

**STATEMENT OF JACOB WALLEES
AMBASSADOR-DESIGNATE TO THE
REPUBLIC OF TUNISIA
SENATE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS
TUESDAY, MARCH 20, 2012**

Chairman Boxer, Ranking Member Lugar, distinguished Members of the Committee, it is an honor to appear before you today as President Obama's nominee to be the U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Tunisia. I am grateful to President Obama and Secretary Clinton for the confidence and trust they have shown in me.

I have served our country as a Foreign Service Officer over the past 30 years in advancing American interests abroad. I have spent much of my career working on, and living in, the Middle East, pursuing our objectives of peace, regional stability, and economic cooperation. For four years, I served as Consul General and Chief of Mission in Jerusalem, where I successfully managed a growing post in a complex political environment. Most recently, I have overseen U.S. policy in the Near East, dealing with the policy ramifications for the United States of the changes that have swept the Arab world in the past year. If confirmed by the Senate, I hope to use this experience to enhance our bilateral relationship with Tunisia, where the Arab Spring began just over a year ago.

The people of the United States and Tunisia share over 200 years of history, with rich cultural, economic, and security ties. Only three years after the United States declared our independence, we signed our first agreement of friendship and trade with Tunisia. In 1805, the Tunisian Ambassador to the United States became the first to have a Ramadan *iftar* celebration dinner with an American president. Since

then, we have fought together against common enemies, pursued the goals of regional stability, and helped each other in times of need. The United States operated a robust economic assistance program in Tunisia from 1957 to 1994. And Tunisia has responded in our recent time of need, offering assistance to address the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico in 2009.

Our historic bilateral relationship now has a new touchstone -- the momentous events of the Arab Spring that began in Tunisia in December 2010. The Tunisian revolution captivated the international community and triggered the transformations now underway across the Middle East and North Africa. It has also marked the beginning of a new phase of bilateral and people-to-people cooperation between the United States and Tunisia. Tunisia is now leading the region into a new era of democratic transition and serving as a model for others to follow. The United States has an interest in seeing that this new democratic model succeeds in the region. In the words of Secretary Clinton, “we should do all we can to assist Tunisia in realizing a future of peace, progress, and opportunity.” If confirmed, I will do all that I can to help Tunisia succeed on this path.

As we know from our own nation’s history, building a democracy is difficult and time-consuming. That process is rarely without controversy, setbacks, and sometimes disappointment. But Tunisia’s first steps deserve praise, particularly the Constituent Assembly elections in October 2011, which were the first truly democratic elections in that country in decades. In our engagement with the Tunisian government we have seen their commitment to meeting the legitimate aspirations of the Tunisian people.

I share President Obama's assessment that it is incumbent upon us to support people and governments that have mustered the courage to stand up for their rights and take courageous steps towards democracy, despite the challenges and difficulties that lie ahead. Just as we supported Tunisia shortly after its independence in 1956, now we have a chance to support Tunisia's efforts to achieve critical goals in its democratic transition, including accountable governance, economic growth and security.

We have a number of tools at our disposal that will allow us to support their efforts. Shortly after the revolution, the Department of State marshaled a strong package of assistance for elections and capacity building for civil society to advance the rule of law and promote freedom of expression. With these forms of assistance, we sought to support the Tunisian people's efforts to contribute to the national political debate and decision-making process and to play active, constructive roles in their country's political transformation. If confirmed, I will continue the work that we have already begun in these areas, drawing on the resources of the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) and the U.S. Agency for International Development.

The Tunisian revolution was not only about greater democratic freedoms, it was also about greater equality and opportunity in the economic life of the country. The people called for transparency, anti-corruption, and the ability to improve their socio-economic standing through merit and hard work, rather than through connections and secrecy. We are sensitive to Tunisia's economic development needs, and we will do all we can to support them.

If confirmed, I would welcome the opportunity to utilize the authorities and tools of the entire U.S. government to help Tunisia address these needs. As an economic officer in my 30-year Foreign Service career, I have gained experience to draw on in enhancing our bilateral economic partnership with Tunisia. I will work with the Departments of Commerce and Treasury to promote responsible, market-oriented reforms that will increase Tunisia's attractiveness as an investment destination and place the country on a solid macroeconomic foundation. I will work with the Overseas Private Investment Corporation to facilitate the entry of American businesses and products into the Tunisian market, and with the U.S. Trade Representative to maximize the utility of our bilateral Trade and Investment Framework Agreement and other trade facilitation tools.

Programs are also needed to address the demands of young Tunisians eager for even more academic exchange and English language training. Our Fulbright program, previously underutilized in Tunisia, is now in heavy demand. We also have other tools at our disposal as well, and I would welcome the opportunity to expand recently developed university linkages and community college partnerships to build the capacity of Tunisia's educational system to better prepare Tunisian students for the demands of the modern global economy.

A prosperous, democratic Middle Eastern country, in which citizens are free to apply honest effort towards achieving a higher standard of living, is an important symbol that the age of autocratic and opaque control of the political and economic environment in the Arab world is a thing of the past. It is therefore in our interest to work towards sustainable, inclusive, and free-market economic growth in Tunisia through a range of mechanisms.

If confirmed, I will also endeavor to promote Tunisia's increasing engagement with the international community and greater cooperation on our regional security and foreign policy goals. Tunisia has demonstrated that it shares our interest in peaceful and cooperative relations across the Middle East and North Africa region and, if confirmed, I will continue our efforts to help build Tunisia's capacity to continue to be a good neighbor. I will work with the Department of Defense to continue to support the Tunisian military's efforts to secure the country's borders, improve its strategic planning capacity, and develop whole-of-government approaches to the national security challenges that the Tunisians face.

Madam Chairman and Members of the Committee, in closing I would like to thank you again for allowing me to discuss ways that we might advance U.S. interests in Tunisia. I believe that we have the opportunity of a generation before us, and I am excited about this new opportunity to serve our country in the critical period ahead. If confirmed, I look forward to working with you, with the rest of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and with the Congress to continue to advance U.S. interests and promote our bilateral relationship with Tunisia. I would be pleased to answer any questions you may have.

Thank you.