



## Embassy of the Kingdom of Morocco in Australia

### MOROCCO E-NEWSLETTER

#### DOMESTIC & FOREIGN POLICY

##### ❑ **Sahara Issue: the initiative for autonomy widely welcomed**

Morocco has on April 11 presented to the UN Secretary General a draft plan to grant substantial autonomy to the Sahara to be circulated and attached to his report to the Security Council. The "Moroccan initiative for negotiating an autonomy statute for the Sahara Region" allows all Sahrawis to run their affairs democratically, through various representative legislative, executive and judicial bodies within the framework of the Moroccan sovereignty, national unity and territorial integrity. The initiative achieves the principle of self-determination, through a free, modern and democratic expression via a referendum in conformity with international legality and the norms and standards applicable in the area of autonomy.

In this regard, the international community has widely welcomed this initiative as a credible basis for negotiations among the parties. In the United States, for instance, 157 members of Congress signed a letter to President Bush endorsing Morocco's initiative. It stated that this initiative "is a breakthrough opportunity to find an enduring political solution, and U.S. support is critical to its successful implementation." The American legislators stressed in their letter that: "With al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups expanding their presence in North Africa, we are concerned that the failure to resolve this conflict of more than 30 years poses a danger to U.S. and regional security, while simultaneously preventing the economic integration of the Arab Maghreb Union."

##### ❑ **Western capitals welcome UNSC resolution on the Sahara**

The United Nations' Security Council passed in April 30<sup>th</sup> a resolution welcoming as "serious and credible" Morocco's efforts to solve the three-decade old Sahara dispute.

The UN Security Council's resolution calls upon the parties to enter into negotiations "without preconditions and in good faith," with a view to achieving a just, lasting and mutually acceptable political solution. It requests the Secretary-General to "set up these negotiations under his auspices and invites Member States to lend appropriate assistance to such talks". In fact, Morocco's initiative provides the basis for serious and constructive negotiations between the parties on the autonomy status of the Sahara.

The 15 members of the UN Security Council also decided to extend the mandate of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara until 31 October 2007.

Mr. Taieb Fassi Fihri, Moroccan Minister-Delegate for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, stated that this resolution "marks above all a clear-cut rupture with the approaches recommended so far and with the different proposals tested or expressed since 1990 in particular". "It is also a resolution of substance that constitutes a crucial turning point in the search for a realistic and workable solution of the issue", Mr. Fassi Fihri said.

Western capitals, including permanent member countries of the United Nations Security Council, positively welcomed the UN Security Council resolution on the Sahara and called for direct negotiations between the

parties concerned to settle the three-decade old Sahara dispute.

"We have welcomed Morocco's credible efforts," the United Nations Security Council President, Great Britain's ambassador, Emyr Jones Parry told the press following the UNSC adoption of this resolution on 30th April. "What we want to see now are direct negotiations" between the parties, he said, underlining that besides extending the mandate of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (known by its French acronym MINURSO), the Council aspires "through the resolution language to encourage the parties enter into negotiations."

Echoing him, US ambassador to the UNSC, Zalamy Khalilzad, said that in its resolution, the Council noted Morocco's "credible and serious efforts" to overcome the current deadlock.

France's ambassador to the UN, Jean-Marc de La Sablière, said his country welcomes the new resolution as an "important, balanced and agreed upon text," voicing hope to see "the parties concerned engage negotiations in good faith and without preconditions as soon as possible."

In Spain, President of the Spanish government, José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, welcomed the UNSC resolution that "fully tallies" with Spain's stance both in favorably welcoming the Moroccan autonomy initiative as well as calling upon the parties to engage negotiation in a bid to settle the dispute through dialogue.

#### ❑ **Conference on Human Development in Africa**

The first African Conference on Human Development, jointly organized by Morocco and the UNDP, took place in Rabat on 6-7 April 2007. This ministerial meeting, with the participation of 50 African countries, was held within the framework of the UN's Millennium Development Goals. His Majesty Mohammed VI sent a message to the participants where he stressed that:"this meeting offers an appropriate occasion to assess the situation of human development in Africa, to diagnose without complacency the barriers to its full implementation and to draw conclusions from past experiences".

At the end of the Conference, Ministers passed a declaration in recognition of the crucial role played by regional groupings and institutions in realizing the goals of regional integration and the optimum exploitation of resource in their respective areas. In pursuit of this objective, Ministers at the meeting encouraged the creation of an African network of experts in human development and the establishment of national focal point in charge of coordinating the national networks of experts.

The Second African Conference on Human Development is to be held in the Republic of Gabon in 2009.

#### ❑ **Morocco joins task force on Middle-East peace initiative**

Morocco has been selected by the special Arab Initiative Follow-up Committee to take part in a task force entrusted with engaging contacts with the international community about the Arab peace initiative for the Middle East.

This initiative, which was first approved by the Arab League in its 2002 summit in Beirut, calls for Israel's pullout from Arab land occupied in the 1967 Middle East War and the establishment of an independent Palestinian state in return for the normalization of ties between Israel and Arab states. The Arab Summit in Riyadh last month reactivated the peace initiative.

Speaking at the Committee's meeting held in Egypt at the level of foreign ministers, Moroccan Foreign Minister Mohammed Benaissa expressed the hope that the Follow-up Committee's proceedings would be marked by transparency, frankness and boldness in examining the issue of peace in the Middle East.

The newly-formed Arab peace initiative Follow-up Committee groups Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, the Palestinian Authority, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, Sudan and Yemen.

## ECONOMY & INVESTMENT

### ❑ **Morocco plans US\$1.7bn port in Tangier**

Morocco plans to build a new 14 billion dirham (US\$1.70bn) port for containers in Tangier to supplement another new port opening in July 2007. This project was endorsed recently by His Majesty the King Mohammed VI at a meeting of top government officials.

The new port would be close to the Tangier Mediterranean port, which was launched in 2002 at a cost of more than \$2bn and is due to be opened in July this year, to benefit from a network of roads, highways and rail lines linking to a free-trade zone nearby and to the rest of the country. "The new port would be built at a cost of about 14bn dirhams, almost half of the investment would come from private investors from Morocco and abroad," a senior official involved in the project planning said. The port, with three container terminals, would have a capacity of five million containers.

The first port, known as Tangier Mediterranean Port, also houses a container terminal with a capacity of three million containers, oil storage, cereals terminal and other facilities. The oil site will store at least 20,000 tons of petroleum products to be sold to local retailers along with offering petroleum products and services to ships docking at the port or crossing the Straits of Gibraltar.

The two ports would have a combined capacity of up to 10 million containers, making the Tangier port complex one of the biggest in the world. Tangier Mediterranean Special Agency chairman Said Elhadi said the Tangier port complex would be one of the biggest and most competitive maritimes hubs in the Mediterranean region since the government has a plan to invest up to US\$18bn for the 2002-2015 period.

### ❑ **Final section of Tangier-Marrakech highway completed**

HM King Mohammed VI has inaugurated the highway linking the towns of Settat and Marrakech in central Morocco, the final section of the Tangier-Marrakech motorway. The 145-km Settat-Marrakech section, built at a cost of more than US\$ 400 million, is the longest in the 558-km route linking Tangier to Marrakech. It is expected to handle a traffic volume of 4,600 vehicles a day.

The Tangier-Marrakech motorway, for which a sum of US\$ 970 million was earmarked, will reduce the driving time between the two cities by three hours.

In recent years, Morocco has accelerated the construction of motorways from 40 km a year in the late 1980s to 160km a year at present. A total of 635 km of motorways are under construction at present as part of the country's aim to build a total of 1,500 km of motorways by 2010, of which 784km have already been built, at an overall cost of more than US\$ 4.3 billion, 80 per cent of which is lent by international funds.

### ❑ **Morocco joins World Bank's low-risk countries category**

Morocco has joined the category of "low-risk" countries in the management of public finances, according to the latest World Bank report entitled "country financial accountability assessment." The report conducted a risk assessment on all methods, procedures and public finance management tools applied in Morocco, before its classification on a scale of four risk levels: low, average, important and high.

The reforms, undertaken over the past three years in Morocco, did not cause any risk increase despite of their number, scope and sensitivity, said the World Bank's report, which reviews the historical background

of the reforms, to establish a diagnosis on their foundation, challenges, implementation and prospects of their development. While lauding these "important and innovative" reforms which have made Morocco's overall risk to remain at a lower level, the report however highlights several inadequacies in the country's public finance system.

#### ❑ **Morocco to set up \$1b LNG terminal**

Mohammed Boutaleb, Moroccan energy minister, announced recently that Morocco is planning to build a liquefied natural gas (LNG) terminal as part of a drive to diversify energy supply to fuel its strong growth.

The minister indicated that the investment needed to set up the terminal and its related transport network is estimated at US\$1 billion. He added that the Moroccan government will finance the project through local and international investors. He further explained that the proposed terminal, which will import natural gas liquefied and shipped in tankers, will have an initial capacity of 3 billion cubic meters. It will boost the share of gas in Morocco's energy supply basket from less than 3 percent to 20 percent.

#### ❑ **Over 1 million tourists visited Morocco in 2007 Q1**

Some 1.25 million tourists visited Morocco in the first quarter of 2007, i.e. a 7% increase compared to the same period of 2006. According to the latest figures released by the Tourism Observatory, the French tourists topped the list with 458,000 tourists, followed by the Spaniards (266,000), the British (106,000), the Italians (56,000), the Belgians (55,000) and the Germans (53,000).

Some 6.4 million tourists visited Morocco in 2006 compared to 4.4 million in 2002, while the number of night guests increased by 10%. Morocco has elaborated a strategy, dubbed "Vision 2010" that aspires to attract 10 million tourists by 2010. This strategy also aims to create 160,000 beds, bringing the national capacity to 230,000 beds and to create some 600,000 new job opportunities. The Vision is meant to diversify the tourism product, develop training and partnership in the air transport and other related tourism fields and increase tourism contribution to GDP by 8.5% annually to reach 20% by 2010.

#### ❑ **Uranium explorer Toro Energy Ltd is expanding its focus to Morocco**

Toro Energy Ltd has recently inked a memorandum of understanding with the ONHYM (Moroccan public entity in charge of hydrocarbons and mining) to review the potential for uranium at a number of prospects over the next six months. Toro said exploration in the 1970s and early '80s by French and Russian companies had discovered uranium mineralisation in Morocco, but these were never developed.

The company was formed last year through the spin-off of the South Australian uranium assets of copper-gold producer Oxiana Ltd and Minotaur Exploration Ltd.

## **CULTURE & SOCIETY**

#### ❑ **HH Prince Moulay Rachid and HH Prince Philip dedicate holy texts exhibition to the British Library**

During a recent visit to London, HH Prince Moulay Rachid (younger brother of HM Mohammed VI of Morocco) and HH Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh dedicated an exhibition displaying rare holy texts and exquisite manuscripts of the three monotheistic religions at the British Library.

This cultural event, organized under the patronage of King Mohammed VI and of Prince Phillip, aims to further promote understanding between races and the history of the three divine religions. In this regard, the British Library paid tribute to King Mohammed VI in recognition of his tireless efforts to promote values of tolerance and understanding between different cultures and civilizations.

The exhibition that will last until September 23, will feature a valuable collection of the original religious texts, sources and documents relating to the special rituals and ceremonies of these three major world religions. The exhibits include some codices, paintings and documents on loan from the British Library and other international collections and museums.

#### ❑ **Morocco to allocate USD 643Mn to 2012 International Exposition**

Morocco will earmark US\$ 643Mn to organize the 2012 International Exposition in the northern city of Tangier, said recently officials in charge of Tangier bid. This budget aims to build and equip theme pavilions that will cost USD 60.7Mn, establish lodgings on a 25ha area (USD 72.8Mn) and build a conference hall, worth USD 12.1Mn. It will also be dedicated to convert the 2012 event buildings after the exposition. Touching on the urban legacy, the organizers said Morocco plans to build a USD 30.3Mn "setting sun"-shaped monument that will be the national and international emblem of the 2012 International exposition.

During the exhibition, billed for June 16 through September 16, organizers expect some 6 Million visitors from 80 countries, i.e. a daily average of 130,000 visitors.

Morocco presented Tangier as a candidate city to host the 2012 International Exposition -under the theme "Routes of the World, Cultures connecting. For a More United World"- to the members of the BIE, during the 140th session of their General Assembly, held in Paris on December 18-19, 2006. Former diplomatic capital of Morocco, the city of Tangier is undergoing a genuine economic and cultural renaissance in line with a vast program of investments undertaken to modernize the country, which should come to full fruition at the start of the next decade.

In addition to Tangier, two other cities have applied to host the 2012 International Exhibition: Wroclaw (Poland) and Yeosu, (South Korea).

#### ❑ **Rural electrification rate reaches 88%**

4,741 Moroccan villages benefited from electrification in late 2006 compared to 2,004 in 2002 that is a 88% electrification rate, revealed Moroccan Minister of Energy, Mohammed Boutaleb. Over 27,000 villages have benefited from the Rural Electrification Global Program (PERG), since its launch in 2006, Boutaleb said recently during a House of Counselors' question time.

The minister pointed out that the current pace of rural electrification would help endow around 36,000 villages with electricity by the end of this year. This goal will be achieved through joining the national network (up to 91%) and through decentralized electrification, mainly using photovoltaic kits (up to 7%), he noted.

Source : Maghreb Arab Press