



THE MIDDLE EAST PARTNERSHIP INITIATIVE

Supporting Freedom and Opportunity in the Middle East and North Africa

"In the Middle East, the long, hopeful process of democratic change is now beginning to unfold. Millions of people are demanding freedom for themselves and democracy for their countries."

—Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice

Like people everywhere, the citizens of the Middle East and North Africa seek greater freedom and opportunity, and a growing community of reformers in the region has emerged with new energy and ideas to make these aspirations a reality. The United States is proud to strongly support them as they build more peaceful, prosperous nations.

Through President George W. Bush's Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI), the U.S. is providing unprecedented levels of assistance to reformers as they pursue their vision for positive change — so democracy can spread, education can thrive, economies can grow, and women can be empowered.

FOCUSING ON REFORM

As the U.N. Arab Human Development Reports have catalogued, the Middle East's lack of democratic freedom, closed economic systems, education deficits, and limitation on women's participation are obstacles threatening the region with continued stagnation. The 2005 report went so far as to refer to the persistent status quo as the "impending disaster scenario."

The Middle East Partnership Initiative has responded by investing over \$293 million in reformers' efforts to overcome these obstacles. Funding goes primarily to non-governmental organizations with innovative ideas for accelerating progress in the region. Many recipients are indigenous civil society groups and local reformers.

In four years, MEPI has set in motion more than 350 programs in 15 countries and the Palestinian territories. An additional \$99 million has been committed for the initiative this year. More than this, however, MEPI's funds leverage the billions of dollars in bilateral assistance the U.S. provides annually by ensuring that reform policy and programs are tightly connected throughout the Arab world.

GIVING PEOPLE A VOICE IN THEIR FUTURE

Citizens in the broader Middle East deserve a stronger voice in the future of their communities and more accountable, representative governments. MEPI democracy programs support civic engagement by bringing non-government organizations, governments, and citizens together to push the boundaries of change, with a focus on four areas:

- **Improving elections and political processes** to advance democratic practices and electoral systems.
- **Developing civil society and reform advocacy** to create greater public conversation, allowing democratic voices to be heard in the political process.
- **Strengthening media** to facilitate free, independent, and accurate news coverage.
- **Promoting the rule of law** to support accountable, effective government and judicial institutions.

Examples of MEPI democracy program activities include voter education, independent media monitoring, journalist investigative skills training, newspaper business

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management training, election monitoring, political campaign training, youth leadership development, and promotion of legal reform and judicial independence.

SUPPORTING QUALITY EDUCATION

When children receive a quality education, they have a strong foundation for political and economic opportunities in life. MEPI programs support educational reforms that enable more students to acquire the skills they need to compete in today's economic and political arenas — and to improve the quality of their lives and their families' lives. MEPI is concentrating in three education goal areas:

- **Expanding access** to education, especially for girls and women.
- **Improving the quality** of education.
- **Focusing on the development of skills** that lead to jobs and opportunity.



MEPI education programs support youth leadership skills, youth civic involvement, independent reading, teacher training, curriculum improvements, and technology skills.

DEVELOPING ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

The citizens of the broader Middle East want to provide for their families and invest in the future — the kind of economic opportunity that creates more stable, prosperous communities. MEPI's economic programs support reforms that encourage private-sector growth and entrepreneurship, concentrating on the following goal areas:

- **Encourage investment** in business so employment grows, particularly in small- and medium-sized businesses.
- **Promote entrepreneurship** that creates new private-sector jobs.
- **Improve trade and regulatory transparency** to enhance countries' global competitiveness.

Examples of MEPI's collaborations with people in the region include entrepreneur training exchange programs, technical assistance in support of free trade agreements, promotion of international labor standards, and reform of banking regulations and lending processes to encourage business growth.

EMPOWERING WOMEN

Women seek a wide range of choices and opportunities, whether in politics, education, or business. MEPI women's empowerment programs support local organizations and reformers working so women have the chance to fully participate in society. These programs address the cultural, legal, regulatory, economic, and political barriers that women encounter, concentrating on:

- **Women and the law** to eliminate arbitrary legal systems and build strong judicial institutions.
- **Women in democracy** to increase the level of women's participation in democratic societies.
- **Women's rights** to assist local reformers in their work for equality.
- **Women's economic empowerment** to enhance marketable skills, offer economic independence, and increase the influence of the private sector.

MEPI women's empowerment efforts have promoted reform of family code laws using the success of Moroccan women; created the Arab Women's Legal Network to promote women as decision makers and provide information about legal rights; conducted campaign schools to improve women leaders' political skills; and created the Women's Business Network and associated support hubs to bolster entrepreneurial growth.

For more information, visit www.mepi.state.gov.

