

Speech by President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali
on the 15th anniversary of the Change

Carthage, November 7th, 2002

In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate

Fellow Citizens,

With great pride and honor, we celebrate today the 15th anniversary of the Change, while at the same time we start the holy month of Ramadan with the rest of the Muslim world -May it bring us affluence and blessing this and every year- and look forward to the future with full confidence and determination to win its stakes and take up its challenges. One and a half decades have passed since we undertook to save the country from the perils in which it had sunk, and started a period of major reforms and achievements in all fields, which radically changed the face of the country.

We have relied on the authenticity and genius of our people and we have won the stakes. For today, wider prospects are open for Tunisia, thanks to the capabilities it has acquired in various fields as well as to the balance and cohesion established between the components of the national community.

I would like to express my sincere thanks to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization, for the honor bestowed upon Tunisia and upon myself a moment ago, as well as my deep appreciation of the significance of such an act. I also wish to address my thanks to Mr. Jacques Diouf, the Organization's Secretary General, for the kind words and noble feelings he has expressed in his address. I salute his efforts at the head of this prestigious organization and commend his contribution to the strengthening of fruitful cooperation with our country.

We are living through a stage whose major orientations we drew up at the tenth anniversary of the Change. We indeed managed, over the past five years, to materialize these orientations, to carry out plans and policies in line with them, and to translate most of the objectives set in our program for the future into a tangible reality. This national occasion carries a particular import, in that it is the first to be celebrated in the context of our building of the Republic of Tomorrow, the first since the major constitutional reform which was unanimously approved by the different categories of the Tunisian people in a general referendum held for the first time in Tunisia's history.

The Republic of Tomorrow is today a reality that we are building at a steady pace, consecrating the new constitutional reforms. It is the Republic of ambition, the cherished ambition of all Tunisian men and women and their choice for the future; it is the Republic of popular sovereignty and the country's glory, with strong institutions and a participation open for all who serve Tunisia with sincerity, love and loyalty, and for all who work for Tunisia and make sacrifices for the sake of its glory, without exclusion or discrimination.

We have always believed that Tunisia belongs to all Tunisians. We have always worked and continue to work, so that this principle remains a strong and unshakable patriotic bond that everybody attends to its preservation, a bond guaranteed by the values and institutions of the Republic.

The Change is a continued process and reform is a constant anticipation of the future that not only accompanies changes but also prepares for their potential consequences.

We have opted for reform as a method of action because we built upon a deep-rooted national heritage and drew our constants and systems of reference from the thinking of its pioneers, the struggle of our people and the fundamentals of our national identity and distinctive civilization.

On this occasion, we recall with great pride and respect the pioneers of reform in our country, as well as the leaders, martyrs and activists of our national movement, from Kheireddine to Habib Bourguiba. We pay homage to their glorious deeds and sacrifices which must be given the prestigious place they deserve, so that they serve as references for our future generations and bright landmarks in our national history.

Fellow Citizens,

The comprehensive reformist approach we have established since the Change has not been confined to the political dimension; rather, it has been coherent in its dimensions, providing for the interdependence of the economic, social and cultural components. Today, we are fully aware of the challenges awaiting us, some of which are generated by globalization and the new world juncture, while others are imposed by the profound qualitative transformations witnessed by Tunisian society.

The Tunisia of today is different from the Tunisia of yesterday. In it, constants have been further entrenched and all variables have been profoundly developed; its standing has been elevated within its Maghreb Arab, African, Mediterranean and international environment .

The Tunisia of today is different from the Tunisia of yesterday, thanks to the level of welfare achieved by its people as shown by human, economic and social indicators. Projections confirm the depth of those transformations in the foreseeable and distant future; indeed, regarding the composition of the population, a different age structure is expected to rise by the end of the first decade of this century and during the second decade, with a higher percentage of inhabitants over sixty (60) and a lower percentage of inhabitants under twenty-four (24). The citizens life conditions have improved; life expectancy at birth is now 73 years and is expected to exceed 74 years by 2006; the schooling rate is currently over 99% for six-year old boys and girls; the rate of enrolment in higher education is over 28% for the 20-24 age group and is expected to exceed 35% in 2006 and 40% at the end of this decade, against 6% in 1987. These projections clearly show the features of the society of tomorrow; features which are daily delineated by the process of change and the development efforts stepped up in every sector; features of a country in progress and of a mature and educated people who draws its wealth from the intelligence of its children, and whose objective is human progress, dignity and well-being.

Projections also highlight the magnitude of the challenges awaiting us in the fields of social welfare, employment, and upgrading of our national economy so as to be an intelligence economy in a society of knowledge; a society which we are endeavoring to build, consolidate its pillars and lay solid foundations for it, by investing in science, education and new technologies.

We have also paid special attention to our policies in strategic and vital sectors, such as the fields of water and its desalination, energy and its renewal, and environment and its protection, until the third decade of this century, so as to ensure a comprehensive and sustainable development.

Our political reforms constitute the platform on which we are firmly moving ahead to develop public life, to reinforce freedoms and to promote ways of participation for all male and female citizens. We have already started putting into effect the provisions of the Constitution in its new text, as regards both the establishment of multiple candidacies in the next presidential elections and the preparation for regular revision of the electoral rolls.

The next few months will witness the drafting of specific laws related to the Chamber of Counselors, so as to lay all the foundations necessary for its establishment and to allow this new constitutional institution to hold its place within the republican edifice in the coming period.

We have also given our instructions to prepare a bill to amend the electoral code, which we will submit to the Chamber of Deputies in the next few months. In view of the importance we attach to the different phases of the electoral

process in consecrating the practice of democracy, guaranteeing its credibility and ensuring the transparency of elections at all levels, we gave our instructions to consult political parties regarding such an amendment. Those parties have put forward proposals and made contributions to the various aspects of the amendment, and we will consider their suggestions and contributions with much care.

Indeed, we are keen on making the electoral code in its new version a legislative framework which reinforces our gains in moving ahead with the pluralist process.

In addition to the decision we have already announced to reduce the number to polling stations and simplify the conditions of accreditation of the observers by the participating electoral rolls, we give our instructions today to include within the bill a set of new provisions and guarantees regarding registration on the electoral rolls. The bill shall state the obligation to give every citizen who files a request for that purpose a receipt enabling him/her to safeguard his/her right to litigation if need be. The bill shall also give the electorate further guarantees through revision of the composition of regional committees in charge of settling disputes related to registration, and whose chairmanship, as is stipulated in the proposed amendment, shall be assigned to a judge.

In order to impart greater effectiveness to the operation of distributing the voter registration cards and provide maximum opportunities for electors to obtain them, we will extend the period of time allotted to the committee that will decide on the claims made by registered electors who have not received their cards in time. Membership of that committee is open to political parties.

We also give our instructions to ensure that the new bill includes a provision banning the members of the polling station from carrying any signs indicating their political affiliation. The president of the polling station shall attend to the execution of this measure which applies also to observers.

In order to strengthen the guarantees offered to candidates and to apply the principle of equality among them, the proposed amendment to the Electoral Code shall include provisions allowing observers to write down their remarks on the voting operation and to submit them in the form of a memorandum which must necessarily be attached to, and mentioned in, the vote counting report. This in addition to the current guarantees stipulated in the Code for observers regarding the vote counting process.

Having opened the way to multiple candidacies in the next presidential elections by virtue of the draft constitutional law we have recently introduced, we announce today our decision to simplify the conditions related to the attribution of the grant allocated to presidential candidates so that they can cover the expenses of their electoral campaigns, by reducing, from 5% to 3% of the votes declared, the minimum percentage of votes required as a condition to the second installment of the grant and to get back the financial guarantee paid by the candidate.

We are indeed keen to ensure that that the next elections offer a new opportunity for the different parties to participate, on the basis of the principles of transparency and democratic competition with its lofty values and ethics. **It will also be an opportunity to provide brotherly and friendly countries wishing to follow this event optimum conditions.**

We want this phase, the phase of building the Republic of Tomorrow, to be marked by a growing consolidation of pluralism in public life and a further reinforcement and enlargement of the scope of the participation of political parties in national life, in order to enrich the political scene, foster their supervisory and awareness-raising role and facilitate their field activities to make known their programs and viewpoints.

Moreover, to offer political parties, national organizations and the components of the associative fabric more opportunities to better make known their activities and programs, **the National Radio and Television Establishment is called upon to further cover the important events and activities of these parties, organizations and associations.**

We have made of the consecration of human rights values one of the foundations of the constitutional reform. We have indeed consolidated human rights principles and enlarged the scope of their protection in the text of the Constitution. To that end, we have been keen on protecting personal data, based on our steadfast conviction that the inviolability of the right to privacy is an integral part of the dignity of the individual, especially in view of the progress made in the computerized data processing.

To that end, we will submit, in the near future, to the Chamber of Deputies a bill specifying the procedures and mechanisms necessary to the protection of personal data. The provisions of this bill will also specify the

Fellow Citizens,

In the era of Change, Tunisia is the country of dialogue and social harmony. While I point to the success of the last round of social negotiations, the continuing consecration of this fundamental choice, and the uninterrupted asing power despite the difficult economic juncture and the current reality of the international environment, I would like to express my deep thanks and high consideration to all the social partners, particularly the Tunisian General Union of Labor, the Tunisian Union of Industry, Trade and Handicrafts, the Tunisian Union of Agriculture and Fisheries, and the representatives of the administration and public establishments, for their sense of patriotism, their awareness of challenges and stakes, and their attachment to interest.

In view of the difficulties of the current international juncture and the recession that the world economy has witnessed over the last few years, all parties are called upon to show more diligence, vigilance and sense of initiative, so that Tunisia will pursue its progress confidently, within this fluctuant environment, and so that our economy will be able to keep up with the possible developments with the required rapidity and the necessary efficiency.

Parallel to our insistence on following the path of dialogue is our keenness to consecrate our major priorities, chief among which is employment. Thanks to our policies and initiatives in this field, we have managed to increase the pace of development and achieve a high rate of satisfaction of the increasing job demand, especially from university graduates. These results have been achieved through the mechanisms of the solidarity economy which we have initiated in this field, particularly the National Solidarity Fund (26 - 26) and the National Employment Fund (21- 21), in addition to the Tunisian Solidarity Bank, and the system of micro-credits and the different specialized support structures.

Having said this, I reiterate my call for economic enterprises to exert a greater effort to promote employment and increase the rate of supervision.

Indeed, however advanced it can be, technology loses its efficiency if it is not based on a human intelligence that puts it to use and takes full advantage of the potentialities it offers.

In this field, our country has made a qualitative leap, a fact which has elevated to higher degrees the efficiency and performance of the educational

system. Since the Change, the number of university students has doubled nearly seven times; university institutions have been created in various regions of the country; the number of subjects has gone up from 200 to 400, in order to keep pace with the development and diversification of the n
the results affirm the soundness of our choices, they also present us with certain challenges, chief among which is the need to provide adequate conditions for the housing and transport of students, especially in certain towns and regions where the university fabric is created for the first time.

Keen on guaranteeing optimum conditions for the success of our students, we give our instructions to exert further efforts this year and allocate the necessary material means to start, from now, providing additional students' halls of residence, and to expedite the completion of those currently being implemented. This project should be given top priority, even if it means reviewing, if necessary, the order of priority for certain other projects.

We also give instructions to provide additional incentives to private ready for the start of the next academic year and the subsequent years, until the end of 2004. This is, in fact, to have the private sector contribute to facing the increasing number of new university students, which is estimated to reach 350,000 in two years from now and more than 500,000 before the end of the present decade.

As regards the current academic year, we have given our instructions to the ministries and public institutions owning buildings that could be used to house students, to put them at the disposal of the Organization of Education and Family to be utilized to this end.

We also gave instructions to devote additional means of transport to facilitate the movement of students in all university centers.

Fellow citizens,

Today in Tunisia, excessive disparities between the regions have disappeared, as regards the level of infrastructure, education, provision of collective equipments, creation of jobs and sources of income and the establishment of industrial zones. We have considered regional development policies as among our major priorities, and have stepped up an additional effort for more necessitous regions.

We have already launched the implementation of the Tenth plan, with a pace that would draw our country, in this phase, nearer to the ranks of developed countries.

Tunisia has indeed achieved satisfactory results, despite the climatic difficulties characterizing the last few years, the recession of the world economy, the decrease in commercial exchanges, and the crisis that affected certain sectors in the aftermath of the September 11th events. These results have, in fact, shown that the Tunisian economy has managed to maintain its balance and cohesion, especially that we have rapidly taken the necessary measures in order to guard against all fluctuations.

We are carefully following the world economic juncture, in order to ensure for our course of progress the best orientation, especially that several sectors have, during this last short period, regained their vitality. This requires from all parties the exertion of further efforts, as well as more caution and vigilance. For its part, the state has accomplished its role in this regard, by attending to the options and priorities, and also by carrying on the improvement of the economic infrastructure and the control of foreign debt and the inflation rate.

Businessmen are called upon to persevere in stimulating the pace of private investment, exportation, and the conquering of foreign market . It is important to point, in this regard, to the fact that accelerating the pace of creating new enterprises constitutes an essential challenge and a strategic necessity to achieve our objectives in terms of employment, development and welfare.

You certainly realize the importance of the coming period. It is a decisive period in the process of our partnership with the European Union; it requires us to complete the basic factors of our competitiveness, to ensure success for the upgrading program and its extension over the services and agricultural sectors and to build a modern and coherent economy. Chief among these factors is the building of the society of knowledge to which we have provided the necessary infrastructure in terms of communication technologies and networks. This, indeed, has had an optimum impact on the upgrading of the production environment.

In this context, we give our instructions to introduce new reductions, by 50%, in the tariffs of connection to data transmission networks intended for economic enterprises. We also give instructions to increase the capacity of the digital phone network by one million additional lines during the coming year.

We will pursue efforts to reinforce and develop the other components of infrastructure.

Now that we have completed the building of the Tunis-Bizerte highway and launched the construction of the Tunis-Oued Zargua highway, **the construction of the Msaken-Sfax highway will start in 2003. We also give instruction to start conducting studies related to the Sfax-Ras Jedir highway.**

Concerning the mobilization of water resources, and in completion of the plan we set in this field, **we give our instructions to start constructing three new dams in the north.**

In all our endeavors to build the national economy, we have always been keen on ensuring the correlation between the environmental and developmental dimensions, and the complementarity between the productive and protective functions of activities based essentially on natural resources.

The sector of agriculture and fisheries has also benefited, since the Change, from a qualitative leap that has guaranteed for the country its food and water security and has contributed to the consolidation of the balance of trade.

It is indeed the solid platform provided for the agricultural sector that has made it possible to face the effects of drought during four consecutive years.

We give our instructions today to conduct an in-depth study on the phenomenon of climatic changes and its new impacts upon the agricultural sector and upon the ecosystem in our country, in order to identify its risks and to define ways to deal with it. The aim is to elaborate a comprehensive strategy and executive programs to limit its negative effects and provide for possible alternative solutions to protect production capacities and benefit from rainy years.

Today, initiative constitutes a support for the national economy and the source of production and employment.

To further reinforce the supervision provided to investors and young promoters and smooth out the difficulties they may encounter, **we call upon regional development boards to concentrate their efforts, during the coming period, to support private investment in regions, especially by providing the necessary assistance to promoters, as regard the elaboration of studies, the obtainment of the necessary funding in the easiest ways possible, and the rapid implementation of their projects.**

Considering the role of investment companies in backing up promoters and diversifying the economic fabric, **we have decided to double the capital of investment companies in the regions of the North-West, the Mid-West and the South, in order to give them a fresh impetus, reinforce their interventions, and elevate them to the hoped-for level.**

Moreover, to encourage private initiative and offer opportunities to those, among managerial staff and civil servants, who feel themselves capable of carrying out an individual project, **we have decided to allow all those whose projects meet the eligibility and profitability criteria a one-year leave, renewable once, so that they can engage wholly in the implementation of their projects in the areas of regional development. During the leave period, these will be paid half of their salaries.**

As a reinforcement to the mechanisms we have established to back up investment, and in order to enable small and medium enterprises to obtain the appropriate funds, **we give our instructions today to create a system to guarantee credits and contributions for enterprises in the non-agricultural sector.** This system will cover the new projects whose cost does not exceed 3 million dinars, and will concern mid- and long-term credits, as well as the contributions of investment companies and short-term credits for newly-created enterprises. **We also give instructions to establish a set of additional incentives to encourage the creation of such projects, as well as tax incentives for savings accounts intended for investment.**

In accordance with our program for the future which includes the creation, each year, of a science and technology center, **we give instructions today to start establishing two science and technology centers in 2003, one in Borj Cedria, the other in Sidi Thabet.**

In that way, we can make one step forward on the way of our achievement of the interdependence and complementarity between the system of higher education, scientific research, technology and vocational training, on the one hand, and the mechanisms of project creation and the establishing of enterprises in innovative sectors, on the other hand.

Considering the fact that the handicrafts sector is one of the vital foundations of the economy, and has an important role in firmly establishing national identity and culture, in addition to the increase in the number of craftsmen to 300,000, we gave instructions to submit the results of the strategic study on handicrafts by the year 2016 to a national consultation. This decision was welcomed by those

concerned with this sector in all the regions of the country, and we will pay due interest to the recommendations and suggestions that will emanate from it.

Fellow citizens,

Among the basic foundations of stability are balance, moderation and the golden mean. Our political, development and cultural choices helped consecrate the concept of median society, a multi-dimensional concept whose material ground lies in the importance of the middle-class in our country, which represents today more than three-fourths of the population. This is, indeed, an achievement that we will carry on reinforcing, so that no room would be left in our country for marginalization or profound disparities. In so doing, our basis is our immutable constants and choices in the fields of economic and social development; choices based on an equitable distribution of wealth between regions and social categories and a profound vision of solidarity.

These are the same principles we call for and work for their consecration on the international scene. For indeed, one of the greatest hazards that threaten human solidarity lies in the widening of the gap between rich and poor countries, and the ensuing tragedies, conflicts and feelings of despair and frustration.

The principle of solidarity between states and peoples is essential to remedy the causes of these hazards and to reduce the inequalities that threaten security and peace in the world. It was for that reason that we called for the creation of a World Solidarity Fund, a proposal that was met with a UN unanimous approval and large-scale international support. We cherish the hope that this Fund will be established as soon as possible, thanks to the joining of the efforts of all states in the framework of the United Nations.

The consecration of this principle at the international level requires the establishment of the culture of entente, cooperation and solidarity between peoples, and to firmly entrench and develop its values and concepts. We believe that thinkers and intellectuals all over the world are better qualified to accomplish this noble mission. **As a contribution from Tunisia to the dissemination and enhancement of this culture, we announce today our decision to create the "prize of the President of the Republic for world solidarity", to be awarded to thinkers, artists and intellectuals or to organizations and associations that distinguish themselves in this field on the international level.**

Since the Change, we have been keen on reinforcing the principle of our sublime religion, namely moderation, solidarity and cooperation. We have always called for the dialogue of cultures and civilizations, and we continuously work to consolidate the bright image of Islam in the world, especially after the criminal

acts of terrorists have distorted the reality of Islam in the eyes of many westerners. To contribute to the sensitization of specialists to the necessity of stepping up further efforts in this field, **we announce the creation of the "international prize of the President of the Republic for Islamic studies**, in order to enrich the interpretative (ijtihad) thinking which believes in dialogue and openness and rejects seclusion and fanaticism.

Fellow citizens,

We have paid our full attention to justice and the judicial branch. We have always been keen on protecting the independence of the judiciary, within the framework of the republican rules and the principles of constitution.

When we chaired the centennial celebration of the Tunisian Bar, we expressed our appreciation of the role performed by this profession in promoting justice and equity.

It has become necessary to rationalize the organization of this profession, the fact which requires the conduct of a study for the establishment of a higher institute for the training of lawyers, within which those qualified for this profession receive additional training, while holders of a post-graduate law degree retain their right to join the profession.

We will also ensure the protection of the profession against certain illegitimate practices, such as exploiting the exemption from representation by a lawyer to practice the bar illegally.

The development of legislation today requires the provision of a wider him/her exclusively specialized in concluding good will-related contracts and to require representation by a lawyer in tax disputes involving amounts exceeding a sum to be determined by law and in disputes relating to debt collection firms.

We will also establish a system of social protection for lawyers, after the fashion of the systems we have put in place for other professional categories.

While we have given young lawyers full care so that they start their careers with maximum chances of success, we call for the reinforcement of their supervision. We also give our instructions today to consider effective ways to help them set up their own practices for the first time and to further

encourage young lawyers by increasing again the requisitioning remuneration.

Moreover, we have given our instructions to take effective measures to facilitate even further the work conditions of lawyers in the courts, based on respect due the juridical authority, and in the framework of cooperation between the various components of the juridical profession.

Fellow citizens,

The family is the basic nucleus of the social fabric. For that reason, we have provided it with our full care and protection, through the various legislative reforms we have introduced in this respect, so that its members would assume their respective roles within a strong cohesion and a civilized behavior deeply rooted in our culture.

Our steadfast choices in favor of women do constitute, in fact, a constant consolidation of the family, since we have enabled Tunisian women to enjoy full dignity and equality with men both *de jure* and *de facto*.

Tunisian women today, thanks to their elevated status and their deep awareness, provide a strong support for the Change and the preparation for the future.

We have also given Tunisian children the optimum place in our care; we have indeed provided for all the guarantees and mechanisms necessary to protect them, to safeguard their rights and to bring them up in optimum conditions. **In a drive to further promote children's conditions in order to keep up with the potential changes expected at all levels, we give instructions today to start elaborating a national plan of action for the second decade (2002-2011) in favor of children, in order to develop the gains achieved for children in the first decade.**

Our protection of the child is a challenge for Tunisia of tomorrow whose youth we are preparing today to assume an effective role in its development process.

In the face of the expected challenges, young people are called upon to step up efforts for the sake of excellence and outstanding performance in all fields and to show more ambition and a spirit of excellence, as a sign of patriotism and adherence to the country's flag. The next youth consultation will be an opportunity to assess the achievements recorded, and to draw up an ambitions

national plan to further upgrade youth conditions in all fields, until the end of the current decade.

We have paid special attention to leisure for all social categories. Today, we give instructions to prepare a national plan in this field, in coordination with all the parties concerned. The plan will target young people from all social categories, and will optimize the organization of free time and the utilization of existing facilities. It will also promote the development of leisure activities in such a way as to meet the needs of all categories and age-groups and combine usefulness and enjoyment, while at the same time opening for the private sector the possibilities of advertisement and sponsoring in leisure projects, and encouraging private investment in this field.

The national effort being made to promote the cultural sector in our country, and further reinforced by incorporating its set objective within our Program for the Future, brings into light the new prospects open for culture and intellectuals for greater production and creativity and prize-winning on the national and international levels. We consider cultural development as a basic supportive element in taking up the challenges of globalization and consolidating the foundations of our national identity. This requires all of us to give our full care to cultural industry in order to diversify and develop it and to encourage private investment in it.

We have given the media sector the encouragement and care it deserves, and provided it with the best conditions, means and legislative guarantees to facilitate the performance of its functions in a sound political climate. We have also offered the press of political parties opportunities to participate in enriching the media scene, and given it the necessary support in order to make known its programs, opinions and visions, and to contribute to further entrenching the democratic pluralist approach.

We want an information that draws its substance from the right of difference and the freedom of opinion; an information that abides by requirements of the ethics and noble purposes of the profession, thereby avoiding to lapse into abuse, defamation and the quest for immediate profit at the expense of the noble mission of the profession; an information that accustoms all parties including journalists, audiences and officials to accepting criticism and respecting other

freedom of expression in our society and enable the media to fully assume their role in serving the causes of our country.

We will reinforce the forums of dialogue in the written press and on radio and television, so as to promote a greater participation of all the components of society and to make known the different views and analyses.

In support of this choice, we also give our instructions to devote a television program for live coverage of the proceedings of sector-based sessions in the Chamber of Deputies.

We call upon the radio and television establishment to avail itself of the possibilities offered by digital technology, in order to enlarge the scope of audio-visual information by setting up specialized information channels and other regional channels that are closer to the citizens' concerns in their respective areas, thereby responding to the multifarious interests and tastes, and qualifying our country to keep pace with the worldwide communication revolution.

Fellow citizens,

Our faithfulness to the Maghreb edifice is one of our constants. We have endeavored with utmost earnestness to strengthen our bilateral relations with the brotherly Maghreb countries and to broaden the base of cooperation with them. We have spared no effort since the establishment of the Maghreb Union to promote the Maghreb joint action and to seek, with our brothers the Heads of State in the region, to overcome the current difficulties so as to achieve our cherished goal and to meet the aspirations of our peoples to complementarity and unity.

Another immutable constant of our policy is our support for the struggle of the brotherly Palestinian people to recover all its legitimate rights, primarily its right to self-determination and its right to build its independent state on its national territory with Al-Qods Al-Sharif as its capital. While we reiterate our support for its legitimate struggle, we express our deep concern as to the continuing daily and incessant aggressions against it and about the targeting of its legitimate leadership by the Israeli occupation forces and their persistence in destroying its infrastructure and crippling its institutions.

In reiterating its firm position on this just cause, Tunisia calls on the effective parties in the international arena to take firm and speedy action in order to ensure the protection of the brotherly Palestinian people and provide the necessary conditions for a resumption of negotiations as the only means to achieve just, comprehensive and durable peace for all peoples in the region.

For security and stability to be established in the Middle East region, it is also essential to make progress in settling the Iraqi issue through peaceful means.

It is our belief that dialogue between the United Nations and Iraq remains the most effective way to resolve the outstanding problems, particularly in view of the positive attitude manifested by the Iraqi authorities in dealing with the United Nations.

The terrorist events of September 11, 2001 and their serious repercussions on stability, security and mutual understanding across the world require the international community to strengthen its cooperation against extremism and terrorism and to address the root causes of these two scourges, on the basis of a comprehensive approach founded upon dialogue, solidarity and cooperation.

We had already warned against the dangers of this phenomenon as far back as the early 1990s when we asserted that extremism and terrorism do blemish human history with bigoted minds and bloody acts. We showed that terrorism can only be eradicated by reviewing the treatment extended to its groups by a number of Western parties. We called upon the international community from the various U.N. and regional rostrums to lay down rules of conduct in this field. We believe that time has come to convene an international conference on terrorism, which we had called for since 1998, in order to establish an international code of ethics to which all parties will be committed. This code will help establish a responsible dialogue that transcends double standards and defines common denominators for combating terrorism.

Within this framework, we have sought to give solidarity the place it deserves in international relations so as to eliminate the socio-economic imbalances which feed terrorism.

Extremism and terrorism are two dangerous phenomena which threaten humanity in its most cherished and sacred rights. For our part, as we commend, with great admiration, all honest human rights activists, be they personalities, UN or non-governmental organizations, associations, or institutions, we consider that deviating from the lofty values of human rights by reiterating the claims and lies of extremists only strengthens extremism and terrorism and further aggravates their danger.

Tunisia, being a country of the rule of law, while it respects noble struggle and honest dialogue, does not accept deviations that undermine fundamental human rights and their lofty principles.

We also condemn those who act against their country from abroad and harm its interests out of cowardice and treason. While we accept honest criticism with absolute broad-mindedness from those who prefer the

homeland to exercise on it their right of expression, we declare again that the law is the decisive criterion against all those who seek to undermine the interests of the country.

Fellow citizens,

Tunisia's independence, security and prosperity are a trust placed in our hands which we are protecting and developing in every field, out of faithfulness to the sacrifices of martyrs and activists and out of devotion to serving our coming generations.

Our confidence in the future is growing thanks to the progress and development witnessed today by Tunisia in all fields and to the significant gains and achievements it has made, notwithstanding all difficulties and challenges.

The more we are optimistic, the more we are resolved to make further achievements, because our determination is unswerving, and our faith in our people is unshakable, our people who had been glorious all over its long history and is still pursuing the same path with great pride and ambition.

Let us preserve this spirit and devote ourselves wholeheartedly to serving our country and our people and to securing the brightest future for both of them.

God Almighty said: "I seek only to reform as much as I can, and my success is with none but Allah. In Him I have put my trust and to Him I turn."
(Koran)

Thank you for your attention