



**Remarks by David Hamod, President & CEO
National U.S. – Arab Chamber of Commerce
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In the Arab world, we say, “One hand alone cannot clap.”

In the context of today’s Joint Economic Commission (JEC), I am referring to the partnership between the United States and Tunisia, as well as the partnership between our respective public and private sectors.

I do not profess to speak for all of America’s private sector, of course, but I’m confident in saying that America’s business community thanks the U.S. and Tunisian Governments for organizing this Joint Economic Commission session today.

This is a Partnership. The government-to-government meetings help to create *frameworks* for commerce, thereby “opening the door” for business. But at the end of the day, the onus is on us, the private sector, to do the deals that will create jobs, economic growth, and prosperity.

Here in America, the private sector is the engine of economic growth. Increasingly, that is true in Tunisia as well.

It is my sense that our private sectors have been holding back, waiting for our respective governments to take the lead. I think that’s natural in these public / private partnerships: Sometimes the governments take the lead, and sometimes the business community takes the lead. This *symbiosis* is normal and, in my estimation, essential.

However, in my opinion, there is no longer any reason for our private sectors to hold back. Full stop.

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I am pleased to share some personal perspectives with you today.

I am here not as a diplomat, but as a businessman. You may count on me to share my observations respectfully, but candidly. If we want this bilateral relationship to achieve its full potential, then we must speak honestly with one another.

I bring a unique perspective to our bilateral relationship:

1) I am presumably the only person in this room who, as a student, backpacked across Tunisia.

2) More relevant for today's proceedings: As head of NUSACC, I have had the privilege to lead more U.S. private sector delegations to Tunisia than any other American.

3) Our Chamber has led more delegations to Tunisia than to any other country in the Arab world.

This high level of interest is a reflection of our Chamber's deep respect for the Tunisian people, of course, but it also reflects the promising commercial potential of Tunisia.

So, I have a certain vantage point for seeing the evolution of the U.S. – Tunisia commercial relationship. It has changed in positive ways over the years, thanks in part to a number of the business associations represented in this room today. What are some of these changes?

1) We no longer perceive that we are far away from each other. (And once we begin nonstop flights from Tunis to the USA, we'll be even closer!)

2) Language is no longer a barrier, in large part because increasing numbers of Tunisians now speak English well. (Regrettably, Americans' command of Tunisian Arabic and French has remained largely unchanged.)

3) Tunisian companies have really stepped up their game, making them *even better* partners for U.S. firms.

4) Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) on both sides have more in common than ever before. In the past, the commercial relationship was dominated largely by the "Big Guys," often state-owned or government-directed enterprises.

Today, there is growing recognition that SMEs on both sides of the Atlantic have the potential to be very good business partners.



For our Tunisian colleagues: SMEs are vital to economic growth in the USA. According to the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA):

* There are more than 30 million small businesses in the United States, which employ almost half of America's private workforce.

* 99.9 percent of all firms in the USA are SMEs, and almost 98 percent of *exporting* firms are SMEs.

* SMEs account for almost two-thirds of net new job creation.

In short, the potential for SME-to-SME cooperation between our two countries is vast.

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Whether we are talking about Big Guys or little guys, I believe that U.S. technology and American expertise are the best in the world.

Like every other business leader in this room, I imagine, I look forward to doing my part to promote the commercial relationship between our two nations.

With this in mind, our Chamber will provide this JEC with at least one "deliverable" today from the private sector.

Effective immediately, NUSACC will take the lead in creating a private sector Trade & Investment Task Force that will help the U.S. and Tunisian private sectors speak to our respective governments with one voice. We will help to identify "the good, the bad, and the ugly" parts of our commercial relationship, and we will work with our government counterparts to make this relationship even stronger.

NUSACC welcomes the participation of others, starting with AmCham Tunisia. Our goal is to make this Task Force as inclusive, and as effective, as possible.

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Ladies and gentlemen, on multiple occasions, I have heard Minister of Commerce Omar Behi refer to a “win / win” (*gagnant / gagnant*) relationship with the United States.

In this spirit, America’s private sector welcomes an opportunity to build an even more durable, more sustainable partnership with Tunisia than ever before, and we look forward to doing this hand-in-hand with our government counterparts.

Thank you for the opportunity to share a private sector perspective today, *wa Salaamu Alaikum!*