First Coordination Meeting in preparation of the “Forum for the Future” 2009

(Rome, 15 December 2008)
Chair Summary, Forum for the Future  
Morocco, 10 – 11 December 2004

1. The Ministers of Foreign Affairs and the Ministers of Economy and Finance of the countries of the Broader Middle East and North Africa (BMENA), together with their G8 counterparts and their partners (hereinafter “the Participants”), participated in the first Forum for the Future, which met on December 11th, 2004, at Rabat, in the Kingdom of Morocco.

2. The Participants reflected their countries’ awareness of the issues at stake that constitute the challenges they share in terms of co-development on political, economic, and social levels, and in terms of mutual understanding on human, cultural, and societal levels. By contributing to the success of this Forum, the Participants are tangibly demonstrating their conviction that these shared challenges require them to respond in a global way, as part of their renewed commitment to dialogue and cooperation.

3. With this in mind, the Forum for the Future hopes to provide a setting for an informal, flexible, open and inclusive dialogue, devoted to strengthening democracy and the participation of civil society, to developing skills training, and to encouraging the growth of modern economies that generate wealth and that are well integrated into the global economy. It is the pillar of the Partnership for Progress and a Common Future, which is the framework for dialogue and cooperation based on shared responsibility and mutual respect, with the objective of codevelopment and the promotion of appropriate political, economic, social, and educational reforms, in harmony with the values, and with the special cultural, religious, and historical characteristics of the countries of the region, and in accordance with their respective possibilities and resources.

4. This Partnership builds on the development programs and initiatives of the BMENA region, as a complement to the bilateral, regional, and inter-regional relations which it seeks to reinforce. The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (“Barcelona Process”), the U.S. Middle East Partnership Initiative, and the Japan-Arab Dialogue Initiative are examples of such initiatives. In the context of such a complementarity, the Participants confirmed their willingness to translate their shared commitment to mutually profitable development and voluntary cooperation capable of creating within the region a zone of exchange and shared prosperity, to the benefit of regional and international peace and stability.

5. During their meetings, the Participants solemnly reaffirmed their commitment to continue the political, economic, and social reforms now underway and planned in the region, especially building on the Declaration of the Arab Summit in Tunis (May 23rd, 2004). Similarly, the countries in the region have welcomed the commitment of the G8 Partners expressed in particular at the Sea Island Summit (June 9th, 2004), to increase their individual and collective commitment to support actively these reforms.

6. In this regard, the Participants congratulated the countries that presented sectoral initiatives aimed at expressing these commitments in the form of concrete proposals. Such proposals include, among others, those put forward by Turkey, Yemen, and Italy for a Democracy Assistance Dialogue; by Bahrain for a Network of Funds; by Jordan for an Investment Task Force; by Jordan and Yemen on microfinance; by Jordan on education; by Morocco and Bahrain on entrepreneurial training; by Afghanistan and Algeria on literacy; and by Egypt and the United States to support the regional facility at the International Finance Corporation for technical assistance to promote small businesses. Recognizing the importance of including in the process of reform and modernization all components of society, including business and civil society, the Participants also welcomed reports and recommendations from participants in the business and civil society dialogues. These proposals, reports, and the discussions among the Participants in this regard have led to the following:

7. The Participants renewed their commitment to strengthening the basis for democracy, consultation and cooperation in the region, broadening the scope of participation in politics, public affairs, and decision-making, within a framework of the primacy of law, fairness, and equality among citizens, including for
women, and of the guarantee of an independent justice system and freedom of expression, with a view to consolidating the role of all components of society, including NGOs, and strengthening the participation of all social strata in the political life of their countries.

8. Convinced that political development is a long and demanding process, which only the nations concerned can initiate, the Participants reiterated their conviction that a process of political reforms in the region must recognize that the pace and scope of change will vary from country to country.

9. The Participants reaffirmed the sovereign right of each country, within its national unity and territorial integrity, to freely develop its own democratic political and socio-cultural system, consistent with the principles of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and the United Nations Charter, especially the respect of human rights and fundamental freedoms, non-interference in domestic affairs, the peaceful settlement of disputes, and good neighborliness. While encouraging an exchange of views and consideration of the lessons learned from successful national experiences with a view to sharing best practices in the region, the Participants remain convinced that successful reform must emerge from within the societies of the region and should not and cannot be imposed from outside.

10. The Participants hailed the significant progress achieved by several countries in the region in terms of their political development, and expressed their support for both the consolidation of democratic advances in those countries and the continuation of political reforms underway or planned in the region. In this regard, the Participants noted that they are following with interest the preparations for elections in the region, and expressed their strong and unanimous support to the countries concerned.

11. The Participants welcomed all steps taken so far to achieve democracy in Iraq and to encourage the Interim Government of Iraq to continue the political process by holding general elections before the end of January 2005, to achieve a Transitional National Assembly, which will have responsibility for forming a Transitional Government of Iraq and drafting a permanent constitution for Iraq leading to the formation of a constitutionally elected government by December 31, 2005 in line with the timetable endorsed in Security Council Resolution 1546. In this respect, they welcomed the efforts of the Interim Government of Iraq and other leaders of the Iraqi community to broaden political participation by encouraging all elements that reject violence to engage in the political and electoral process through peaceful means.

12. The Participants likewise reaffirmed their support for free and transparent elections in the Palestinian Territories. They urged Israel to work towards fulfilling its commitment to facilitate the holding of such elections. They also called for the participation of all Palestinians, including those in Jerusalem, and commended those nations that are supporting the elections with observers and financing. The Participants also reaffirmed that their support for reform in the region will go hand in hand with their support for a just, comprehensive, and lasting settlement to the Arab-Israeli conflict, based upon U.N. Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338. They reiterated their commitment to the full implementation of the Roadmap and to the goal of two states, Israel and a sovereign, independent, viable, democratic, and territorially contiguous Palestine, living side by side in peace and security, achieved through direct negotiations between the two sides.

13. Assessing the true value of the role played by civil society in development and as a contributor to the process of reform, the Participants stressed the relevance of contributions from members of civil society, including NGOs and representatives of the business sector, as a breeding ground for an active and responsible citizenry, which is the best guarantor of an irreversible transition to democracy. They recalled in this regard the recent reform declarations of business and civil society representatives, including those of Sana’a, Aqaba, Istanbul, Alexandria, Beirut, Marrakech and Rabat. Similarly, the Participants expressed their support for the development of exchanges, dialogue, and decentralized cooperation among these key actors in regional development, in respect of law, and welcomed the efforts of Italy, Turkey, and Yemen in organizing the Democracy Assistance Dialogue with the goals of facilitating promotion and consolidation of democratic institutions, norms and values.
14. Recognizing the essential contribution of women in political, economic, and social development, the Participants agreed on the importance of further encouraging them in particular to participate in the political, civil, social, educational, cultural, human, and environmental sectors.

15. The Participants further stressed their awareness that development and growth require a strong commitment to promoting a society of learning in which governments work with their partners to eliminate illiteracy, strengthen access to quality education at all levels, especially for girls, women, and other vulnerable groups, and develop skills responsive to needs. In this regard, the Participants reaffirmed their determination to pursue educational reforms, as part of a global and concerted effort aimed at laying the foundations for skills training that favors enlightenment, modernity, tolerance and good citizenship.

16. Given the importance of this subject, the Participants agreed to devote a specific meeting of Education Ministers to the topic, focusing on determining what should be implemented to eradicate illiteracy, provide basic education for all, upgrade curricula, and improve the quality of education and the administration of educational systems. Participants welcomed Jordan’s offer to host this meeting in May 2005 and, in this context, agreed to convene a preparatory meeting in early 2005, to draw up a draft agenda for the meeting.

17. Furthermore, Participants welcomed the work of Afghanistan and Algeria to promote dialogue on literacy among donors and beneficiary countries in the region. Afghanistan and Algeria will take the lead on developing a Literacy Initiative Plan of Action to address both common goals and country-specific needs. The Literacy Plan would set forth the actions that could be taken to reach common goals in this area, country-specific measures that are being taken, organizations involved in the effort, and other critical issues. To begin this work, Algeria will host a Literacy Workshop meeting in early 2005.

18. Morocco has submitted a proposal for the establishment of a Center for Entrepreneurial Excellence. This initiative aims to promote the creation of enterprises as a driving force for sustainable development in the BMENA Region. To achieve this it had undertaken to use the expertise and local talent available in conjunction with the technical and financial support provided by the G8 countries to set up a training center in Morocco. This center aspires to respond to the region’s need for qualified business professionals by providing high quality business training as well as documentation, consultations, research studies and opportunities for cooperation that are all designed in response to the region’s specificities and realities. The goal is ultimately to stimulate an irreversible dynamic that allows the emergence of innovative economic development and offers the intellectual tools to further it.

19. Bahrain has submitted a proposal for the establishment of a Regional Center for Entrepreneurial Excellence. The purpose of this initiative is to identify and develop highpotential entrepreneurs from around the region, promoting a culture of entrepreneurship, undertaking research into the issues and challenges facing entrepreneurs and reaching out to students, young people and women. Courses will range from mini-MBA to intensive sector specific professional development and vocational training. Activities will also include networking events, modules on topics of interest to entrepreneurs and exchange programs. Preparations have included contacts and discussions with Governments and business groups in Bahrain and the region.

20. Participants welcomed and expressed their support for a workshop on vocational training to be co-hosted by Japan and Jordan in 2005 with a view to sharing good practices and experiences in the field of vocational training particularly for young people, in BMENA region. They also welcomed Germany’s efforts to develop an intra-regional initiative aimed at enhancing vocational training.

21. Concerned over the socio-economic needs of the countries of the region, the Participants reiterated their determination to act both separately and in cooperation with each other to ensure sustained economic growth and socio-economic development and successful inclusion of regional economies in the global economy.

22. With this in mind, the Participants renewed their commitment to continue implementing the necessary economic reforms, particularly in the areas of investment, finance, trade, protection of property rights and
combating corruption. The aim is to encourage the most stable and reliable economic environment possible, one that is suitable for investment and for promoting an entrepreneurial sector that will generate wealth and jobs and that is capable of increasing the competitiveness of the economies of the region’s countries and of encouraging socio-economic prosperity in those countries.

23. The Participants also emphasized that for economic reforms to be fully beneficial, they must be implemented on a voluntary, managed, and progressive basis, and originate from within the very nations concerned. Such reform must, in the pace of their implementation and their scope, give due consideration to the diversity of the political, economic, social, and cultural situation of each country. They must also continue to benefit from support of regional and international financial institutions, as well as bilateral donors, including the G8 countries. In this respect, the G8 countries reaffirmed their commitment to intensify and, in partnership and dialogue with governments, business and civil society, expand their already strong individual and collective engagements in the region. These reforms must continue promoting economic openness and liberalization, while preserving at the same time the role of appropriate government regulation and efficient public services, as guarantors of the public interest and national solidarity.

24. The Participants agreed that priority should be given to successful integration of the region’s countries into the multilateral economic, financial, and trading system, thus allowing them to benefit from stable and predictable rules capable of attracting domestic and international investment, particularly from the G8 countries. In this regard, they supported the ongoing efforts of countries of the region seeking to join the World Trade Organization, and welcomed the assistance offered by the G8 to those countries. Participants welcomed ongoing efforts to facilitate trade through infrastructure investments, streamlining customs procedures and improving local firms’ capacity to compete in global markets. They also expressed their support for further multilateral trade liberalization through the Doha Development Agenda of the WTO.

25. Weighing the strategic importance of developing intra- and inter-regional trade, the Participants expressed their desire to bolster the integration of existing subregional groups, especially by encouraging their common economic interests. They agreed on the need to exploit fully the possibilities offered by current and future Free Trade Agreements, not only between the countries of the region but also between those countries and the G8 Partners, pursuant to the multilateral trade rules. To that end, they expressed their support of the Agadir process as an important step towards the effective implementation of larger free trade areas, especially within the framework of the Greater Arab Free Trade Area, the Euro-Mediterranean Free Trade Area, and the US-Middle East Free Trade Area.

26. The Participants also stressed the importance of improving financial flows for socioeconomic development, with effective participation by the countries of the region in the design of projects and in the decision-making process. In this regard, they welcomed of a proposal for developing a Network of Funds, presented by Bahrain. The Network will serve as an informal and flexible advisory mechanism for G8 and BMENA governments, with the aim to facilitate cooperation and to improve the effectiveness of official financing in the region. They agreed that this network should build on the existing experiences of regional and international institutions. They also welcomed the proposal that the Arab Monetary Fund will further study this mechanism.

27. Recognizing the important role of the private sector in promoting sustainable long-term economic growth and job creation, the Participants welcomed the establishment of the International Finance Corporation’s (IFC) Private Enterprise Partnership for the Middle East and North Africa facility. The facility aims to provide technical assistance to help the countries of the region in their efforts to improve financing opportunities and business environment for small and medium-size enterprises. To that end, the Participants endorsed the goal of a US$100 million facility over 3 years. Donors have already pledged more than $60 million to the facility and activities are underway in SME management training, financial institutions and markets, business enabling environment. furthermore, the IFC has also established clear objectives and quantifiable targets for delivering SME training and advising banks on SME financing, while establishing a systematic evaluation procedure, that the Finance Ministers of the region can review at forthcoming meetings of the Forum for the Future. Participants also agreed that as part of that evaluation,
the IFC should endeavor to assess the facility’s impact on job creation and SME profitability. The Participants noted the IFC’s plans to work with local institutions to improve the business climate.

28. Microfinance is an effective tool to empower the region’s citizens, including women, to promote economic development, encourage wider community participation in small business activities, and serve vulnerable segments of the population. With the aim of supporting microfinance in the region, Jordan, in partnership with the Consultative Group to Assist the Poor (CGAP), has agreed to host a microfinance best-practices training center, the Microenterprise Development Institute. The center will target training to NGOs, microfinance institutions, private organizations, and government officials. The Government of Yemen will work with CGAP and other BMENA partners to support the microfinance needs of entrepreneurs through a well-designed pilot project that builds on established best practices in microfinance.

29. Recognizing the critical role of better access to private foreign and domestic investment to support economic growth and job creation, countries of the BMENA region and the G-8 have joined together in a cooperative 3-year program with the OECD, the World Bank and other institutions to design and implement policies to improve the region’s investment climates and governance. To that end, the Arab Business Council, in cooperation with other business interests in the region, is working with the OECD’s Business and Industry Advisory Committee to establish an Investment Task Force. Comprised of senior business leaders from inside and outside the region, the Investment Task Force will contribute to the work of the region and the OECD on next steps for designing national action plans supported by a regional process of peer review and monitoring. Furthermore, Participants underlined that remittance inflows offer an important opportunity to strengthen the investment capacity in the region, and agreed to work together to improve these flows with a view to finance productive investment.

30. Participants agreed on the importance of strengthening the global and regional financial systems. In this regard, they welcomed all regional and international initiatives, including the recent establishment of the Middle East/North Africa Financial Task Force (MENA/FATF), aiming at ensuring that international anti-money laundering/counterterrorist financing standards are effectively implemented.

31. At the end of their proceedings, Participants welcomed the offer by Egypt to host a meeting of Foreign Ministers of G8 member states and members of the League of Arab States in Cairo on 3 and 4 March 2005. The meeting will provide an opportunity for an exchange of views on the implementation of development, modernization and reform plans and programs.

32. This initial Forum for the Future has made it possible to strengthen the commitment of the countries of the region and of the G8 Partners to development and reform, while identifying the general orientation of the Partnership for Progress and a Common Future, and of forthcoming workshops. The Participants have agreed to meet in Bahrain in 2005 to assess the progress achieved thus far and to continue sharing their ideas as they advance together towards a future of peace and prosperity. They also welcomed Jordan’s offer to host the meeting of the Forum for the Future in 2006.

33. At the end, Participants expressed their profound thanks to His Majesty The King MOHAMMED VI and praised his role and efforts in promoting tolerance, mutual understanding, peace and stability.
Ministers of the countries of the Broader Middle East and North Africa (BMENA) together with their G8 counterparts and other partners met together in Bahrain for the second Forum for the Future, to review progress made since the inaugural meeting in Rabat in December 2004, and to reaffirm our determination to work closely together to achieve our shared goals.

Ministers gathered on the eve of the Forum for the Future to discuss a broad range of issues of particular importance to the region; Ministers were appalled by the horrendous attacks against innocent people in Jordan on 9 November. They strongly condemned terrorism in all its forms and manifestations and reaffirmed that terrorist acts cannot be justified or legitimised by any cause or grievance. They agreed on the importance of unity, cooperation, and the promotion of peace and understanding as a means to counter those who seek to sow division and terror or incite hatred and degrade symbols of faiths and culture. They, therefore, welcome efforts within the region to promote the true image of Islam and its message of moderation and tolerance, such as the International Islamic Conference held in Amman in July 2005.

Ministers welcomed the Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza strip as a first step toward implementation of the Road Map and would welcome further steps by both sides, including implementation of the Sharm al-Shaikh Agreement and the UN Resolutions 242 and 338, as well as an end both to continued settlement activity and to the construction of the separation barrier. Ministers urged both Israel and the Palestinian Authority to refrain from any act that contravenes the Road Map and prejudices the outcome of a negotiated settlement whose goal is two states, Israel and a sovereign, independent, viable, democratic, and territorially contiguous Palestine, living side by side in peace and security.

Ministers recalled the successful national elections that took place in Iraq on 30 January 2005 and the setting up of the democratic transitional government in April 2005. They applauded the adoption of a new national constitution as marking a major milestone in the development of a secure, democratic, federal and united Iraq at peace with its neighbours. They underlined the necessity of maintaining the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Iraq and of the participation of all Iraqi elements in the political process, including in the elections scheduled for December.

Ministers expressed continuing concern for the plight of the victims of the earthquake in Pakistan. They were determined to strengthen their cooperation to assist those affected and called upon all participating countries to attend and support the international donor's conference on the 19th November in Islamabad.

Throughout 12 November, Ministers held wide ranging discussions with representatives of civil society on issues concerning education and knowledge, the Democracy Assistance Dialogue and Civil Society Dialogue. Ministers recognized that reforms in the region will differ in pace and scope from country to country. They understand that reform will emerge from within the societies of the region. They agreed on a range of measures to be implemented over the course of the next twelve months. In particular;

The Forum stressed the potential of education to boost the region’s development, not least by providing youth with the skills needed for a modern economy, reducing social exclusion and promoting tolerance and understanding. Participants welcomed continuing work on the Framework of Action agreed at the Education Ministerial Meeting in Jordan in May, particularly efforts to increase literacy, to enhance access to education and to improve the quality of education and its relevance. They encouraged the work of the Education Task Force set up under the partnership to support and monitor this work, including developing the outcomes from the literacy meetings in Algeria and Egypt and plans for a regional resource facility.

The Forum appreciated the initiatives and longstanding experiences of Jordan, Japan, Egypt and Germany to assist vocational education and skills in the region. The Forum welcomed the continuing work of the
Workshop of TVET (Technical and Vocational Education and Training) co-chaired by Japan and Jordan and welcomed Germany's offer to host the next meeting of the Task Force on TVET.

The Forum welcomed the UK’s offer to support a conference on IT in education next year. They expressed interest in Russia's consideration of launching an "Education for the Future Programme" in their G8 presidency that would include students from BMENA countries. The Forum welcomed Egypt's offer to host the next Education Ministerial in 2006 to further develop a mutually-supportive, quality-led approach to education.

The Forum highlighted the importance of assisting the region’s youth to gain the business skills and expertise necessary to contribute to global economic development. Participants welcomed the establishment in Bahrain and Morocco of regional entrepreneur centres and, with further support from partners, their aim of training up to 5,000 young business people.

The Forum supported the inclusion of youth as an additional topic in the civil society thematic dialogues for next year. They welcomed the support of the government of Kuwait in this initiative.

Ministers and representatives from civil society jointly discussed how governments and civil society could work together to achieve a number of objectives that would strengthen regionally-led political, social and economic development. Ministers thanked the University of Bahrain, Transparency International, the American Bar Association and the Qatar National Human Rights Commission, and sponsors, for their work on the four themes of women's economic empowerment, transparency and corruption, the rule of law and human rights. They highlighted the importance of governments working in partnership with civil society on these issues and on pursuing follow up to the recommendations presented by civil society representatives.

In particular the Forum agreed to pursue ratification and implementation of the United Nations Convention against Corruption and to develop practical measures to improve transparency in public financial management that would assist our common goal of achieving the UN Millennium Development Goals. Delegations agreed to explore with civil society groups, as appropriate, legal frameworks within which civil society can best operate, together with further steps that might be taken to preserve judicial independence. Recognising the importance and benefits of supporting women's economic empowerment, the Forum encouraged the development of projects that help achieve this objective, including sharing good practice on ensuring a conducive legal framework to underpin it. They noted Japan's initiative to intensify cooperation on human resources development, including the empowerment of women under the banner of "People Oriented". Finally, Ministers and civil society agreed to support campaigns that raise public awareness of human rights and reform and mobilize public opinion in this respect.

The Forum welcomed a proposal from Egypt on the establishment of a study consortium of independent research institutions and academic centres across the partnership to offer advice on regional development, particularly on issues dealt with in the Forum for the Future. Equitable geographical representation of all partners should be observed in the formation of G-8 MENASCO Board.

The Forum commended the work of the Italian, Turkish, and Yemeni governments and partner NGOs (No Peace Without Justice, Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation, and Human Rights Information and Training Centre) in co-sponsoring the Democracy Assistance Dialogue and organizing activities within this framework.

The Forum welcomed the work of the DAD programme to promote the principle that dialogue and cooperation between Governments and civil society is an important component of the democratic reform processes. Having discussed the recommendations from the DAD meetings in Istanbul, Venice, and Sana’a as well as the Rabat Colloquium, held in cooperation with the Moroccan Government, they encouraged further work on these proposals, including the monitoring of the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in the region in those countries that have ratified it.
The Forum welcomed the commitment of the DAD Co-sponsors and their NGO partners to continue their engagement within the DAD framework and to expand the scope of their activities. In response to the DAD partners, the Forum discussed several areas of further cooperation that could be addressed within the DAD framework. It was decided that the process of consultation will continue between the Forum members and the DAD Co-sponsors in order to develop further joint and cooperative work in these areas in the future.

The Forum heard from non-governmental organisations, both within the DAD framework and elsewhere, of the need for a facility to support civil society and their work on reform, consistent with respective national laws. Participants therefore welcomed the commitments made by a number of partners to establishing a Foundation to support civil society organizations and democratic processes in the region, including the offer of Hungary to make the International Centre for Democratic Transition available to advise and assist the Foundation in its activities, as necessary. They welcomed the announcement of the establishment of the Foundation and thanked those who have pledged to support it. They also agreed to hold a senior officials meeting in Jordan next month, which would also include members of civil society, and would further discuss the charter and structure of the Foundation.

Complementary to the regional entrepreneur centres, the Forum applauded the launch by a number of partners of a $100m Fund for the Future that would further assist in the development of profitable small and medium sized enterprises in the region through the provision of grants and loans. The Forum warmly thanked those who had made pledges to support this initiative and encouraged contributions from other partners. Ministers agreed to further promote exchanges of people, especially youth, and to activate cultural exchanges and dialogue between G8 and BMENA partners with a view to promoting tolerance and respect for shared values.

Participants at the Forum noted the continued strengthening and development of the G8 BMENA partnership. Ministers expressed deep appreciation to the Government of the Kingdom of Bahrain for organising the Forum for the Future and for facilitating the attendance of the participants. They also expressed thanks to those governments and civil society groups that hosted, supported and organised activities over the course of this year. Ministers looked forward to continuing their cooperation across the full range of the Plan of Support and welcomed Jordan’s commitment to hosting the next Forum for the Future in 2006 during Russia’s G8 Presidency. The first preparatory meeting for next year's Forum is to be held in February 2006 in Jordan.
The Third Forum for the Future convened at the Dead Sea, Jordan with participation of Foreign Ministers and representatives of the countries of the Broader Middle East and North Africa (BMENA), G8 Countries, and other partners. The Forum was held at an important time: Despite the troubling violence and political challenges in the region, and despite ongoing economic and educational obstacles, governmental and civil society leaders from around the world came together to say, now, more than ever before, cooperation and reform are needed to bring greater peace and prosperity to the people of the Middle East.

The participants, over two days, reviewed the progress made in the implementation of the Sea Island Initiatives. They also renewed their determination to continue the close cooperation to achieve the goals and objectives of this important dialogue and partnership. The participants also recognized the outstanding efforts made by Morocco and Bahrain in hosting the previous two meetings of the Forum.

The participants underlined the importance to further enhance the momentum of home-grown reform, and agreed that while national governments have the primary responsibility to push forward with their reform agendas; this effort must be complemented and supported politically and economically by the international community. In this regard, it was emphasized that the pace and content of reform in any particular country or region would be greatly enhanced with the resolution of long-standing conflicts in the region.

In this regard, on the eve of the ministerial meeting, Foreign Ministers and heads of governmental delegations discussed the various issues in the region. They reaffirmed that their support for reform in the region will go hand in hand with their support for a just, comprehensive and lasting settlement to the Arab-Israeli Conflict, based on the internationally agreed upon terms of reference of the Middle East Peace Process, including United Nations Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338, in addition to the Arab Peace Initiative endorsed by the Beirut Arab League Summit. They reiterated their commitment to the Principles of Quartet's Roadmap and to the goal of two states, a sovereign, independent viable, democratic and territorially contiguous Palestine, living side by side in Peace and Security with Israel, achieved through direct and expedited negotiations between the two sides.

Participants welcomed the cease-fire agreement reached recently by the Palestinian Authority and Israel and called on both sides to further demonstrate their commitment to Peace by taking other measures that would strengthen the cease-fire and pave the way for a meaningful, tangible and forward-looking direct political negotiations.

The Participants expressed their deepest concern at the increasingly alarming situation in Iraq and reiterated their firm commitment to the independence, sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of Iraq. The Participants also voiced their strong support for the Iraqi government in its efforts to restore security and solidify national reconciliation and dialogue. They also expressed their support to the efforts of the international community in this regard.

In this respect, the Participants called for an inclusive political process that ensures the participation of all Iraqis irrespective of their ethnicity, religion or ideology or any other ground with the view to ensuring a sovereign, united, stable and prosperous Iraq.

The Participants expressed their full commitment to supporting all efforts that would contribute to enhancing Lebanon's sovereignty, security, stability, prosperity, independence and cohesion by advocating and enhancing national dialogue and consensus. They also expressed their condemnation of the spree of political assassinations that have targeted key Lebanese leaders and intellectuals and reiterated their full support to the Lebanese government and its efforts to bring those responsible for these heinous crimes to Justice. They also expressed their support to the full implementation UN Security Council Resolution 1701.
The Forum commended the work of the Italian, Turkish, and Yemeni governments and partner NGOs (No Peace without Justice, Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation, and Human Rights Information and Training Centre) in co-sponsoring the Democracy Assistance Dialogue (DAD) and organizing activities on women’s empowerment in public life, political pluralism and electoral processes, and freedom of expression within this framework. The Forum welcomed the work of the DAD program to promote the principle that dialogue and cooperation between Governments and civil society is an important component of the democratic reform processes.

Participants acknowledged that during the past two years many significant activities have been implemented by DAD government and non-government partners. The major outcome of these activities was reflected in the creation of a solid and sustainable framework for cooperation to accelerate reforms in the areas of expanding political participation, and women’s empowerment, encouraging free and fair elections, and securing free, independent and professional media. Accordingly, participants welcomed DAD recommendations to further promote democratic transformation in the region. Furthermore, participants commended the role of the Yemeni Government in hosting the intergovernmental conference on Democracy, reform and freedom of expression held in Sana’a in June, 2006.

Ministers expressed their commitment to ensuring increased citizen participation in the political decision making process across the BMENA region. In addition Ministers acknowledged the role that civil society plays in political development.

The Forum recognized the importance of an independent media that exercises the freedom of speech in a responsible manner. Furthermore, participants highlighted the need for improving press laws to ensure freedom of expression as well as equipping media with sufficient access to information and with training in order for it to be a key player in the democratization process.

Ministers and representatives from civil society jointly discussed how governments and civil society could work together to achieve a number of objectives that would strengthen regionally-led political, social and economic development. Ministers thanked the representative delegations of the Arab civil society as well as the Arab Center for the Rule of Law and Integrity, the Lebanese Center for Policy Studies, the Lebanese Transparency Association and Adalah as well as the international NGOs that supported their efforts for their work on the themes of Independent Judiciary, Legal Environment and Civil Society, Transparency and Corruption, and Youth Engagement in Civil Society.

Participants recognized that the effective application of the rule of law is vital to protect democracy and human rights. The rule of law provides the conditions of decent living for citizens. Participants further acknowledged the role of judicial independence, equality and accountability before the law, observing integrity in applying the law, and the separation of powers in achieving political, social and economic development.

Participants reaffirmed the role of Civil Society, recognizing the importance of creating a more enabling environment for Civil Society Institutions, in accordance with national laws, to operate and actively contribute to the political, economic and social development of the BMENA region.

Participants highlighted the progress made in implementing the Arab Dialogue Forum program which represents a platform for dialogue between government institutions and the civil society including parliaments, political parties and media, recognizing the contribution of HRITC in this regard.

Governments reiterated their commitment to increasing transparency, referring to the outcomes and recommendations made during the Civil Society Dialogue Meeting on the implementation of the UN Convention against Corruption which was held in Amman in September 2006.

The Forum acknowledged the progress that has taken place in the area of women empowerment, recognizing however, that the situation of women in the BMENA region requires further attention. The Forum recognized that small steps in the right direction to consolidate gender equality, especially in the area of literacy, can make an enormously positive impact on the advancement of democracy and realization of the region’s vast human potential. Furthermore, participants commended the role of the
Turkish Government in hosting the Intergovernmental Conference on “Empowering Women in Public Life” in Ankara in May 2006.

Participants took note of the final declaration and recommendations of the Civil Society Parallel Meeting held in Amman, Jordan on 27-28 November 2006.

Participants stressed the potential of education to boost the region's development, not least by providing young people with the skills needed for a modern economy, reducing social exclusion and promoting tolerance and understanding. They pledged to provide a high quality, broadly based education for all children and young people, as well as to take action at the national level to develop and encourage the spirit of learning and critical thinking in all students, in their families, their schools and their communities and to encourage greater mutual knowledge across faiths and cultures. They also recognized the importance of strengthening links to the labor markets, hence seek greater involvement of the Private Sector.

G8 Ministers agreed to further strengthen support to BMENA educational reform by making more effective use of existing funds. Participants agreed on the need for greater commitment and involvement of all countries in further home grown reforms of the educational sector. They also agreed to strengthen efforts in the implementation of the recommendations and agreements of the Education Ministers, including:

- training more teachers towards providing a high quality, qualification-and skill-based, education that encourages critical thinking;
- reducing the number of illiterates by the year 2015 and meeting the EFA goals on literacy;
- strengthening the participation of women in education and training with the goal of higher female participation in the economy;
- bringing in civil society and private sector into the efforts of educational reform to broaden the bases and developing sustainability; and
- reforming the education sector towards broad participation, effectiveness, efficiency and accountability and maximize employability of graduates.

Participants recognized the importance of establishing mechanisms to ensure the inclusion of youth in the decision-making process taking into consideration that youth comprise a high percentage of the BMENA population. Moreover, participants agreed on the role that civil society should play in engaging young people in the democratic process and in all relevant civil society activities. Participants also highlighted the role that youth should play in economic development of the BMENA region and the need for skills-based training to create jobs and address the underlying problems of youth unemployment. Moreover, participants commended the Jordanian government for hosting the Young Arab Leaders Forum on November 26 and 27 of this year.

Participants expressed their satisfaction with the progress made since the Framework of Action agreed on during the Ministerial Education Meeting which took place in Jordan in May 2005. The participants highlighted the steps proposed by the Education Reform Task Force and the Literacy and TVET working groups. Participants further emphasized the importance of a stronger multilateral partnership between BMENA countries and G8 countries in this area, indicating that special focus should be given to quality and appropriate learning for a globalized world.

Ministers of BMENA region welcomed the recommendations made at the Ministers of Education meeting in Sharm El-Sheikh, May 2006, to retain the education task force and current working groups, TVET co-chaired by Japan and Jordan, Literacy by Egypt and USA, and continue supporting the action plans taking into account appropriate mechanisms, resources and issues of accountability.

Participants pledged to pursue vigorously every avenue which will create new economic opportunities for the region in the global marketplace, to promote the private sector by encouraging a culture of entrepreneurship, reducing obstacles to trade and investment and using international economic cooperation to increase opportunities for all, while supporting efforts to reduce poverty and unemployment.
In the area of attracting investment to MENA countries, participants welcomed the recommendations made at the Ministerial Meeting of the MENA-OECD Investment Program in Jordan February 2006. In particular, they welcomed the specific investment reform targets which were announced, and encouraged governments in the region to continue their efforts in identifying and implementing, in a coordinated manner, reform targets that can be achieved; also confirmed their support to the MENA-OECD Investment Program and encouraged governments from outside the region to continue their support to the Program and the reform objectives of governments within the region.

In addition, participants encouraged the constructive involvement of business representatives and other elements of civil society in discussions with Governments on the improvements that should be made to the investment environment. Finally they called for more international and bilateral initiatives to support home-grown economic reform efforts within the region.

Participants also commended the efforts of Bahrain and Morocco in establishing the Centers for Entrepreneurial Excellence and highlighted the role these centers play in helping BMENA region leaders in improving their managerial and entrepreneurial leadership skills through training, professional networking and the alumni support systems. They also underlined the importance of G8 Partners' financial and technical support to these centers in order to respond to the region's needs for developing qualified business professionals.

Participants welcomed the good progress achieved by the IFC's Private Enterprise Partnership MENA, and encouraged new Partners to support this initiative.

Participants were briefed on the recent developments that have taken place on the Foundation for the Future including the announcement of a full board and headquarters to be established in Beirut, Lebanon. Representatives of Countries of the G8-BMENA and other Partners who are founding members of the Foundation expressed their encouragement by the Foundation's commitment to issuing its first grants this winter. They also welcomed the setting of a date for the second board meeting in early December, 2006 in Amman, Jordan.

Ministers expressed their deep appreciation to the Government of Jordan for organizing the Forum for the Future and for facilitating the attendance of the participants. Ministers also recognized the role of Russian Federation in co-chairing the Forum and organizing various G8-BMENA activities over the course of the year.

Participants committed themselves to isolate the tiny minority of extremists who sought to sow division and discord. They expressed their optimism that, by steadfastly promoting common values and shared vision of peace, security and prosperity, their governments and people would succeed in building a better future for themselves and their children.

They also expressed gratitude to those governments and civil society groups that hosted, supported and organized activities over the course of this year.

Participants noted the interest expressed by several Countries in the BMENA to host the 2007 Forum for the Future. The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan being the host country of the current Forum Meeting will work in coordination with the G8-BMENA countries to reach an agreement on the next host for the 2007 Forum.

The Participants look forward to continuing their cooperation across the full range of the Plan of Support during Germany's upcoming Presidency of the G8 and its co-chairmanship of the 2007 Forum for the Future.
Chair's Summary, Forum for the Future
Abu Dhabi, 18-19 October 2008

1. The fifth Forum for the future, co-chaired by UAE and Japan, has been convened in Abu Dhabi, 18, 19 October 2008 with broad participation of ministers and representatives of the BMENA, G8 and other partner countries as well as international organizations and the civil society.

2. The participants appreciated the efforts made by the UAE for hosting the Forum including strong contributions made by Japan, in addition to the efforts made by Yemen and Germany in the framework of the previous session of the 2007 Forum.

3. The participants reviewed the progress of G8-BMENA initiative and reaffirmed its objectives of this important dialogue and partnership.

4. The participants expressed concern over the consequences of the international financial crisis, and committed to continue working together to stabilize the financial market and to support global economic growth. Several participants stressed on the negative impacts of this crisis on developing countries and confirmed the importance of Doha’s UN Millennium Conference and Kuwait’s Arab Economic and Social Summit Conference.

5. The participants affirmed the importance of coordinated efforts aimed at achieving a just and comprehensive peace of the Arab Israeli conflict, and supported the full implementation of the Road map and expressed their support for the Arab Peace Initiative as an effective vehicle to deal with the conflict.

6. The participants emphasized the need to solve the Darfur crisis, in all its humanitarian and political aspects, and supported the Arab League’s and the African Union’s initiative, sponsored by the State of Qatar, as it secures Sudan’s sovereignty and unity and achieves justice.

7. The participants expressed their support for the national unity, independence and territorial integrity of Iraq, as well as supporting its comprehensive national reconciliation, constitutional political process, and the enhancement of governmental institutions and comprehensive development efforts.

8. The participants stressed the importance of resolving international disputes through peaceful means, in accordance with international law and UN charters, and stressed the importance of mutual respect of national priorities, sovereignty, independence and integral territories of all countries.

9. The participants highlighted the importance of enforcing the momentum of political, economic and social reforms stemmed out of the local environment, that are compatible with cultural, historical and religious characteristics of the region in conjunction with available capabilities and resources. In addition, the participants agreed that the course and span of reforms do vary from one country to another; and that the lasting progress of political reform in the region is a joint responsibility between governments and the civil society.

10. The participants recognized the progress achieved in educational reform and recognized the important role of educational and vocational-technical training in development. In addition, the participants recognized the measures taken to further joint cooperation between governments and the civil society in development efforts; particularly, in the domains of environment, sustainable energy, human rights issues, food security, humanitarian aid and creating employment opportunities.

11. The participants acknowledged the progress achieved in the area of women's empowerment and enhancing women's participation in all sectors.

12. The participants reaffirmed their commitment to guarantee freedom of expression, human rights, justice, equality, rule of law, respect of diversity, transparency and combating corruption. The participants also reaffirmed their commitment to renouncing terrorism, extremism and violence and for supporting joint regional and international efforts to combat such phenomena in the international environment.
13. The participants emphasized their keenness to support efforts exerted on enhancing and promoting dialogue among civilizations, religions and cultures; and disseminating a culture of tolerance, respect of differences, and not offending religious characters and convictions of all nations and peoples.

14. The participants expressed their hopes to achieve peaceful diplomatic solutions on the Iranian nuclear issue; that will deepen mutual trust and enhance regional and international security and stability. The participants also stressed the importance of ensuring a Middle East, including the Arabian Gulf, that is free of all weapons of mass destruction and in compliance with obligations under the non proliferation treaty. The participants recognized that the region's countries have the right to acquire peaceful nuclear technology in the framework of relevant international agreements.

15. The participants reviewed the progress of the Forum for the Future, since it was launched in Sea Island, U.S.A., in 2004, and affirmed the importance of supporting the Forum as a podium for dialogue and mutual cooperation among BMENA, G8, partner governments, international organizations and the civil society. In addition, the participants affirmed their commitment to develop the Forum's mechanisms and to support Democracy Assistance Dialogue (DAD) efforts for the promotion of dialogue and cooperation between governments and the civil society.

16. The participants acknowledged the activities of the "Foundation for the Future" and appreciated the efforts and grants submitted by donors to support the foundation's activities.

17. The participants expressed their appreciation for the constructive work done by all parties to expand cooperation and engagement between governments and the civil society.

18. The participants appreciated the presentation by the DAD and expressed their hope that governments and the civil society further promote cooperation on reforms and sustainable developments in the region.

19. The participants acknowledged the document on “Partnership between G-8 BMENA Governments and The Civil Society” and welcomed the efforts made by the DAD.

20. The participants renewed commitments to continue their dialogue and collaboration, and noted continued progress and cooperation among all partners of Forum for the Future. They look forward to continued cooperation during the coming Italian Presidency of G8 in 2009, and the hosting of the sixth session by by Kingdom of Morocco.

21. The participants expressed their appreciation to the UAE for its generous hospitality and efficient organization of the fifth forum.

A Partnership between G-8 BMENA Governments and Civil Society

Taking into consideration that the Forum for the Future serves as a vehicle for exchanging views on the issues of concern to the region, and ensuring that the efforts we make collectively respond to those concerns;

Taking into consideration that the Democracy Assistance Dialogue (DAD), under the auspices of the Forum, brings together in a collaborative and transparent environment willing governments, as well as civil society groups from the G8, EU and other democratic partners and countries in the region to enhance existing democracy programs or support new initiatives;

Recognising that non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are essential to the development and success of democratic societies and the promotion of mutual understanding and tolerance, and recognising the commitment of G8 and BMENA countries to support this role;
Recalling the rights of freedom of peaceful assembly, association and expression set out in the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders;

Reaffirming the commitment undertaken by both governments and civil society representatives on political dialogue, including within the framework of the Democracy Assistance Dialogue;

Recognising civil society as a legitimate partner in the democracy building process;

Considering this document as a statement of commitment to constructive partnership to strengthen the interaction, partnerships and improve the environment between BMENA governments, NGOs, G8 governments and other democratic partners to tackle the key challenges that our regions face, in accordance with the purposes and principles of the UN Charter including the sovereign equality of all members in recognition of the rights and protections set forth in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Principles for BMENA governments

Recognise diversity and pluralism as strategic values for societies to guarantee full respect of the rights and democratic principles enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; and reject all forms of discrimination, marginalisation and oppression in recognition of equal rights for all;

Provide the necessary legal framework and structure as well as political environment which would enable NGOs to undertake their activities and to operate freely to contribute constructively to the societies within which they undertake their activities;

Deepen partnerships with NGOs to strengthen a practical framework which would enable NGOs to operate in a peaceful, non-violent, legitimate, open, and constructive environment;

Permit all citizens to legally form, join, and participate in NGOs of their choosing, and exercise their rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly, and association;

Allow NGOs to legally sustain themselves and seek, receive, manage, and administer financial support, in accordance with transparent non-discriminatory national legislation, from peaceful, non-violent, legitimate, domestic, regional and international sources;

Engage with civil society in the Forum process, including endorsing recommendations and initiatives coming from the Ministerial Forum, thus creating a transparent, consultative environment for civil society organisations to substantively participate and support the implementation of the domestic reform process;

Work with NGOs to promote tolerance and mutual understanding by promoting popular participation in public life and positive citizenship, in particular among young people and women;

Reaffirm the crucial role of civil society in encouraging the growth of active citizen participation to promote the full respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Principles for civil society organisations

Carry out lawful activities in a responsible, peaceful, non-violent manner and do not solicit or accept funding from non-peaceful or violent entities;

Encourage openness of membership in NGOs;

Constructively participate in the Forum process;

Seek opportunities to share best practices with like-minded organisations;
Work with governments to promote tolerance and mutual understanding;

Work with governments and with other NGOs and independently to submit to the annual Forum for the Future ministerial other proposals for action on reform and progress reports and analysis on implementation of previous years’ initiatives.

*Principles for G8 and other democratic partners*

Support and encourage the development of civil society, including through ongoing participation in the Forum process;

Encourage G8 civil society to work with governments and NGOs in the region, including through the BMENA process;

Support peaceful, non-violent BMENA civil society and reaffirm the promotion, protection and realisation of human rights for all, including those rights and protections set forth in the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders and monitored by the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders;

Respect the cultural diversities of the BMENA region and encourage civil society organisations in the G8 to increase awareness in their respective countries of the BMENA region’s cultures, traditions, and history, with a view to develop a better understanding among peoples;

Assist in strengthening civil society cooperation in order to address and advocate for recommendations put forward by the official civil society dialogues. Work to advance and implement recommendations through tangible, in-country programming, including through existing mechanisms. Support BMENA governments in strengthening their cooperation with the civil society within the BMENA process;

Create a clear and appropriate mechanism to follow-up the initiatives made by the BMENA countries and NGOs during the forums annual ministerial meetings;

Engage civil society representatives in the planning of Forum for the Future annual conferences in close cooperation with governments.