

The Honorable Lindsey Graham
Chair
*Senate Subcommittee on State, Foreign
Operation, and Related Programs*

The Honorable Kay Granger
Chair
*House Subcommittee on State, Foreign
Operations, and Related Programs*

The Honorable Patrick J. Leahy
Ranking Member
*Senate Subcommittee on State, Foreign
Operation, and Related Programs*

The Honorable Nita Lowey
Ranking Member
*House Subcommittee on State, Foreign
Operations, and Related Programs*

October 20, 2015

Dear Senator Graham, Senator Leahy, Representative Granger, and Representative Lowey,

Tunisia has made remarkable progress since 2011 in its historic transition to democracy. Tunisia has adopted the most democratic constitution the Arab world has ever seen, forged through a process of inclusive consensus-building. This was followed by competitive, multi-party elections judged free and fair by domestic and international observers, leading to the first peaceful transfer of power in an Arab democracy. At a time when much of the Middle East and North Africa is descending into civil war or experiencing the resurgence of repressive authoritarianism, Tunisia stands absolutely alone in its democratic achievements and potential.

Despite this progress, Tunisia faces daunting economic and security threats and its democratic gains remain fragile. This year alone, Tunisia has witnessed the two deadliest terrorist attacks in its history, as radical extremists with ties to the Islamic State (ISIL) struck in Tunis and Sousse. Tunisia also remains threatened by the civil war across its border in Libya. These dangers have contributed to continuing economic weakness and high unemployment, exacerbated by the slow economic recovery in Europe and a tourism sector devastated by the terrorist attacks. Without a reversal of these trends, there is a real danger that democracy itself could be discredited in the eyes of Tunisia's citizens if it is not able to deliver tangible results including security and economic opportunity.

It was in recognition of these unique circumstances that the administration requested a significant increase in bilateral assistance for Tunisia in Fiscal Year 2016, to \$134.4 million. Yet while appropriators in the House recommend fully funding the request, the Senate appropriations bill falls significantly short, providing \$86.9 million in bilateral FY16 aid. While we recognize budgetary constraints, we also note with concern that House and Senate appropriators did manage to fully fund or exceed the administration's budget request for all authoritarian U.S. allies in the Arab world, and we fear that failing to do the same for Tunisia sends a very dangerous signal to the entire region. Already, news of the funding shortfall by Senate appropriators drew intense public scrutiny in Tunisia, where it was perceived as a sign of waning U.S. commitment. As you make final determinations for FY16 appropriations, we urge you to fully grant the administration's budget request of \$134.4 million in bilateral assistance to Tunisia.

The importance of Tunisia's success cannot be overstated. For the United States, having a strategic ally in the Arab world that shares not only our strategic interests but also our democratic values is an extraordinarily important opportunity that should not be missed. The international community and citizens of the region often fear a choice between violent extremism and repressive autocracy; a stable and prosperous democracy in Tunisia would provide the most powerful counterexample to this false dichotomy.

We recognize that \$47 million in additional U.S. assistance will not alone make the difference between success and failure in Tunisia. The country's elected government and parliament must make tough choices and carry out difficult reforms in order to ensure progress, economic development, and stability, and it will need far greater amounts of outside financial support to do so. Providing increased aid will help Tunisia address youth unemployment, implement vital economic and security reforms, and strengthen its nascent democratic institutions. In addition, increasing assistance will demonstrate stronger U.S. support for Tunisia and enable the United States to lead its international partners to bolster their own commitments to Tunisia.

This is an important opportunity to follow through on U.S. rhetoric and demonstrate that the United States will continue to invest in Tunisia's future. We commend the Nobel Committee for recognizing the significance of Tunisia's transition by awarding the Peace Prize to Tunisia's National Dialogue Quartet, and we hope that you will now follow suit in recognizing and rewarding Tunisia's progress. We strongly urge you to fully grant the requested \$134.4 million in bilateral assistance to Tunisia, to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with the country as it continues the difficult but momentous task of consolidating the Arab world's first successful transition to democracy.

Sincerely,

Stephen McInerney
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U.S. Senator, 1977–2013

Thomas Daschle
U.S. Senator, 1985–2005

Joseph Lieberman
U. S. Senator, 1989–2013

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Jane Harman
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U.S. Ambassador to Tunisia, 1982–1984

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