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## **“An American-Moroccan Youth Dialogue On Democracy and Security”**

**May 25-26, 2007—Rabat, Morocco**

On May 25 and 26, 2007, the “American-Moroccan Youth Dialogue on Democracy and Security” convened 25 American and 25 Moroccan students and young professionals in Morocco’s capital to discuss pathways to democratic reform, the U.S. democracy promotion agenda in Morocco, and U.S. foreign policy in the region. This conference was the third in a successful conference series hosted by Americans for Informed Democracy (AID), the Project on Middle East Democracy (POMED), and local partner organizations in Amman, Jordan; Cairo, Egypt; and Rabat, Morocco.

The first day was packed with three exciting panels featuring scholars, political party leaders, government officials, and civil society activists. The second day consisted entirely of bilateral dialogue, as participants broke down into small groups to discuss and debate the issues raised in the previous day’s panels. The dialogues yielded 33 policy recommendations, 20 of which were ratified in an afternoon voting session.



The conference gave both Moroccans and Americans an opportunity to explore the over-arching issues behind the US-Moroccan relationship, including America’s role in pushing for democratic reform, the partnership in fighting terrorism, and Washington’s support for Morocco’s autonomy plan for the Western Sahara. American participants gained a greater exposure to both the challenges and opportunities of American policy in the Kingdom, and Moroccans—likewise—had the opportunity to hear directly from American policy implementers. By breaking into groups the next day, participants were able to tease out the obstacles to a more successful US engagement in the region, making formal recommendations towards realizing this goal.

Speakers at the conference included Counselor for Political Affairs at the U.S. Embassy, Craig Karp; Director of the *Centre Marocain d’Etudes Stratégiques* Mohammed Ben Hammou; Chief of Party to USAID/SUNY Parliamentary Support

Project, Julia Demichelis; Senior Program Manager from the National Democratic Institute, Eric Duhaime; ranking member of the Political Bureau and National Campaign Team of the *Mouvement Populaire* Party, Lahcen Haddad; and several other activists representing Morocco's vibrant civil society organizations.

The conference received excellent international coverage with a 15 minute program being aired live throughout the world on *Al Jazeera News* during its "Maghreb News Bulletin." The Program also featured a live interview/debate with POMED's James Liddell, along with co-planner Mohammed Ben Hammou, and Almorki Alidrissi Abu Ziad, a Member of Parliament from the Islamist Party for Justice and Development (PJD). The BBC radio service also carried coverage of the second day, giving several quotes from participants during the dialogues. Morocco's leading Islamist daily *Attajdid* carried a front-page story on the conference. There was also coverage in pro-palace French-language Daily, *Le Matin*; socialist French-language daily *Libération*; and the Maghreb Arab Press (MAP) government news agency.

## Participants

Participants were selected through a competitive application process. Among other information, candidates were asked to write an essay on the importance of dialogue between Americans and Moroccans.

American participants were a mix of graduate and undergraduate students already doing research or studying Arabic in Morocco, as well as those currently studying abroad in England, France, and Spain. Young professionals from the U.S. Institute for Peace, the National Democratic Institute, as well as several Fulbright fellows and a Rhodes Scholar were also in attendance.



Moroccan participants traveled from all over Morocco, and there were numerous alumni from the State Department's PLUS program who spent two years studying at an American university. There were also several alumni from Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) programs as well as youth political party leaders. Several Ph.D. candidates from the London School of Economics and the American University of London also flew in from England to attend.

## Day One

### Introduction

The conference kicked off at 2:00 p.m. at Rabat's Golden Tulip Farah Hotel. Over 80 people, including several media outlets, attended the afternoon session. The Friday session opened with introductions from Laurel Rapp, of Americans for Informed Democracy; Mohammed Ben Hammou, of the Moroccan Center for Strategic Studies; and James Liddell, of the Project on Middle East Democracy.

Laurel Rapp began with introductions and a welcome to all participants and guests. She touched on the current dismal image of America in Morocco and the world (27% of Moroccans have a positive image of America, PEW Global Attitudes Survey), and spoke of the importance of cross-cultural youth exchange in the current international political atmosphere, drawing from participants' essays on why they think it is important for young Americans and young Moroccans to engage in dialogue.

Mohamed Ben Hammou of the *Centre Marocain d'Etudes Stratégiques* opened by presenting his organization and discussing his decision to partner with AID and POMED, noting that he did not hesitate when approached by the Americans because he believes in exchange of ideas and youth capacity building. He spoke briefly about current security problems in the world and our need to maintain and preserve democratic values.

James Liddell gave an overview of the basic principles of POMED, explaining the impetus for holding a series of conferences throughout the region. He introduced each of the three panels and outlined the themes and issues to be discussed throughout the conference. Finally, Liddell stressed the importance of coming together with open minds in order to challenge preexisting beliefs and notions of American-Moroccan relations.

### Panel One: "Talking About Democracy"

- \*Lahcen Haddad, Political Bureau, *Mouvement Populaire Party*
- \*Yassir Mezouari, Youth Bureau, *Union Socialiste des Forces Populaires Party*
- \*James Liddell (Discussant), Project on Middle East Democracy



Lahcen Haddad spoke about the relationship between democracy and modernization in political history and, more specifically, in the context of Morocco. Haddad challenged the hypothesis that modernization does not necessarily lead to democracy, averring that as long as Morocco continues to

modernize, democracy will be in the nation's future. Haddad pointed to the need for important stakeholders in democracy, of which there are very few currently. This "societal demand for democracy" remains generally dormant in Morocco. Haddad stressed, however, that the status quo of gradual modernization was better than rushing to open up the political system too quickly.

Yassir Mezouari spoke about progress and liberalization in Morocco, stressing recent reforms within the Kingdom as well as the rising desire among youth to see promised reforms implemented. Mezouari emphasized the importance of youth involvement in political parties in order to challenge the status quo from the inside, instead of lamenting the disconnect between politicians and their constituents from the outside.

During the question and answer sessions, both panelists were engaged in a lively debate with the audience. The youth participants challenged Haddad for his perceived rosy view of Morocco's path towards democracy; a debate about the relationship between modernization and democracy ensued. Mezouari was also challenged by Moroccan participants who didn't believe political parties in Morocco gave youth the opportunities to play a meaningful role. Mezouari's trumpeting of civil society activism also called into question whether bolstering the ranks of Morocco's already vibrant civil society wouldn't actually weaken the youth's confidence in political parties as vehicles of representation and change. In the end, Haddad and Mezouari were of one voice in challenging participants to seek change from the inside.

## **Panel Two: "The Role of U.S. Democracy Promotion Organizations in Morocco"**

\*Julia Demichelis, Chief of Party, USAID/SUNY Parliamentary Program

\*Eric Duhaime, Senior Program Manager, National Democratic Institute, Morocco

\*Yassine Santissi (Discussant), Ph.D. Candidate, London School of Economics



Julia Demichelis spoke about ongoing USAID efforts in Morocco and the distinction between democracy promotion and democracy assistance, noting that USAID engages in the latter. Demichelis explained recent manuals authored by USAID to train parliamentarians and ensure that current training efforts are sustainable. She confessed that USAID must "exert significant efforts to overcome mistrust that is always there," and that USAID is "part of a foreign policy machine that affects our work." However, Demichelis did not shy away from noting the achievements her program had made through technical assistance geared towards strengthening committees and honing other legislative tools.

Eric Duhaime explained the general mission of NDI, stressing its role as providing “technical assistance to countries currently in a democratic transition process.” He outlined specific strides Morocco is currently making towards this goal and spoke about the three challenges NDI faces in Morocco: first, they must constantly counter accusations that they are trying to “import the American model of democracy;” second, Morocco enjoys 35 different political parties, which often makes focusing on all of them difficult; and lastly, international actors must strike a fine balance between providing meaningful assistance without being accused of interfering in the internal political process of the host country. Duhaime finished by enumerating the opportunities available to NDI as it carries out its assistance, such as the integrity it enjoys as an impartial consultant to the major political parties. He noted that NDI was not “imposing” any model on Moroccan parties, but instead offered assistance to all major parties, noting that they were free to turn it down (as is the case with the Party for Justice and Development).

### **Panel Three: “U.S. Foreign Policy in the Context of Moroccan-American Relations”**

- \*Craig Karp, Chief Political Counselor, U.S. Embassy, Morocco
- \*Mohammed Ben Hammou, Director, *Centre Marocain d’Etudes Stratégiques*
- \*Younes Foudil, The Rights and Democracy Network
- \*Laurel Rapp (Discussant), Americans for Informed Democracy

Craig Karp began with a personal reflection on his long-standing love of Morocco and his satisfaction with being assigned his dream assignment, given his long-standing interest in North Africa. Karp spoke about the important work the U.S. Government is doing in Morocco, including development programs and the Free-Trade Agreement. Karp spoke about the closing of the Casablanca Consulate, noting that the delay in opening may be saving his own life and those of his colleagues. He touched on the question of the Western Sahara, insisting that the American Ambassador’s unpopular comments interpreted as his desire for an independent Western Sahara were taken out of context and misquoted.



Mohammed Ben Hammou highlighted the long shared history between the US and Morocco, tracing developments during the colonial-era, the cold war, the 1990s, and September 11 onward. Ben Hammou claimed that Morocco paid the political price for this historical alliance with the US, especially when some U.S. policies were not palatable in the broader Middle East. He also spoke about the new strategic importance of Morocco for the US, due in part to major terrorist attacks on American and Moroccan soil. Ben Hammou concluded that Morocco is on a path to democracy that it is constantly

evolving. This form of democracy must include local values as well as universal democratic values. “Democracy is not singular, it’s plural,” he noted, emphasizing variations in democratic systems around the world.

Younes Foudil finished off the panel, highlighting the ground swell of civil society resistance against the American Embassy as a result of U.S. foreign policy. He named the different groups that have joined together in boycotting all U.S. Embassy activities in Morocco and explained their refusal to take part in U.S. Government funded activities or work with U.S. Government funded organizations. Because his remarks came after the U.S. Political Counselor, Foudil gave special attention to challenging Karp on myriad perceived U.S. policy blunders in Morocco, such as recent remarks made by the U.S. Ambassador over the status of autonomy negotiations for the Western Sahara as well as the continued closure of the U.S. Consulate in Casablanca.

Not surprisingly, the question and answer session was dominated by questions for the U.S. diplomat. Both Moroccan and American participants were quite vocal, challenging Karp on many U.S. positions. One participant even asked how he could reconcile the flagrant human rights abuses resulting from U.S. policies with his job of supporting and promoting U.S. policies. Questions also focused very heavily on the status of the Western Sahara as well as the controversy over the closure of the U.S. Consulate.

## Day Two

On Saturday morning at 9am, participants arrived at the Allal al Fassi Complex in Agdal, Rabat, eager and excited for the opportunity to discuss and debate the issues that were introduced the day before.



### Small Group Discussions

Participants were divided into four groups of 10-13 students each and placed in rooms without a facilitator. At the beginning of each session, participants were given topics to discuss, as well as parameters to help shape the direction of their discussions. The early morning topic was “Democracy and Reform” while the late afternoon session dealt with “Conflict and Security.” Participants were encouraged to speak respectfully, yet frankly on these topics.

### Policy Recommendations

Towards the end of both of the one and one-half hour morning sessions, participants were asked to draft policy recommendations aimed at the American and the Moroccan Governments. All members of the small group were to be in general agreement on

each of the recommendations. Each group submitted approximately eight policy recommendations, which were compiled on a single document to be debated in the afternoon.

In afternoon plenary sessions, the 50 participants debated, amended, and ultimately voted on all proposed policy recommendations. Participants were invited to propose a maximum of two amendments to each policy recommendation. For each recommendation, proceedings began with one amendment proposal followed by a statement in opposition to the amendment. The amendment was then voted upon and the procedure was repeated for the second amendment. When both amendments had been offered, participants voted on secret ballots either for or against the revised recommendation. Both a majority of Moroccans and a majority of Americans were needed in order to ratify a resolution.

Participants ultimately ratified 20 of the proposed 33 recommendations, on topics of education, the media, American democracy promotion projects, Moroccan politics and governance, and combating terrorism. Resolutions were aimed at both the Moroccan and American Government and ranged from calls for an independent Moroccan judiciary to the need for the American Government to respect due process rights in accordance with the Geneva Conventions in its fight against terrorism.

### **A Sustainable Network**

The two-day conference was a great success in that it brought together young Americans and Moroccans, exposed them to new ideas that challenged their beliefs, and enabled participants to create a series of policy recommendations to be received by American and Moroccan Government officials. Despite these great milestones, we believe that the conference is still only the first step.



All participants have received the policy recommendations with the instruction that these are to be used for further advocacy projects in their home country as much as possible. Moroccan and American participants have received one another's contact information in the hopes that the network created in Rabat will be a sustainable one. We will soon be operating an on-line forum for participants from all three conferences (Amman, Cairo, Rabat) to discuss political developments in their respective countries, share editorials for publication in the others' local papers, and to stay in touch. Conference organizers are pursuing potential sources of funding for future activities.

Finally, conference participants are already taking the initiative and seeking out further meetings and dialogue sessions in order to explore the issues raised at this conference. In fact, conference alumnus and Fez language student, Max Walters, in partnership with a Moroccan member of the USFP, Adil Azaar, recently organized a follow-up conference for 31 young Americans and Moroccans in Fez June 24. This

get-together provided Americans and Moroccans who did not have the chance to participate in the Rabat conference with a chance to sit down and discuss U.S. democracy promotion and other relevant policy issues in the context of US-Moroccan relations.

## Media Coverage



### **Al Jazeera News**

25 May 2007

Al Jazeera did a 16 minute piece Friday night on its “Maghreb News Bulletin” which featured a 4 minute program taken from over five hours of footage taken during the event. It featured interviews with conference speakers and participants, including conference co-planner Laurel Rapp. The remaining 12 minutes consisted of a live (and in many ways impromptu and heated) debate among James Liddell of POMED, Mohammed Ben Hammou of the Moroccan Center for Strategic Studies (a co-sponsor of the conference), and Almokri Abu Zaid, a Member of Parliament from the moderate Islamist party, the Party for Justice and Development. Liddell and Ben Hammou combated criticism from the MP who claimed that such youth efforts at organizing a dialogue were not independent and could be traced back to the American government’s interference into Moroccan affairs. Liddell emphasized that the youth participants were private citizens and were not here to blindly defend their nation’s policies but instead were committed to participating with open ears and open minds.



### **BBC** World Service Radio

26 May 2007

A piece about the conference went out on the BBC World Service Radio on Saturday evening May 26 and Sunday May 27. The transcript quotes an American and a Moroccan about solutions to terrorism and highlights the importance of such an event. BBC Morocco



correspondent Richard Hamilton said, “The students believe that as potential future leaders of their countries they want to shape the future of a foreign policy, which they say has gone badly wrong.”



**Attajdid**  
28 May 2007

[<http://www.attajdid.ma/def.asp?codelangue=6&infun=33846>]

Morocco’s leading Islamist daily *Attajdid* carried front page coverage of the conference. The Arabic daily, closely affiliated with the Party for Justice and Development (PJD), used the participation of U.S. Diplomat Craig Karp as a lightning rod with which to frame the article—giving special attention to the critical questions he received as well as reminding readers of the recent policy blunders made by the U.S. Embassy in Morocco. It also quoted the same PJD MP that appeared on Al Jazeera (Almokri Abu Zaid) reaffirming that, “Washington’s desire to embellish its image in Morocco through winning the favours of the so-called civil society organizations in order to cover up for its crimes in Iraq and Palestine and the world, in the context of the negative image the Arabs and Moslem have of America.”



**libération** 29 May 2007

[[www.liberation.presse.ma](http://www.liberation.presse.ma)]

This socialist French-language daily, associated with the *Union Socialiste des Forces Populaires* Party, gave an overview of remarks made by their representative, Yassir Mezouari who spoke on the first panel at the conference.

## LE MATIN 28 May 2007

[[http://www.emarrakech.info/Maroc-USA-Rencontre-a-Rabat-sur-la-democratie-et-la-securite\\_a11621.html](http://www.emarrakech.info/Maroc-USA-Rencontre-a-Rabat-sur-la-democratie-et-la-securite_a11621.html)]

This pro-palace French-language daily carried the article by the Government's official media outlet *Maghreb Arab Presse* (MAP) which gave an overall summary of the conference.



9 June 2007

[ [www.lejournal-hebdo.com/sommaire/id-es/dialogue-entre-des-jeunes-marocains-et-americains.html](http://www.lejournal-hebdo.com/sommaire/id-es/dialogue-entre-des-jeunes-marocains-et-americains.html)]

Conference organizers James Liddell and Laurel Rapp authored a piece in Morocco's leading French-language news weekly rebutting points made in the *Attajdid* article. They warned against failing to separate the citizens of a country with the policy of that country's government. They stressed that despite polls showing growing dissatisfaction of America among Moroccans, participants were still able to come together and agree on many areas that need change. In closing they remarked, "We sincerely hope that those who hold on to firebrand absolutist statements [about the US] will be able to overcome their outrage and see that not everyone on the "other side" is their enemy, but potential partners in seeking change."

### Conference Planning Committee

#### **Mohamed Ben Hammou:**

Mohammed Ben Hammou is the President of the Moroccan Center for Strategic Studies (Centre Marocain d'Etudes Stratégiques) in Rabat. He is also a professor of political science at Université Mohammed V in Rabat and at the Université Francois Rabelais in Tours, France.

Dr. Ben Hammou received his Ph.D. in France in 1989 from Science Po, where he wrote his dissertation on Moroccan political parties and elites. He is also a graduate of the Ecole Nationale d'Administration in Paris. Dr. Ben Hammou is a founding member of the Mediterranean Forum for Democracy. He is also vice-president of an international NGO, Formateurs Sans Frontières. In the past, Dr. Ben Hammou has served as vice-dean of the Faculté de Droit, Salé, Université Mohammed V. His research interests include democracy, security, and politics.

## **James Liddell**

James Liddell currently serves as the Monitoring and Evaluation Coordinator for the National Democratic Institute in Morocco where he oversees evaluation and program reporting. Previously, he worked with the Public Affairs Sections of U.S. Embassies in Rabat, Morocco, and Tunis, Tunisia, where he tracked and analyzed press developments, participated in public diplomacy outreach activities, and worked on programs for the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI). James also worked as a Programs Department Assistant at the Middle East Institute.

He received a B.A. in Political Science from Bates College where he wrote his senior thesis on the Inclusion of Islamist Parties in Post-Conflict States. At Bates, James founded the Center for the Study of the Muslim World as part of the national student-run think-tank, The Roosevelt Institution. James has studied in Russia, France, and the Balkans and is also currently a program coordinator for the Project on Middle East Democracy where he has helped plan a series of "American-Arab Youth Dialogues" in Jordan, Egypt, and Morocco.

## **Laurel Rapp**

Laurel Rapp is the Regional Director for the Middle East and North Africa at Americans for Informed Democracy. Laurel has been coordinating this conference series, "American-Arab Youth Dialogues" in Amman, Jordan; Cairo, Egypt; and Rabat, Morocco. She is also a researcher at Université Mohamed V in Rabat, Morocco, on a year long Rotary Ambassadorial Scholarship. In Rabat, she is conducting research on female veiling practices and women's political participation.

Laurel is a graduate of Brown University ('06) where she received a BA in International Relations. Prior to this, she spent a semester in Lyon, France, at the Institut d'Etudes Politiques. She has held numerous research assistantships with faculty at the Watson Institute for International Studies at Brown on topics ranging from International Terrorism to NATO. At university, Laurel was a Student Rapporteur for the Watson Institute. While at Brown, Laurel co-founded a chapter of Americans for Informed Democracy and has seen it grow over the course of the last three years.

She has worked with the Geneva Center for Security Policy in Switzerland, the Global Center for Women's Leadership at Rutgers University, and Human Rights Watch in the Middle East and North Africa Division. Laurel speaks French, Italian, and is proficient in Arabic.

### **Sponsoring Organizations**



Americans for Informed Democracy (AID) is a non-partisan 501(c) (3) organization that brings the world home through programming on more than 500 U.S.

university campuses and in more than 10 countries. AID fulfills its mission by coordinating town hall meetings on America's role in the world, hosting leadership retreats, and publishing opinion pieces and reports on issues of global importance. Through these efforts, AID seeks to build a new generation of globally conscious leaders who can shape an American foreign policy appropriate for our increasingly interdependent world.

AID is supported by the CarEth Foundation, Connect US Fund, DarMac Foundation, Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation, Ford Foundation, Hewlett Foundation, MacArthur Foundation, Open Society Institute, Planethood Foundation, Ploughshares Fund, Rockefeller Brothers Fund, Stanley Foundation, United Nations Foundation and its many participating universities.

The conference will follow AID's successful "Bringing the World Home" conferences in Europe in 2004-2006. Americans for Informed Democracy has a strong track record of working with students who travel abroad to help raise global awareness and understanding after they return to their home communities. AID is a pioneer in what it calls "reverse public diplomacy" – using the knowledge and passion of young students who have been abroad to raise awareness in their home communities of other cultures and political and economic systems. AID has conducted successful events on this scale in the past. AID held "Bringing the World Home" conferences over a six-week period in spring 2005 in Berlin, London, Oxford, Madrid, Prague and Barcelona, bringing together hundreds of participants to discuss America's role in the world. Already in 2006, AID has held similar conferences in London, Berlin, and Madrid.



The Project on Middle East Democracy (POMED) is a nonpartisan, nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization dedicated to examining the impact of American policy on political reform and democratization in the Middle East. Through dialogue, policy analysis, and advocacy, POMED hopes to promote understanding of how genuine, authentic democracies can develop in the Middle East and how the U.S. can best support that process. POMED has organized and sponsored seven panel discussions in Washington, D.C. since spring 2005 on America's impact on Middle East political reform. It has recently started its daily blog The POMED Wire, which tracks legislature, articles, and events both at home and in the MENA region regarding democracy promotion and reform.



The Moroccan Center for Strategic Studies is an independent center for information, consulting, studies, and analysis on international and strategic issues based in Rabat, Morocco. Founded in 2004, the MCSS undertakes academic studies in a variety of fields with the goal of facilitating a comprehensive understanding of events at the international, national, regional, and local levels.

The Moroccan Center for Strategic Studies is an open space for trainings, discussions, and information sessions that attract specialists, research professors, and others interested in these issues. Among other objectives, the MCSS aims to facilitate a better understanding of the current affairs across the long-term.