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BROADER MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA REGION

Forum for the Future, Bahrain 2005

“Across the Middle East, a consensus is emerging on the need for change.... Political, civil society, and business leaders have met to discuss modernization and reform, and have issued stirring calls for political, economic and social change.”

– President George W. Bush

The Forum for the Future is a cooperative effort by the countries of the Broader Middle East and North Africa (BMENA) region, the Group of Eight (G8) industrialized nations, and other partners who seek to promote and develop political, economic, and social reform in the region.

The Forum serves as a venue for regional civil society and business groups to express their reform goals and ideas to their governments. Its agenda seeks to advance the universal values of human dignity, democracy, economic opportunity, and social justice.

The second Forum for the Future takes place November 11 and 12, 2005 in Manama, Bahrain, hosted by the Governments of Bahrain and the United Kingdom, the current G8 president. The first Forum was held in Rabat, Morocco in December 2004.

Foreign ministers from across the BMENA region, the G8 and other partner countries will work to further reform in the areas of democracy, civil society and education. They will be joined by representatives of civil society organizations who carried out the vigorous agenda set in Rabat focused on transparency of governance, women in the workplace, legal reform and human rights.

Considerable progress has been made in the seven initiatives launched at the Sea Island G8 Summit in 2004:

- **Democracy Assistance Dialogue (DAD):** Significant activities have taken place in each of the lead DAD countries—Turkey, Yemen, and Italy—including four conferences engaging hundreds of BMENA civil society and governmental representatives and emphasizing women in public life and strengthening political parties and electoral processes.
- **Entrepreneurship:** Morocco and Bahrain are working with the G8 to create two regional entrepreneurship centers to provide regional business training and job creation expertise. Separately, Japan, Jordan, Germany,

and Egypt have taken the lead in vocational training.

- **Microfinance:** The G8 asked the Consultative Group to Assist the Poor (CGAP) to develop a training center to promote microfinance for the region. CGAP established a regional training center in Jordan and conducted microfinance assessment missions to several countries. USAID’s \$125 million microenterprise program should reach 2 million entrepreneurs over the next five years in countries including Egypt, Morocco and in the West Bank/Gaza.
- **International Finance Corporation (IFC):** The IFC established its regional Private Enterprise Partnership to support the growth of small and medium-sized businesses, and it is now active in 13 countries and the West Bank/Gaza. G8 and regional partners have already pledged two-thirds of a three-year funding goal of \$100 million.
- **Network of Funds:** Regional and international development institutions established a “Network of Funds” to facilitate cooperation and improve the effectiveness of official financing in the region. Institutional representatives met in September 2005 in Cairo and Washington and agreed to consider joint initiatives in trade, infrastructure, human resource development and financial sector development.
- **Task Force on Investment:** Led by the Arab Business Council, the private sector Task Force will discuss and analyze barriers to investment. It advises regional governments and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development on reform measures to improve the investment climate.
- **Literacy and Education:** Education Ministers met at the Dead Sea in May 2004 and agreed to a Framework for Progress stressing the importance of education reform for regional prosperity. They also agreed to a goal of increasing literacy by an additional 20 million people in 2015, with emphasis on female literacy.