

**Text of speech by Ambassador Nagma M. Mallick at the Ambassador's Forum on the Role of the International Community in Supporting Tunisia delivered as part of the annual conference of the Centre for the Study of Islam and Democracy, Tunis, 28-29 March, 2014**

**Dr. Radwan Masmoudi, Chairperson of the Forum,  
Distinguished colleagues from the diplomatic corps,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I want to begin by saying how useful and informative I found the CSID annual conference last year and what good speakers there were. I have looked forward a great deal to the annual conference this year. Therefore, I feel privileged to be a part of the Ambassador's Forum on the Role of the International Community in Supporting Tunisia.

The huge difference from last year to now of course is the extraordinary and historic achievement of the Tunisian people earlier this year in adopting their Constitution through a process of debate and negotiation resulting finally in a valuable, hard-won consensus within the democratically-elected National Constituent Assembly. I can confidently say that witnessing the signing ceremony of the constitution by the three Presidents in the National Constituent Assembly will remain one of the most unforgettable and inspiring moments of my diplomatic career. It was particularly evocative for me as an Indian that the Tunisian constitution was adopted on 27<sup>th</sup> January, one day after the day India celebrates the adoption of her constitution – on 26 January 1950.

India fully supports the democratic transition in Tunisia. We salute the people and the leadership of Tunisia for the many firm steps you have taken on the thorny path towards a durable democracy. We know that it has not been easy to get thus far, as Tunisia has had to struggle with many problems, including religious radicalism and terrorism and an economy in very difficult straits. Nevertheless, the people of this brave country have shown the region and the world that differing ideologies and schools of thought can co-exist and work together through a difficult transition to achieve nationally-recognised objectives of democracy and the rule of law.

India sees a long-term future together with Tunisia. India can help with expertise in microfinance, capacity-building and IT and high-tech sectors over the long-term. In the immediate future, we have offered our expertise to Tunisia in election management, and we are ready to help in any way we can in this very vital sector.

I wish to recall here the visit of our External Affairs Minister, Mr. Salman Khurshid to Tunisia in early February this year to salute the Tunisian people and government on their historic achievements. This was the first-ever bilateral visit of our Foreign Minister to Tunisia in the independent history of our two countries. During his visit, he discussed cooperation in the sector of election management with the government of Tunisia. India has offered to Tunisia the gift of the full complement of electronic voting machines needed for conducting elections in Tunisia which would be worth around five million Dinars. These are in use in India since more than 20 years and are cost-effective and nearly impossible to rig. But we understand that the Tunisian electorate is unfamiliar with electronic

voting machines as indeed are the voters of many countries. We will, naturally, defer to the priorities and preferences of Tunisian voters and Tunisia's ISIE in this matter. We are interested to conduct a workshop in Tunisia with officials from our Election Commission later in the year on the voting machines and other issues related to election management. We have also offered to provide on-the-job training on the principles and practice of election management for two weeks to officials from ISIE in New Delhi in April, i.e., next month, when our General Elections will take place, with the largest electorate in the world of over 800 million voters. We are keen to welcome Mr. Mohamed Shafik Sarsar, President of ISIE to visit India to establish a collaborative relationship with the Election Commission of India. But we understand that this chapter of cooperation can begin only after the electoral law has been adopted by the National Constituent Assembly and after the juridical status and many other particulars of ISIE have been established, and we will naturally await those events before taking forward this cooperation. In any event, Tunisia has successfully conducted free and fair elections in October 2011. So the collaborative relationship between the two authorities that we are trying to establish will aim to broaden existing horizons and enhance the current expertise.

There are important economic, political and social challenges facing Tunisia currently. A word on the economic challenges. It is perfectly understandable that there may well be unintended consequences of a newly-achieved democracy and freedom. Labour unrest and discontent can freely express themselves, and the natural result would be a drop in production. Thus Tunisia has witnessed plunging phosphate production: from an average production of 8 million tons of rock phosphate in the pre-Revolution period, the production last year was only 2.5 million tons. In our view, every Tunisian has to realise that ultimately their salvation lies within them. Tunisia's great skills in engineering, its highly-literate workforce and its natural resources must be harnessed and made more productive than before to meet the revenue requirements of a country in transition. I am confident that this realisation is already there, and that the phosphate sector will see a revival just like the tourism sector is seeing a recovery currently.

India is the largest buyer of Tunisian phosphate which is processed into an important fertilizer, and this is, thus, an important link between our two countries. Tunisia is contributing to the food security of India, of which we are very proud. We are thus concerned for the revival of the phosphate industry here.

Tunisia has already shown the world that it knows how to resolve significant political differences and differences in ideology through negotiation and compromise leading to consensus. I am certain that the same spirit will prevail in bridging the political and social cleavages here. I would like to end with a quote from our External Affairs Minister made during his stay here : 'Mature democracies have much to learn from young democracies – India can learn from the determination with which Tunisia has taken forward the process of democratic transition and the spirit of compromise and consensus with which you have succeeded in adopting your Constitution'. In other words, Tunisia, we are with you, holding your hand and also learning from you.

I thank you

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