

Joint Communiqué on the UK-Tunisia bilateral forum

The Forum was co-chaired by the Rt Hon Dr Andrew Murrison, Minister of State for the Middle East and North Africa, and H.E. Sabri Bachtobji, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.

Association Agreement

Both countries committed themselves to finalising a broad bilateral association agreement in the near future. Concluding this agreement will provide a framework for the growing trading relationship between our two countries. It will ensure British and Tunisian businesses and consumers benefit from continued access to markets once the UK has left the EU. Beyond trade, this agreement will provide a comprehensive framework to strengthen cooperation on political dialogue, democracy, education, trade, environmental and human rights matters.

Politics

After appreciating the progress made by Tunisia to ensure a smooth democratic transition, both countries underlined their intention to strengthen parliamentary ties, in order to share experience and promote exchanges between legislative and judicial bodies. Both countries noted the important role that media freedom plays in democracies, with Tunisia expressing an interest in the Global Coalition on Media Freedom due to be announced at UNGA. There was agreement to continue working closely together in the UN when Tunisia assumes its membership of the UN Security Council in January 2020, with Tunisia welcoming the UK's offer of pre-membership training. Tunisia highlighted gender as a priority issue during its upcoming UNSC membership. There was also agreement to work together on climate and protecting oceans against plastic waste. On Libya, both countries reiterated their support for an urgent ceasefire and a return to the UN-led political process as essential steps towards stabilising that country. Tunisia reiterated its request for concluding a bilateral agreement on visa exemption for diplomatic and official passport holders. Highlighting recent improvements to the process for students, both countries committed to continuing talks to identify further opportunities to ease visa application for all Tunisians.

Economics and trade

Both countries identified a number of business opportunities to develop, including in the energy, agrifood, textile, tourism and technology sectors. They committed to explore these further in the run-up to the African Investment Summit (AIS) in London in January 2020. They agreed to raise awareness among businesses of the UK Export Finance offer for Tunisia (worth £2 billion). Both countries expressed satisfaction with the impact of their existing initiatives on trade and investment flows, and agreed to strengthen their efforts in order to further trade and investment. They decided to

establish a Trade and Investment Multi-Sector Working Group and looked ahead to the launch of a UK-funded project to develop the Tunisian Stock Exchange. Agreement was reached on the Tunisians attending the AIS at the most senior level, while discussions also covered the 2nd session of the “UK-Tunisia Trade and Investment Forum”, which is due to take place on 22 October in London. Both sides agreed to strengthen cooperation on inclusive economic development, beginning with the deployment of new UK development advisers to Tunis before the end of this year.

Education

Both countries welcomed the continuing positive work of the UK-Tunisia Higher Education Commission (HESRC), which has met twice this year. They agreed that important progress had been made to strengthen links between higher education institutions in both countries towards the implementation of the agreed Action Plan. They noted that the HESRC had identified Quality Assurance as an area for further engagement and that a new project funded by the British Council and implemented by the Quality Assurance Agency would start soon. They noted the growing demand in Tunisia for English-language and soft-skills training. They welcomed the UK-funded and British-Council-implemented “Teaching for Success” project (worth £6 million), aimed at enhancing job prospects for the next generation of young Tunisians. The Forum also stressed the importance of fostering bilateral cooperation in the field of culture, in order to enhance the promotion of the Tunisian and British cultural heritages in each country.

Environment/Tourism

Over 120,000 tourists travelled to Tunisia in 2018, with more expected this year. This represented a significant increase. Both countries expressed their support for work to protect the environment, including for COP26, for tackling plastics waste, and for creating an enduring eco-system for sustainable tourism.

Security

Both countries highlighted the continuing serious threat posed by terrorist groups, including “Daesh”, to the UK and Tunisia. They agreed that UK-Tunisia collaboration in the fight against terrorism had been ground-breaking and that they wished to expand and deepen that co-operation at the bilateral level and within the “G7+” security coordination mechanism.

The comprehensive and wide-ranging nature of the discussions reflects the deepening relationship between the UK and Tunisia. The successful conclusion of the sixth annual UK-Tunisia Bilateral Forum underlines both countries’ desire to continue working together in a spirit of friendship and close collaboration to advance their shared interests.