



# BROADER MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA INITIATIVE

## *Advancing Civil Society and Reform*

*“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 Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative is a cooperative effort initiated by countries in the region, in partnership with the G8 nations and other partners, to develop political, economic, educational, and social reform in the Broader Middle East and North Africa. The effort was launched at the Sea Island, Ga., G8 Summit in the summer of 2004, attended by several BMENA leaders.

### FORUM FOR THE FUTURE

The yearly ministerial meeting of the BMENA partners held to advance their reform agenda is the centerpiece of the Initiative. Called the Forum for the Future, two sessions have taken place, one in Rabat, Morocco, in December 2004, and the other in Manama, Bahrain, in November 2005.

The Forum serves as a venue for regional civil society and business groups to share their reform goals and ideas with their governments. Foreign ministers from across the BMENA region, the G8 and other partner countries now work with these organizations to further reform in the areas of democracy, civil society, and education.

### FOUNDATION AND FUND FOR THE FUTURE

At the November 2005 Forum for the Future in Bahrain, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice noted the ten-fold increase in the number of civil society groups involved in the meeting. She also participated in the announcement of a new Foundation for the Future and Fund for the Future.

### OTHER BMENA INITIATIVES

- Launch of regional entrepreneurial center in Bahrain
- A Microfinance Training Center being established
- International Finance Corporation established a regional Private Enterprise Partnership active in 13 countries and the West Bank/Gaza
- Network of Funds will facilitate cooperation for official financing in the region
- Task Force on Investment analyzing regional barriers to investment
- Plans to enhance literacy and achieve educational reform

- The Foundation for the Future
  - Will promote freedom and democracy in the region
  - Will provide financial and technical assistance directly to local non-governmental organizations
- The Fund for the Future
  - Will provide capital to small- and medium-sized enterprises
  - Will seek to develop a strong middle class that will support the development of democratic practices and institutions

### BMENA PROGRESS

While the seven initiatives launched under the BMENA umbrella continue

to make advances, the most striking progress in 2005 was made in the Democracy Assistance Dialogue (DAD):

- Hundreds of indigenous civil society activists came together at conferences in Istanbul, Venice, Sana'a, and Rabat. The four meetings covered respectively, women's empowerment, political pluralism and the electoral processes, the role of Arab civil society in advancing reform, and reforming electoral and political processes.
- Civil society is being more robustly integrated into the ministerial Forum:
  - In the Bahrain Forum, civil society representatives numbered more than 40 in contrast to only five in the Morocco Forum.
  - For the first time at the Bahrain Forum, civil society organizations met with ministers as equal participants.