U.S. TRADE AND DEVELOPMENT AGENCY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

USTDA PROJECT FORUM PROMOTES ICT SECTOR DEVELOPMENT IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA
Announces Regional Telecommunications Training Program

MUSCAT, OMAN – (May 15, 2006) Expanding information and communications technology (ICT) infrastructure in the Middle East and North Africa is the objective of a project forum sponsored by the U.S. Trade and Development Agency (USTDA). The event, which is taking place through May 16, 2006, in Muscat, Oman, attracted more than 180 public and private sector participants from the Middle East, North Africa and the United States. The Forum is being held in cooperation with the Ministry of National Economy of the Sultanate of Oman.

"Communications infrastructure is an important foundation for economic growth and development, providing tools that the private sector needs to compete effectively in the global economy," said USTDA Chief of Staff Thomas R. Hardy in remarks at the opening plenary. "This conference is designed to help countries in the Middle East and North Africa expand their current ICT infrastructure to enable that engine of development to reach its full potential."

In addition to Mr. Hardy, other participants in the opening plenary session included: His Excellency Al-Fahdhel Alharthy, Undersecretary of the Ministry of National Economy for Development Affairs; Ambassador David Gross, U.S. Coordinator for International Communications and Information Policy; and Mr. Nizar Zakka, Secretary General of the Union of Arab ICT Associations. All of the opening remarks touched upon the need to increase the expansion of ICT services to the region in order to further spur economic growth.

Following the opening session, Mr. Hardy announced USTDA support for a Middle East and North Africa Regional Telecommunications Management Training Program. Under the program, USTDA will fund the participation of 13 delegates from the countries participating in this week's project forum at the United States Telecommunications Training Institute (USTTI). USTTI is a non-profit joint venture between leaders of the U.S. telecommunications, broadcast, and information technology industries, as well as senior U.S. government officials.

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The project forum has brought government officials and private sector leaders from Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Oman, Tunisia, and Yemen together with representatives of U.S. ICT companies. Under the theme *Making Connections in the Middle East and North Africa*, the event is providing participants with details on new project opportunities in the region in the areas of telecommunications infrastructure expansion, new license offerings, as well as regional e-government and e-education initiatives. The projects are expected to be implemented over the next three years and range in value from $2 million to $200 million each.

USTDA is pleased to have partnered with Motorola, Microsoft, Intel and iBasis to co-sponsor the conference and highlight U.S. solutions to development challenges faced by the Middle East and North Africa region.

The U.S. Trade and Development Agency advances economic development and U.S. commercial interests in developing and middle-income countries. The agency funds various forms of technical assistance, feasibility studies, training, orientation visits and business workshops that support the development of a modern infrastructure and a fair and open trading environment. USTDA's strategic use of foreign assistance funds to support sound investment policy and decision-making in host countries creates an enabling environment for trade, investment and sustainable economic development. In carrying out its mission, USTDA gives emphasis to economic sectors that may benefit from U.S. exports of goods and services.

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