

Testimony for the Record  
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Chairman Ros-Lehtinen, Ranking Member Deutch, Members of the Subcommittee, I am honored to appear before you today to offer an overview of U.S. policy toward Morocco.

I am also pleased to appear before you today with USAID Deputy Assistant Administrator Alina Romanowski. I have had the pleasure of working closely with Ms. Romanowski to further our foreign policy objectives in Morocco and the region. We welcome the opportunity to speak to you today and look forward to answering any questions you may have regarding Morocco and our policy. [With your permission, I request that my full statement be submitted for the record.]

### **Bilateral Relationship**

Madam Chairman, as you know, Morocco – the first nation to recognize the United States in 1777 – is an important and longstanding ally of the United States. We continue to enjoy a very strong bilateral relationship with Morocco, focused on promoting regional stability, supporting democratic reform efforts, countering violent extremism, and strengthening trade and cultural ties. Morocco – a major non-NATO ally since 2004 – is one of our closest counterterrorism partners in the region, and an active member of the Global Counterterrorism Forum. During its term on the UN Security Council, Morocco played an important role in international efforts to end the Syrian civil war. We also enjoy a strong economic relationship; our free trade agreement that entered into force in 2006 has increased bilateral trade by 254 percent.

We worked to strengthen this bilateral relationship during the November 2013 visit of King Mohammed VI to Washington. This provided an opportunity for the United States to reaffirm our close strategic partnership with Morocco and to discuss the best means of promoting security and prosperity in the region. In

particular, we worked to deepen our consultations on regional issues, and stressed our shared priorities in Mali, Syria, the Maghreb, and the Sahel. We continued our conversations during the recent U.S.-Morocco Strategic Dialogue, which Secretary Kerry opened on April 4 in Rabat. The Dialogue, launched in 2012 out of a shared desire to find opportunities to strengthen the partnership between the United States and Morocco, discussed new avenues for cooperation in the political, security, economic, educational, and cultural spheres. We are also very pleased that our new Ambassador to Morocco, Dwight Bush, was confirmed in March and has arrived in Rabat.

### **Support for Democratic and Economic Reforms**

Under King Mohammed VI, the Moroccan political system has gradually liberalized; the King founded the Arab world's first truth and reconciliation commission – to investigate abuses that occurred during his father's reign – and expanded women's rights. A new constitution was adopted in 2011, and Morocco's first Islamist-led government won nationwide democratic elections. However, much progress remains on implementing the guarantees and institutions, including increasing engagement of its citizens, under the new constitution. We have a robust dialogue with the Moroccan government on human rights and ways in which we can support the ongoing process of political reform.

We will continue to support Morocco as it undertakes these important reform efforts. Our bilateral assistance – roughly \$31 million in FY 2013 – focuses on promoting economic, political, and social reforms; deepening our security partnership by supporting modern military and law enforcement agencies; promoting export control and antiterrorism as well as countering violent extremism efforts; developing a professional criminal justice system; and encouraging broad-based economic growth that provides expanded opportunities for women and youth. Our flagship assistance program has been Morocco's \$698 million Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) compact, which closed in September 2013 and focused on agriculture, fisheries, and small enterprises. Morocco was reselected in December 2013 to develop a second MCC compact.

The United States supports Morocco's reform efforts, particularly the recent progress on military trials. In the Joint Statement issued on the occasion of the November 22 visit of King Mohammed VI to Washington, DC, President Obama welcomed the King's commitment to end the practice of military trials of civilians.

We are pleased to see this commitment made concrete in the Moroccan government's initiative to reform the Military Code of Justice and to exempt civilians from trial by military tribunals through a draft law which has moved to Parliament for approval. We have also remarked on the growing role of the National Council on Human Rights (CNDH) as a credible and proactive defender of human rights, and are encouraged by the Council of Government's decision to strengthen the CNDH by ensuring that government agencies address complaints directed to it. Both of these measures are important steps forward in strengthening the protection of human rights in Morocco and in realizing the promise of the 2011 Constitution.

### **Economic and Security Cooperation**

There are many difficult challenges underlying the instability in the region today. The United States and Morocco are working together to address a number of those economic and security challenges, including addressing the issue of youth unemployment and youth discontent. Young people in Morocco make up approximately 30 percent of the country's population, and one tenth of the region's total youth population. Their levels of exclusion are high: 49 percent of Moroccan youth are neither in school, nor in the workforce, according to a recent World Bank survey. These young people are empowered by new communications technologies to see events across the world and to communicate with each other as never before. And some are frustrated by the lack of jobs and little economic opportunity.

Our mutual concern for peace and stability in the region means that the United States and Morocco are fully engaged in both economic and security cooperation. On economic cooperation, USAID's new Country Development Cooperation Strategy directly addresses the issue of youth unemployment through the creation of new vocational programs and career centers, to assist youth in finding jobs. The United States and Morocco also recently held the second U.S.-Morocco Business Development Conference in Rabat. Fifty-eight U.S. businesses participated in the conference in Morocco, resulting in increased business ties and helping advance our commercial and economic agenda to increase trade and investment.

In the area of security cooperation, Morocco is one of our closest counterterrorism (CT) partners in the Middle East and North Africa region. Instability in the region, porous borders, and the collapse of state institutions in northern Mali have increased regional threats and created new opportunities for cross border illicit flows and for violent extremist groups, such as al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb

(AQIM), to gain ground and stage operations in both the Maghreb and the Sahel. However, due to Government of Morocco's broad, holistic, counterterrorism strategy of vigilant security measures, regional and international cooperation, socio-economic assistance, and counter-radicalization policies, it has been difficult for AQIM to effectively establish a foothold in Morocco.

The U.S. Department of Defense and Morocco held the eighth annual session of the U.S.-Morocco Defense Consultative Committee in December 2013. These meetings build on the already strong U.S.-Morocco security cooperation in the fields of training, exercise, and logistic support.

Morocco is also an active and constructive member of the Global Counterterrorism Forum and the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership and has played a very positive role in the development and dissemination of best practices in combating terrorism, violent extremism, improving border security, and building capacity in the region. The United States looks to partner actively with Morocco to build its capacity to a point where it can aid its neighbors on many of these issues in the region.

## **Western Sahara**

With regard to Western Sahara, the United States supports the United Nations-led process designed to bring about a peaceful, sustainable, and mutually-acceptable solution to the Western Sahara question. U.S. policy toward the Western Sahara has remained consistent for many years. We support the work of the UN Secretary-General's Personal Envoy for Western Sahara and UN-led efforts to find a peaceful, sustainable and mutually-agreed solution to the Western Sahara conflict. We urge the parties to work toward a resolution. With regard to the Moroccan autonomy plan we have made clear that Morocco's autonomy plan is serious, realistic, and credible, and that it represents a potential approach that could satisfy the aspirations of the people in the Western Sahara to run their own affairs in peace and dignity.

## **Educational and Cultural Cooperation**

The United States and Morocco have a long history of people-to-people ties. Since 1967, our binational Fulbright program has been strengthening ties between our two countries. Fulbright Alumni have gone on to be government ministers, university presidents, eminent professors, and business leaders in Morocco. One

recent example is Morocco's support of the J. Christopher Stevens Virtual Exchange Initiative, a public-private partnership between the Department of State, the J. Christopher Stevens Fund, the New Venture Fund, and the MacArthur Foundation to build innovative solutions that harness the power of virtual exchange platforms to address critical diplomatic challenges. The initiative is designed to fuel the largest ever growth in people-to-people exchanges between the United States and the broader Middle East, vastly increase the number and diversity of youth who have a meaningful cross-cultural experience, and catalyze the development and expansion of the field of virtual exchange globally. Morocco has graciously committed to donate \$1 million per year over the next five years to this Initiative.

Another part of the United States and Morocco's long history of people-to-people ties is the Peace Corps. Morocco has one of the largest cadres of Peace Corps volunteers in the world and Peace Corps celebrated its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in Morocco last year. Historically, Peace Corps volunteers focused on a number of different areas; recently they have started to focus almost exclusively on the youth sector. As a direct result of the Arab spring turmoil, youth development has become a major focus for the Government of Morocco. As part of his new direction, King Mohammed VI has taken unprecedented steps to support programs that target education, life skills, illiteracy, and unemployment. Morocco anticipated the need for and requested an increase in the number of Peace Corps Volunteers serving youth in the country. With an already strong program working with youth, Peace Corps Morocco has re-focused its entire program to the youth sector and has excellent support from and collaboration with the Ministry of Youth and Sports.

### **Future Cooperation**

As I mentioned at the outset, the United States and Morocco enjoy a very strong bilateral relationship, focused on promoting regional stability, supporting democratic reform efforts, countering violent extremism, and strengthening trade and cultural ties.

As part of this promotion of regional stability we will continue to work with Morocco on issues of peace and security and continue to foster greater economic growth. We are partnering with the Government of Morocco to focus on policies that will create jobs and growth, benefit the people, and knit the economy closer to the United States and the opportunities of the global economy. Progress in diplomatic agreements can help turn the extraordinary creativity and energy of

people in this region toward the building of a better future – but it will take work, and we are working diligently with the Government of Morocco towards success.

**Conclusion**

Madam Chairman, Ranking Member Deutch, Members of the Subcommittee, I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today, and I look forward to answering any questions you may have.