

[Home \(/\)](#) / [About Us \(/about-us\)](#) / [Policy Offices \(/about-us/policy-offices\)](#) / [Press Office \(/about-us/policy-offices/press-office\)](#) / [Press Releases \(/about-us/policy-offices/press-office/press-releases\)](#) / [2017 \(/about-us/policy-offices/press-office/press-releases/2017\)](#) / [April \(/about-us/policy-offices/press-office/press-releases/2017/april-0\)](#)

Joint Statement of the United States-Tunisia Trade and Investment Council

TUNIS, TUNISIA -- The United States-Tunisia Trade and Investment Council met on April 21, 2017 in Tunis under the bilateral Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA). Ambassador Mokhtar Chaouachi, Director General for Asia and the Americas in the Tunisian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, hosted the Council meeting, which is the seventh held since the TIFA was signed in 2002. The Tunisian delegation included representatives from the Ministry of Industry and Commerce; the Ministry of Investment, Development and International Cooperation; the Ministry of Information Communications Technology; the Ministry of Agriculture; the Ministry of Finance; and the Ministry of Women. Daniel Mullaney, the Assistant U.S. Trade Representative for Europe and the Middle East led the U.S. delegation, which included representatives from the Department of State, the Department of Commerce, the Department of Agriculture and the Agency for International Development (USAID).

The U.S. and Tunisian delegations discussed a number of market access issues, with a view to exploring ways to expand bilateral trade and investment and create jobs, to the mutual benefit of both countries. Two-way trade reached almost one billion dollars in 2016 – three times the level in 2000 – but growth has tapered off in recent years. Both sides agreed to seek fresh approaches to get bilateral trade growing robustly again. Assistant U.S. Trade Representative Mullaney welcomed a recent bilateral agreement that will open the Tunisian market to U.S. bovine semen exports in support of U.S. and Tunisian farmers and ranchers. The Tunisian delegation welcomed the cooperation between U.S. and Tunisian agricultural authorities in the fields of organic product certification, technology transfer and capacity building. He also congratulated the Tunisian government for the considerable progress on its economic reform program over the past year – including new laws on investment, public bank recapitalization, the banking sector, competition and prices, public-private partnerships, and bankruptcy – which will make Tunisia an even more attractive trading partner for U.S. businesses. Tunisia described its plans for further reform and development of the economy to improve Tunisia’s business climate, which include follow-up to the Tunisia 2020 conference and implementation of the 2016-2020 development and the ICT national strategic plans (i.e., broad-band Internet, e-governance, e-business reform and Smart Tunisia Project).

Assistant U.S. Trade Representative Mullaney welcomed the significant reduction in time for Tunisian customs processing, which is a positive development for U.S. exporters. He also welcomed the recent ratification by Tunisia of the World Trade Organization (WTO) Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA), which entered into force in February. The United States looks forward to further progress in this area with Tunisia’s implementation of TFA provisions and other improvements in Tunisian customs procedures.

The Tunisian delegation noted the benefits of the ongoing technical support provided by the U.S. Department of State and USAID, including the Business Reform and Competitiveness Project (BRCP), which has worked with 250 small- and medium-sized Tunisian enterprises to promote their efficiency, profitability, and job creation. Under the BRCP, USAID has also assisted the Tunisian government in reforming its digital code to enable, for example, the development of a system for secured transactions that will greatly improve the ability of U.S. and Tunisian firms to do business with each other. Under the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI), the U.S. State Department is setting up a program, in partnership with the Tunisian National Handicraft Office, to provide technical assistance to Tunisian artisans to facilitate their participation in international markets.

The Tunisian delegation recognized the efforts of the Commercial Law Development Program (CLDP) at the U.S. Department of Commerce, which has provided Tunisia technical assistance in a number of areas, including on public procurement, technology transfer and reform of its foreign investment framework. CLDP also continues to provide assistance in developing Tunisia's franchising sector, including through facilitating the establishment of new U.S. franchises in the country. During the TIFA, the two delegations welcomed the recent signature of more than 10 franchise agreements between local entrepreneurs and U.S. companies.

Both sides noted with satisfaction the three-day trade promotion program conducted immediately preceding the TIFA meeting by U.S. officials from USTR, USAID and the departments of State and Commerce, in close cooperation with their Tunisian ministerial counterparts. Deputy Assistant U.S. Trade Representative Erland Herfindahl traveled to Tunis, Sfax and Gafsa to update Tunisian farmers and business owners on the U.S. Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) program, explaining its eligibility criteria and how Tunisian exporters can more effectively utilize the program. State, Commerce and USAID officials briefed on strategies for building trade linkages between the United States and Tunisia. In 2016, Tunisia was the 13th largest GSP supplier to the United States, with \$114 million in GSP duty-free exports. Tunisia is a key trading partner for the United States for several products covered by GSP, including olive oil and dates.

###