

United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6225

May 15, 2015

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President,

On the eve of President Beji Caid Essebsi's official visit to the United States, we write to express support for Tunisia's democratic transition and for continuing U.S. engagement with the Tunisian people and government. The terror attack on March 18, 2015 at the National Bardo Museum failed to undermine and derail Tunisia's democratic progress -- Tunisians are more committed to democracy and representative government than ever. It is vital that the United States demonstrates a similar resolve by supporting Tunisia on its path towards democracy, security, and economic prosperity.

The fiscal year 2016 request for \$134.4 million in assistance to Tunisia is a significant increase over prior years, and is a sign of your Administration's commitment. Going forward, we must build on the solid record of U.S. support by consolidating the U.S.-Tunisia partnership based not only on assistance, but also on shared values and shared interests. We encourage your Administration to underscore U.S. support for a partnership with Tunisia by taking action in the following three areas:

- 1) **High-level Engagement:** In order to make clear the significance of Tunisia's accomplishments and the depth of U.S. strategic support for Tunisia, it is critical that U.S. engagement takes place consistently at the highest levels of your Administration. We urge you to use President Essebsi's visit to the United States to emphasize our country's support for Tunisia and its democratic transition. We also hope that Secretary Kerry will lead the U.S. delegation at the next U.S.-Tunisia Strategic Dialogue.
- 2) **Economic Partnership:** The United States can buttress Tunisian democracy by committing to a multi-year memorandum of understanding with the Tunisian government for U.S. assistance. Such an agreement would allow the Tunisian government to plan beyond the current fiscal year as it works to implement difficult economic reforms, consolidate its political transition, and address counterterrorism and border security priorities. It would also send a powerful signal to the people of Tunisia, to the region, and to the world that the U.S. will support Tunisia as it takes further steps toward an inclusive, sustainable democracy. However, U.S. support for Tunisia's economic reform program must move beyond assistance to include public and private sector partnerships, technical assistance, and educational exchanges. This support should be reliable and consistent while Tunisia's leaders move forward with difficult finance, trade, and investment reform initiatives.

- 3) **Security Sector Reform:** Smart, targeted investments can transform Tunisia's security sector and enable the Tunisian government to better fight terrorism, improve border security, and build trust with Tunisian citizens. We support your Administration's efforts to professionalize Tunisia's security services and provide necessary equipment and training to address immediate and future threats. Tunisia's security forces must fully take ownership of their core mission to protect and serve the Tunisian people within a democratic framework. We must continue robust engagement with Tunisian security forces and make clear that U.S. support will continue as Tunisia's leaders demonstrate commitment to human rights and judicial sector reform.

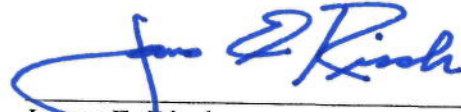
As we take these critical steps to consolidate the U.S.-Tunisia partnership, Tunisia's political and civil society leaders must aggressively move forward with implementing a reform agenda that addresses the concerns and responds to the legitimate aspirations of Tunisian citizens. Chief among these concerns are an ailing economy, unemployment, and a mistrust of Tunisian security services that lingers from the time of former President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali. President Essebsi faces enormous challenges in leading a consensus government, restructuring the Tunisian economy, responding to the needs of an educated and young population, and reforming the security services. As he moves forward with this ambitious agenda, the United States will stand with Tunisia's government, parliament, and citizens.

In the dark days after the attack on the Bardo Museum, President Essebsi admirably summed up Tunisians' resolve in the face of such depravity with this reassurance to Tunisia and the world: "Democracy will win and it will survive." President Essebsi and his fellow Tunisians have demonstrated their clear determination to persevere on the path to democracy. The United States, and the international community, should ensure that they have the support and means to do so.

Sincerely,



Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator



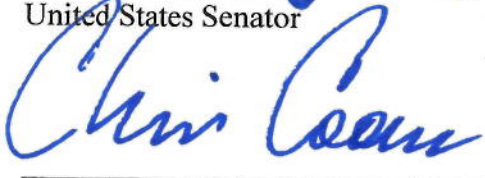
James E. Risch
United States Senator



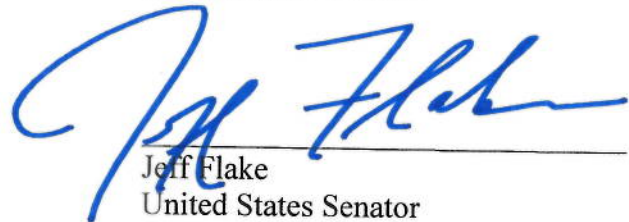
Robert Menendez
United States Senator



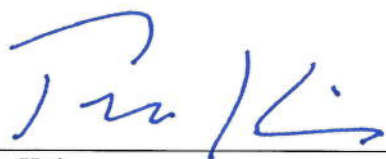
Marco Rubio
United States Senator



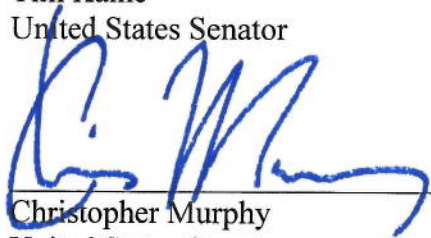
Christopher A. Coons
United States Senator




Jeff Flake
United States Senator



Tim Kaine
United States Senator



Christopher Murphy
United States Senator



David Perdue
United States Senator



Johnny Isakson
United States Senator