

**Speech  
by President**

**Zine El Abidine Ben Ali  
on the occasion of Tunisia's  
celebration of the anniversary  
of the founding of the Republic**

Carthage, July 25, 2002

## **In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate**

Fellow Citizens,

Today, we celebrate with utmost pride and dignity the forty-fifth anniversary of the proclamation of the Republic. Recalling the deep meanings and lessons conveyed by this national event, we draw further impetus to preserve, reinforce, and enhance our people's gains; out of love for, and loyalty to Tunisia; faithful to the sacrifices of generations of reformists, freedom-fighters, militants, martyrs, and leaders who paved the way for, and laid the foundations of, our modern renaissance.

I take this exceptional opportunity to congratulate all those who have been awarded the Medal of the Order of the Republic, recognizing through them all those who are working hard to safeguard this accomplishment and to reinforce its underpinnings.

The proclamation of the Republic was a crucial juncture in the life of our people; it was an opportunity to recover self-determination and sovereignty and to meet the requirements of democracy and modernity.

The Republic is an extremely valuable national accomplishment for whose achievement generations of valiant

Tunisian men and women have struggled and with which the people has fulfilled its freedom and dignity in a mature and responsible way.

As we reiterate our pride with the sacrifices of our people to establish the Republic, we reaffirm our admiration for the outstanding achievements of those who liberated the nation and built the modern state and for their great efforts to consecrate the will of the people and to enhance our glorious intellectual, reformist, and militant heritage, most notably the exceptional pioneering part played by the nation's founding leader Habib Bourguiba, the first President of the Republic.

Our pride with our country's accomplishments from the proclamation of the Republic to this day should not be superseded by our duty to constantly preserve and reinforce them. This is a duty each generation owes to the next.

Our reform project is a project of change and construction; this has been our pledge to the people since November 7 and we are firmly determined to continue its implementation with undaunted resolve.

We have provided attention and care to everything likely to bolster the underpinnings of the dignity of Tunisian citizens, preserve their rights, and meet their ambitions and expectations. Hence, we have focused our efforts on developing our human resources; laying the foundations of a society of moderation, solidarity, and tolerance; benefiting from science and knowledge; and mastering the latest technologies.

We have considered the family, especially women and children, as one of the priorities of our social reform. We have therefore enshrined the principle of gender equality in the Constitution; we have given it substance through legislation

organizing public life, whether in terms of voting rights, eligibility to constitutional bodies, or participation to the various aspects of economic and social life. Thus, women are now an essential factor in the national comprehensive development system, for the stability of the family and for balanced individuals and society.

We have also issued the Child Protection Code to consolidate children's rights, and to provide for their safe social, health, and educational upbringing.

We have placed our trust in youth and organized large-scale surveys to listen to their concerns and ambitions, involve them in defining their country's major options, forecasting its future and supporting its progress. We have provided institutions, facilities, and infrastructure to meet their intellectual, leisure, cultural, and physical interests and to help them demonstrate their gifts and attain the highest degrees of distinction and excellence.

We have given a major impulse to programs targeting our expatriate community, specifically second- and third-generation Tunisians, to reinforce their ties with the homeland, step up the care they are provided with, and defend their rights.

Rehabilitating the Republican system, consolidating its foundations, abiding by the sovereignty of the people, and refraining from confiscating its will, these were some of the most important underpinnings of our political reform, both as a text and as a practice. We have notably eliminated everything inconsistent with the principles of the Republic such as life-long presidency and automatic succession. We have also taken a number of initiatives and steps to lay the foundations of the rule of law and institutions, to firmly establish democracy and pluralism, and to secure human rights in their various dimensions.

We have taken this course because we are firmly convinced that our people deserves a progressive political life that takes into consideration the pace of social development and interacts with the ambitions of society in a deliberate way, shunning slippery slopes and setbacks.

The in-depth constitutional reform recently ratified by the people as part of the first referendum ever to be organized in our country's history is but a further stage of this process and an additional initiative to provide future generations with an advanced political system that safeguards the Republic, strengthens its values and institutions, and consecrates democracy, pluralism, and human rights.

This new stage clearly reasserts the major changes that have taken place in Tunisia in recent years, our people's characteristic political maturity, and the encouraging results achieved in the economic, social, and cultural fields with positive effects on all aspects of daily life.

We consider that one of the gains achieved by the referendum is that the people has effectively exercised its sovereignty, its constitutional authority, and its free will, which will always be the yardstick for all historical options. We will strive to further consecrate this in upcoming political events. We look forward to greater achievements and accomplishments because our trust in our country and our people is unyielding, and because we are forever determined to make headway in both reform and construction.

The referendum will remain a glorious moment in Tunisia's history, a moment when the will of the people concurred with our own initiative. The people ratified our proposed constitutional amendment and adopted our option for the Republic of tomorrow and our vision of our country's future.

Fellow Citizens,

The Republic of tomorrow stems from our firm belief in the need to develop the Republican system, and to modernize, enhance, and buttress its institutions. That is why we wanted the Republic of tomorrow to be an illustration of the level of political maturity reached by our country; meeting the ambitions of generations of Tunisian men and women, opening broad prospects for their involvement in developing their country and running its affairs, taking it to the highest levels of advancement and distinction. This is clearly evidenced by the various topics provided for in the reform — securing human rights and effecting their guarantees; promoting the relationship between the Executive and Legislative branches of government; reinforcing the role of the Constitutional Council and the neutrality of its members; adjusting the presidential election system; setting up the Chamber of Advisors to provide for broader popular representation.

One of the challenges of the Republic of tomorrow is to give full expression to potentialities that have been lying dormant in our people, to mobilize energies, and to deepen the nation's feeling for rights and duties, and to sharpen its awareness of everybody's duty towards everyone else.

The Republic of tomorrow enhances the present and paves the way for the future, based on options which fact has proven right and effective. These are the consecration of a deeply-rooted reform movement that was able to establish a link between the glories of the past and the gains of the present, to grow and to renew itself with the various stages of our country's history.

Now that the people has freely made its choice, and placed its trust in the future, the next step will be devoted to the

implementation of all the provisions contained in the constitutional reform.

One of the foundations of the Republican system is the authority of the people in choosing its representatives within political institutions and referral to the people in electing the President of the Republic.

On the fourteenth anniversary of the Change, we had announced that we would strive to find adequate approaches to consecrate pluralism in the coming presidential elections. We had also announced before the Chamber of Deputies that we would submit legislation to this end.

**Despite the fact that opposition parties, taken together, currently hold the required number of deputies to nominate a candidate for the Presidency of the Republic, we hereby announce, in support of plural candidacies, our initiative to submit a draft constitutional law providing for wider candidacies to the Presidency of the Republic for upcoming presidential elections. Candidacies shall no longer be restricted to the party's highest official as was the case in 1999. Every one of the five political parties represented in the Chamber of Deputies, not capable individually of meeting the requirements of endorsement, will thereafter be authorized to nominate one of the members of its Executive Board to the 2004 presidential elections. Provided that the concerned candidate should have held the position for no less than five successive years and that the party concerned has one or more deputies in the Chamber of Deputies, taking into consideration the deputy's membership of the party when submitting his candidacy to the Chamber of Deputies.**

We call on political parties to ready themselves for this important event, to contribute in reinforcing the democratic

and pluralist process, and to achieve our ambitions and develop our political life within a strong Republican system.

We have consecrated political pluralism by enshrining parties within the Constitution; furthermore, the Electoral Code has been amended to secure the presence of the opposition in the Chamber of Deputies, in municipal councils, and in the various spaces of dialogue and consultation.

The practice of democracy is a common and ceaseless endeavor essentially exercised by the citizen, in which all parties, whether in power or in the opposition, play an effective part.

Elections are the highest form of political activity exercised by the citizen, which confers a special significance on registration in the electoral roll. As provided for in the Constitution, voting is both a right and a duty to be discharged with awareness and a sense of duty.

During the previous elections, we had given instructions to review the electoral roll on an exceptional basis; we organized information campaigns to raise the citizen's awareness about the need to register and to exercise their electoral right. However, a number of Tunisian men and women of legal voting age have not registered their names on the electoral roll as they should have.

That is why, on the fourteenth anniversary of the Change we had announced our intention to introduce an amendment to the Electoral Code to facilitate registration on the electoral roll by dropping the system of annual reviews for a system of permanent review, with lists being regularly posted for continued consultation and registration.

**Based on our determination to provide appropriate conditions for the success of this operation, we hereby give**

**instructions to draft a bill paving the way for a system of permanent review of the electoral roll, allowing Tunisian men and women not registered to vote to register over a period of nine months starting on the day the law is published. The bill will be submitted to the Chamber of Deputies during its next legislative session.**

That is why we call on all municipalities and *imadas* to make ready for this event. We will be taking steps aimed at facilitating the registration of citizens on the electoral roll, setting up mobile registration units, and intensifying information during the review period through radio, television, and other media.

We consider all political parties as stakeholders in this campaign, responsible for its success, in view of the role provided for in the Constitution in terms of assisting citizens in organizing their participation to political life and for all Tunisian men and women to discharge their duties in registering their names on the electoral roll, as this duty is the highest form of exercising citizenship.

We are convinced that all Tunisian men and women, as well as the various political parties, will evidence their national awareness and will contribute to a large-scale review of the new electoral roll, thus consecrating a system of permanent review for all future elections.

Fellow Citizens,

This year, we will start implementing a new Plan which will reinforce our country's development efforts in consecrating a culture of excellence and distinction, stepping up the pace of advancement and progress to adhere to the world economy and assert our effective presence among nations.

This Plan will be a shift from a stage for reforming and upgrading our country to a stage for addressing the challenges of economic, cultural, scientific, knowledge, and civilization competition within a delicate international context marked by deep changes and momentous challenges.

As this Plan completes our Program for the Future, we strive to use it to achieve a quantum leap by the end of the first decade of this new century. Hence, it has a major importance, considering the orientations and ambitions we have defined for it, with participation from the various relevant stakeholders, and large-scale national, regional, and local surveys, marked by a forward-looking vision that takes into consideration the country's capabilities and the various stages that need to be covered to attain our national goals of a comprehensive and balanced development.

These are orientations and ambitions we will exert every effort to achieve despite our awareness of the difficulties and the challenges posed by scarce resources, the effects of economic globalization, and the adverse effects of September 11. Today, we are all —individuals, organizations, and institutions — duty-bound to make this Plan a success and to mobilize every effort to achieve its goals.

To foster the development of a new generation of investors with enough competence and expertise to set up their own businesses, particularly in innovative activities, **we hereby announce our decision to introduce a system whereby a leave of absence is granted to those working in public administrations, institutions, and enterprises wishing to set up their own businesses.**

Such leaves of absence are granted without pay for a one-year period, renewable once, during which beneficiaries are

covered by social security schemes and contribute to pension and social security funds; during this period, employers will also pay their due share of such contributions.

In the implementation of this Plan, we rely on our own capabilities and the good management of our resources; we place our trust in all sections of our society, confident as we are that they are ready to work hard and to mobilize their efforts, their knowledge, and their capabilities in the best way possible to overcome difficulties, meet challenges, and benefit from the various forms of cooperation and partnership with brotherly and friendly countries.

Fellow Citizens,

Tunisia is headed towards an extremely important political and development stage which will place it in a position it deserves among the group of emerging nations at the dawn of this new century. Our only option is for increased effort and hard work, for the consecration of the spirit of concord, solidarity, and complementarity between all categories, regions, and generations, to make a steady progress towards the levels of invulnerability and prosperity we have defined for our people and our country.

Thank you for your attention.