian people. The United States is blessed to share one of Tunisia’s great treasures.”

Gouia is the first ambassador in history to address a joint session of the Wyoming Senate and House of Representatives, and the National Guard of Wyoming enjoys a close partnership with the National Guard of Tunisia.

Numerous Members of Congress expressed their deep appreciation for Gouia’s efforts on Capitol Hill, including the Co-Chairs of the Tunisia Caucus in the U.S. House of Representatives. Congressman Alcee Hastings (Florida), speaking for Democrats in the Caucus, noted, “Ambassador Gouia has represented his Government with unquestioned poise, grace, intellect, and honor.”

Congressman David Schweikert (Arizona), speaking for Republicans in the Caucus, stated, “Tunisia could not have chosen a better ambassador to be here in Washington to provide a skilled and steady presence to ensure the smooth continuity of our countries’ bilateral ties.”

Hon. Joey Hood, Acting Assistant Secretary of State, said, “On behalf of Secretary Pompeo and the U.S. Department of State, I am delighted to congratulate Ambassador Gouia on this distinguished achievement that reflects his dedication to advancing U.S. – Tunisian ties on every front.” He went on to say, “I want to emphasize that Ambassador Gouia has played an instrumental role in Tunisia making inroads through his tireless work on behalf of his country and relationship-building across Washington.”



Hon. Joey Hood, Acting Assistant Secretary of State.



Hon. David Short, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Transportation for Aviation & International Affairs.

Hon. David Short, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Transportation for Aviation & International Affairs, highlighted Gouia’s role in “strengthening the alliance between the U.S. and Tunisia that helps to ensure the safety, security, and prosperity of both our peoples.” He went on to say, “The U.S. Department of Transportation especially appreciates the Ambassador’s efforts to revitalize our Open Skies negotiations, and we hope that during his time in Washington DC we can conclude those negotiations as the basis for establishing nonstop flights between our two countries.”

Tunisia’s Commercial Diplomacy

U.S. – Tunisia commercial relations are on the upswing. This is attributable, in part, to Gouia’s efforts to “talk up” Tunisia across the United States. During his tenure in the USA, he has visited more than 35 States to forge stronger economic ties between America and Tunisia.

A number of dignitaries paid tribute to Gouia’s commercial diplomacy.

The Mayor of Washington DC, Hon. Muriel Bowser, issued a special proclamation for the occasion. She said, “Ambassador Gouia has promoted America’s warm relationship with the Republic of Tunisia . . . I do hereby pay special tribute to Ambassador Fayçal Gouia for his dedication and diligence in enhancing trade and diplomacy in the United States and Washington DC.”

Naceur Hidoussi, President of the [American Chamber of Commerce in Tunisia](#), highlighted Gouia’s efforts in promoting the commercial relationship. “We recognize your longstanding, productive commitment, including recent business and economic events like the [U.S. – Tunisia Joint Economic Commission \(JEC\)](#).”



H.E. Fayçal Gouia, 2019 “Ambassador of the Year.”

Hidoussi also thanked Gouia for bringing the very first international meeting of the U.S. Government’s *Prosper Africa* initiative to Tunisia. Hosted by AmCham Tunisia and the U.S. Embassy in Tunis, *Prosper Africa* (February 6, 2020) will bring together American and pan-African investors. This high-level event, said Hidoussi to Gouia, “would not have been possible without the strength of your resolve and stellar reputation.”

Tangible Deliverables: An Ambassador’s Perspective

In his introductory remarks, Gouia waxed philosophical about his time in Washington DC. “Receiving an achievement award like this makes one reflect upon the past,” he said. “I’ve been in diplomacy for the past 35 years, serving – in one way or another – almost my entire career in service to Tunisian - American relations.” Gouia has spent a total of 11 years in Washington DC, first as Deputy Chief of Mission, in the late 1990s, and then as Ambassador, since 2015.

Among his many accolades, Gouia was named “Man of the Year” by the Near East South Asia Strategic Center, part of the National Defense University, for his “leadership in conducting cooperation programs between Tunisia and the United States in strategic and military fields.”

By the time he returned to Washington as Ambassador, Gouia said, “The world witnessed many changes. Tunisia – which has always been a haven of peace, tolerance and moderation – opened a new chapter in its modern history. Following our nation’s 2011 revolution, Tunisia’s democratic transition – driven by dialogue and moderation – has been acknowledged worldwide as a success story and a model to emulate.”

Gouia went on to say, “It is a fact that a stable and democratic Tunisia represents an asset in the region. Tunisia, as a bastion of freedoms, works hard to counter non-democratic forces and extremist ideologies that would thwart our evolution toward modern statehood.”



Gouia’s biggest challenge as Ambassador, he said, was “transforming emotional support for Tunisia into tangible political, commercial, and economic opportunities.” Working in partnership with his Embassy team and his Government colleagues back in Tunis, Gouia has been very successful in achieving those tangible successes:

- Tunisia was identified in 2015 as a strategic partner of the USA and selected as the 16th Major Non-NATO Ally of the United States.
- U.S. assistance to Tunisia has more than quadrupled in recent years, enabling Tunisia to overcome economic and security hardships.
- A \$100 million Tunisian-American Enterprise Fund was created to invest in sustainable growth and to create greater opportunities for Tunisian small & medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), with a special focus on women, youth, and interior regions of the country.
- In December 2016, the Millennium Challenge Corporation Board of Directors selected Tunisia for a bilateral compact. This resulted in two projects related to water scarcity and the promotion of Tunisia’s business climate.
- In August 2019, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) upgraded its presence in Tunisia to a full-scale bilateral mission, signing a five-year “Development Objective Agreement” with the Government of Tunisia. According to Gouia, this agreement is emblematic of the U.S. Government’s long-term commitment to strengthening Tunisia’s democracy, governance, and economic growth.



H.E. Fayçal Gouia, Tunisia’s Ambassador to the United States.

“This is just a flavor of the cooperative programs that have blossomed between Tunisia and the United States,” Gouia noted. “This strong, diversified partnership continues to grow every day, thanks to amazing support from the U.S. Government, America’s business community, and this country’s civil society.”

The Commercial Angle

In the past four years, during the tenure of Ambassador Gouia, bilateral trade in goods has increased significantly, reaching over \$1.2 billion in 2018.



In a recent [NUSACC Expert Roundtable](#), Tunisia's Minister of Commerce characterized growing opportunities in Tunisia as a "win/win for U.S. and Tunisian companies." He said, "We are engaged in diversifying our production. We have undertaken many economic reforms to develop economic partnerships and investments, and there is a large potential to develop exports to Africa."

Since July 2018, Tunisia has been a member of the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), composed of 20 African countries with about 500 million inhabitants. This status enables Tunisia to export duty-free to COMESA nations, positioning Tunisia as a gateway to African markets, including some of the fastest growing economies in the world.

"With investments in my country, U.S. companies can work with Tunisian partners to export to Africa," noted the Minister of Commerce. "This includes reconstruction and development efforts in neighboring Libya, which is important to both of our nations. Much of this can be accomplished through Tunisia's free zones, which are already serving the Libyan market."

Tunisia is known for its foodstuffs, but its top export is mechanical and electrical goods, which constitute more than 40 percent of all production in Tunisia. Producing electronic components in aviation and aeronautics for companies has resulted in cutting-edge manufacturing.

One of those companies is GE, Lead Sponsor of this year's "Ambassador of the Year" award event. According to George Pickart, GE's Senior Director for Global Government Affairs & Policy, the firm employs about 100 people in Tunisia and has been operating in that country for more than 60 years. "In Tunisia, we go across all of our business lines: aviation, healthcare, and power generation," said Pickart. "More important, we see Tunisia as a platform, a gateway, for a lot of our operations in Africa. That's not only a function of geography; it's really a function of the welcome atmosphere that GE finds in Tunisia."

Tunisia's drive to grow its tech sector is consistent with the nation's long-time commitment to promote education and to prepare graduates for the marketplace. According to a recent World Bank Group report, *Breaking the Barriers to Youth Inclusion*, Tunisia's service sector "has a strong comparative advantage and significant potential for exports, especially in information and communication technology, professional services, transport and logistics, tourism, and health."

The report goes on to say, "Tunisia is relatively well positioned to become a champion in innovation and entrepreneurship, provided that it recognizes the potential of its aspiring generation of self-employed youth."

Other sectors that have been singled out by the Government of Tunisia for investment include [pharmaceuticals](#) , [renewable energy](#), [franchising](#), and more.

At the “Ambassador of the Year” award ceremony, Gouia noted: “Tunisian - American commercial exchanges have more than doubled since 2015, and our ultimate ambition is to initiate negotiations on a Free Trade Agreement. This would enhance the flow of goods and services, encourage investment, and improve rules affecting such issues as intellectual property, e-commerce, and government procurement.”



H.E. Fayçal Gouia, 2019 “Ambassador of the Year,” receiving a Mayoral Proclamation from Hon. Kimberly Bassett, DC Secretary of State.

Concluding Remarks

In his concluding remarks, NUSACC’s David Hamod shared a story about the Carthage Stone. Drawn from the Temple of Esculapius in ancient Carthage, the Carthage Stone was the very last stone to be placed in the Washington Monument. A little piece of Tunisia now lies in the heart of this important American cultural icon, Hamod said, a powerful symbol of the broader U.S. – Tunisia relationship: “Historic, durable, resilient, and solid as a rock.”

In his concluding remarks, Gouia returned the favor by paying tribute to NUSACC, which serves 40,000 stakeholder companies in the United States. He said, “I would like to recognize the effectiveness and superior performance of NUSACC in promoting economic exchange and cooperation between the Arab world and the United States. NUSACC has earned our full respect, support, and commitment for its dedication to Arab - American business interests, including its longstanding partnership with the Republic of Tunisia.”

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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.