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## **“Find Your Voice” A Cross-Cultural Forum on Political Participation and Civic Activism**

### **Conference Overview**

Rabat, Morocco  
April 25-26, 2008

On April 25-26, 2008, 25 American and 25 Moroccan students and young professionals came together in Rabat to explore pathways to youth empowerment through political participation, civil society activism, media and blogging. The conference was organized by Americans for Informed Democracy (AID), the Project on Middle East Democracy (POMED), and the *Institut National de la Jeunesse et la Démocratie* (INJD), an initiative under the Moroccan Ministry of Youth and Sports.

The two-day conference featured four panels which covered opportunities for youth in political parties, the role of civil society, media and democracy, and expression through blogging and citizen journalism. Each panel was followed by a series of small discussion groups in English, French and Arabic in which participants shared their ideas on ways to mobilize youth for change in both the U.S. and Morocco. Through these exchanges, participants formed policy recommendations which they ratified at the end of the conference.

Conference speakers represented a wide array of backgrounds; most were accomplished young activists in their respective fields. Among them were Scott Goodstein, the director of New Media for the Barack Obama presidential campaign; Mbarka Bouaida, the youngest female member of the Moroccan Parliament; Houda Filali-Ansary, political correspondent for *La Vie Eco*; David Ranz, Press Attaché at the U.S. Embassy in Rabat; Mark Parkison, Team Leader for Democracy and Governance programs at USAID Morocco; Gérard Latulippe, Representative of the Maghreb for the National Democratic Institute (NDI); and Sarah Zaimi, a blogger with the Middle East Youth Initiative.

The Moroccan participants included students, journalists and young professionals as well as emerging leaders in political parties. The Moroccans and Americans were treated to a host of social activities, including a reception sponsored by the Political Section of the U.S. Embassy. These interactions formed the basis for participants to work together in a series of follow-up activities planned for the coming months, including op-ed exchanges, blogging workshops, and mobilization campaigns. In addition, one American participant

and one Moroccan participant were selected to present the conference's policy recommendations to legislators, policymakers and academics in Washington, D.C.

The conference received strong press coverage, appearing on the evening news program of State-run RTM television (Channel 1), as well as RTM radio during the day. Al Jazeera television also carried a 5-minute program on the conference Sunday, April 27, in the afternoon and during the evening Maghreb News Bulletin. Print coverage will follow in the coming days.

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