

Excerpts from Speech by President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali on the 14th anniversary of the Change

Le Kram, November 7th, 2001

* we announce our intention to present a draft fundamental constitutional reform which will enable us to make a quantum leap in our political system thanks to the gains and achievements our country has made, and to pave the way for the republic of tomorrow.

* The draft reform will give human rights and freedoms, in the universal and comprehensive character of their principles and in the complementarity and interdependence of their dimensions, a special place in the text of the Constitution.

The draft reform will also concern the extension of protection of the individual's private life, the consecration of inviolability of communications and protection of personal data.

* We will ensure that a mention will be made, in the proposed Constitutional amendment, of the need to submit police custody to the control of justice and to subject it to prior judicial authorization ; such procedures being thus raised to constitutional level.

* The draft Constitutional reform will confirm the role of the State and society in the consecration of the values of solidarity, mutual aid and tolerance among individuals, social categories and generations.

* We will apply ourselves to seeking effective means to consecrate pluralism at the forthcoming presidential elections.

* The degree of maturity that the Tunisian experience has attained justifies our option for the promotion of our political system in anticipation of the coming stage, without renouncing its presidential character, but by bringing about some change in governmental action and in the relationship between the Government and the Chamber of Deputies, and by making the control exercised by the Chamber of Deputies over the Government more effective.

* The proposed amendment will further include a mention of sessions of oral questions and debates on sectoral policies and problems of the hour, in the text of the Constitution which, in fact, is their natural framework.

* The proposed reform will be focused on a broader representation of the regions and the different components of society through establishment of a second chamber beside the Chamber of Deputies so as to enrich the legislative function and political life in general.

Being anxious to consolidate further the position of the legislative power, we

intend to present a bill on administrative and financial organization of the Chamber of Deputies.

* To that end, the draft reform will focus on reinforcing the neutrality and independence of the members of the Constitutional Council which will have to take charge of the operations of presidential and legislative elections in all their stages.

* We today announce our intention to present a draft amendment to the Electoral Code aimed at facilitating the operations of registration on the electoral rolls by discontinuing the current system of annual revision of the rolls and replacing it with a system of permanent revision with periodic bill-posting of electoral rolls so as to make it possible, on a permanent basis, to consult them and register on them as those rolls should only be closed as of the date of issue of the decree inviting electors to vote while maintaining the possibility of exceptional registrations as provided for in the Electoral Code.

* We intend to take the necessary measures and make the required arrangements so that the distribution of cards, in respect of ordinary general elections may start six months before polling day while guaranteeing the right to collect them from municipalities and "omdas", sufficiently in advance as soon as the distribution operation is ended while maintaining all other guarantees including the right of electors to have their cards directly on the very polling day.

* The criteria for the establishment of polling stations will be revised by fixing the number of electors for each polling station at 450 in respect of municipalities that have more than 7000 electors, instead of the current ceiling of 250 ; this measure will contribute notably to reducing the number of polling stations.

In order to facilitate the control operation for all parties even further, the proposed amendment of the Electoral Code will allow the designation of observers in the polling stations from among the persons registered on electoral rolls of other districts contrary to the current provisions of the Electoral Code which stipulate that the observer must necessarily be registered on in the electoral district where the polling station is located.

*In the same context, the electoral bill will authorize the elector to sign himself the electoral rolls which are in the polling station after expressing his own vote.

* We announce our intention to present, on an exceptional basis, a bill allowing opposition parties to be represented within the current regional councils up to a limit of 20% of their members wherever those parties have representatives within the municipal councils of the concerned region.